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XRQ-73 SHEPARD flight showcases hybrid electric propulsion



DARPA's XRQ-73 SHEPARD hybrid-electric experimental aircraft takes off at Edwards Air Force Base, California.

MOJAVE, Calif. – May 6, 2026 – In collaboration with DARPA and Northrop Grumman, Scaled Composites flew the XRQ-73 Series Hybrid Electric Propulsion Aircraft Demonstration (SHEPARD) vehicle, showcasing the hybrid electric system. The XRQ-73 SHEPARD is a flying-wing Group 3 UAV designed to mature hybrid electric propulsion architectures integrated with mission-focused autonomy.

The flight was conducted in April 2026 at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., piloted remotely by Scaled Composites test pilot Dr. Mike McLean. This milestone advances the state of hybrid-electric propulsion and flight demonstration capabilities in support of next-generation aircraft development.

SHEPARD combines Scaled Composites rapid prototyping and flight expertise with Northrop Grumman's aerospace design and autonomous systems capabilities. This collaborative effort supports DARPA's goal to develop hybrid-electric propulsion technologies offering increased fuel efficiency, reduced emissions, and operational flexibility.

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About Scaled

Founded in 1982 by Burt Rutan, Scaled Composites has averaged the first flight of a unique, new airplane per year: challenging the future of aerospace with each design, build, and test. A one-stop shop for rapid innovation of new aerospace concepts, Scaled Composites excels at rapid aerospace development, research flight testing, and the pursuit of breakthroughs.

Our employees are hands-on and out-of-the-box thinkers with a passion for proving the impossible - enabling the execution of significant and impactful programs.

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