AIRBUS IS USING DRONES TO INSPECT AIRPLANES

News / Manufacturer

Airbus expects drone inspection test to finish by end of 2016.

Drones are potentially dangerous to commercial airplanes if they happen to collide. But in some cases, drones can also be helpful to planes and the companies that make them.

Airbus airbus-group-n-v showed off this week at the Farnborough International Airshow in England how it uses drones to inspect airplanes.

The aircraft manufacturer outfitted the drone with a camera so it could take pictures of one of its airplanes and look for scratches, dents, and other damages. Airbus can then use those images to construct a 3D digital model of the plane that the company said can help prevent and reduce additional airplane damage.

“The use of this new technology offers better working conditions including improving the safety and comfort for the quality inspectors,” Airbus head of quality Nathalie Ducombeau said in a statement.

Ducombeau explained in a video demonstration that using the drone to take pictures instead of a human inspector cuts down the inspection time from two hours to 10 to 15 minutes.

She said that once Airbus is finished testing its drone inspection program for its A350 aircraft,

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which should conclude by year's end, the company plans to expand the drone testing to its A330 aircraft in early 2017. Airbus wants to use drones to test its entire family of airplanes, Ducombeau explained.

Drone company Ascending Technologies, which Intel INTC -0.37% bought for an undisclosed amount in January, built the AscTec Falcon 8 drone that Airbus used for its test program. The drone was outfitted with Intel's RealSense 3D camera technology that enables drones to avoid obstacles and navigate surroundings.

"This collaboration and demo with Airbus showcases the advancements and innovation Intel brings to the drone industry," Anil Nanduri, a vice president and general manager of Intel's new technology group, said in a statement.

Although the drone flew autonomously, a human drone operator monitored the testing process.

In May, Airbus Group CEO Tom Enders told the Wall Street Journal that the airliner wants to become a leading company in the drone industry and plans to roll out more drone-related projects.

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