

Floyd File.

Calgary Herald MAY 28/10

Breaking news at calgaryher

NEXT

TRENDS •
DISCOVERIES
WHAT'S NEW

Aircraft sets speed record at 5,600 km/h

W.J. HENNIGAN
LOS ANGELES TIMES
LOS ANGELES

An aircraft resembling a large bodyboard detached from a flying B-52 bomber and then shot across the Pacific on Wednesday at more than 5,633 kilometres per hour, shattering aviation records and reigniting decades-long efforts to develop a vehicle that could travel faster than a speeding bullet.

The unmanned X-51 WaveRider, powered by an air-breathing hypersonic engine that has virtually no moving parts, was launched mid-air off the coast near Point Mugu.

It sped westward for 200 seconds before plunging into the ocean as planned. Previous attempts at hypersonic flights lasted no more than 10 seconds.

"Everything went very well for a first flight," said Charlie Brink, the X-51 program manager for the Air Force.

"For things to go off the way they did, we're confident this technology has a bright future."

Since the 1960s, the Air Force has been flirting with hypersonic technology, which can propel vehicles at a velocity that cannot be achieved from traditional turbine-powered jet engines.

But the technology has been exceedingly difficult to perfect. Previous attempts produced very limited results including flights that lasted only a few seconds, said Peter Wilson, senior defence analyst with Rand Corp.

It has held great promise, however. A passenger aircraft powered by hypersonic engines could fly from Los Angeles to New York in 30 minutes. It also could travel faster than existing cruise missiles.