

## Unmanned escort for manned fighter jets: Airbus presents new Wingman concept at ILA Berlin

- Answers increasing need to augment capabilities of manned aircraft with unmanned platforms
- Showcases foreseen capabilities such as low observability and armament

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**Berlin, 3 June 2024** – Airbus will be presenting its new Wingman concept at the International Aerospace Exhibition ILA in Berlin. In military aviation, a “Wingman” is a pilot in another aircraft that protects and supports the flight lead, delivers more tactical options and thus contributes to mission success. In the Airbus concept, the Wingman is going to operate very much in the same way - only that it is neither a pilot nor a fighter jet flown by one. It is a fighter-type drone that will be commanded by a pilot in a current combat aircraft such as the Eurofighter and can take on high-risk mission tasks that would pose a bigger threat to manned-only aircraft.

The 1:1 model, which Airbus will be exhibiting from June 5 to 9 on its static display at ILA, is similar to a “show car” used as a design exercise by the automotive industry. The Wingman model showcases all of the foreseen capabilities required, such as low observability, the integration of various armaments, advanced sensors, connectivity and teaming solutions. As with “show cars”, not all of what is on display may find its way into series production. In this aspect, the model on display at ILA Berlin will serve as a foundation and catalyst to drive the design requirements for each generation of the Wingman.

Based on the current concept, the Wingman is intended to augment the capabilities of current manned combat aircraft with uncrewed platforms that can carry weapons and other effectors.

“The German Air Force has expressed a clear need for an unmanned aircraft flying with and supporting missions of its manned fighter jets before the Future Combat Air System will be operational in 2040,” said Michael Schoellhorn, CEO of Airbus Defence and Space. “Our Wingman concept is the answer. We will further drive and fine-tune this innovation made in Germany so that ultimately we can offer the German Air Force an affordable solution with the performance it needs to maximise the effects and multiply the power of its fighter fleet for the 2030s.”

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The Wingman’s tasks can range from reconnaissance to jamming targets and engaging targets on the ground or in the air with precision guided munitions or missiles. Pilots in manned aircraft acting as “command fighters” will always have control of the mission. They are always the final decision-making authority, while benefiting from the protection and smaller risk exposure that the delegation of tactical taskings to unmanned systems offers. An additional focus is on increasing the overall combat mass in an affordable manner so that air forces can match the number of opposing forces in peers or near-peers in conflicts.



*The Wingman is a drone that operates with manned fighter jets and receives its tasks and missions from a pilot in a command aircraft such as the Eurofighter.*

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