Merlin Announces Plans to Pursue a Civil Certification Strategy for Large Aircraft

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- *Merlin will refocus its civil certification strategy from small to large aircraft through a phased approach, offering opportunities for safety and efficiency gains*
- *The strategy builds on Merlin's work integrating the Merlin Pilot onto large, high-assurance aircraft in the defense sector, including its C-130J autonomy program with U.S. Special Operations Command*

BOSTON, Sept. 09, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Merlin, Inc. (NASDAQ: MRLN), a U.S. aerospace and defense technology company building the operating system of record for autonomous flight, today announced plans to pursue a civil certification strategy that sets it on a path to bring autonomy to large aircraft. Merlin intends to implement a phased, methodical approach offering opportunities for safety and efficiency gains. To concentrate its efforts on large aircraft, the company is withdrawing its small aircraft Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) application with the Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand (CAANZ), and will apply the technical foundation and regulatory experience it built there to the new program. New Zealand will remain Merlin's Pacific flight test center and demonstration home, and the company intends to begin commercial operations there.

There are over 7,000 large commercial aircraft in service in the U.S. alone, and much of that fleet lacks modern computing capabilities and faces lengthy upgrade timelines. Because these aircraft fly long routes at high utilization, the operational benefits compound across thousands of flight hours a year. U.S. operators spend approximately $24 billion annually on the crews who fly them, and the industry faces a structural pilot shortage: Oliver Wyman estimates the North American and global shortages to approach 30,000 and 80,000 pilots by 2032, respectively. Longer term, Boeing projects a need for approximately 674,000 new pilots over the next two decades. The demand for autonomy to make large aircraft operations safer and more efficient is structural and urgent.

“Operators are already facing real challenges around crew availability, mission complexity, and operating efficiency, creating a growing demand for technology modernization on large aircraft,” said Matt George, CEO and founder, Merlin. “Our work in New Zealand allowed us to move quickly, mature the Merlin Pilot and make meaningful progress on certifying autonomy with a civil regulator. We are now applying that experience and technical foundation to large aircraft, which we believe is the most effective way to bring our technology and American ingenuity to the global market while meeting operators where the commercial need is greatest. We are incredibly grateful to the CAANZ team for their partnership and look forward to continuing that relationship as we enter this next phase.”

Merlin is already working on integrating the Merlin Pilot onto large, high-assurance aircraft. The company has completed preliminary and critical design review under its C-130J autonomy program with U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). The same core Merlin Pilot platform underpins Merlin's defense and civil programs, so investment in one program compounds across the others.

Merlin began its certification program with the CAANZ, in coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) under a Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement, early in its development. The program was designed to mature Merlin’s technology, verification processes, testing, and certification approach while working closely with a civil aviation regulator. That program produced meaningful results including achieving its Stage of Involvement (SOI) 3 milestone and a Stage 4 issue paper addressing the use of AI/ML-based natural language processing. These achievements generated valuable regulatory insights that will inform Merlin’s future certification and collaboration efforts with the FAA and other regulators working to safely bring autonomy to commercial markets.

About Merlin

Merlin is an aerospace and defense technology company building the operating system of record for autonomous flight. Through a first-principles approach, the company is redefining what’s possible across aviation, aerospace, and defense with the goal of delivering full-stack autonomy for any aircraft, military or civilian, from takeoff to touchdown. The Merlin Pilot system powers a growing range of aircraft and mission profiles, proven through hundreds of autonomous flights from test facilities across the globe. With $100M+ total in IDIQ contract ceiling value under its C-130J autonomy program with USSOCOM, Merlin is advancing American leadership in autonomous aviation. To learn more, visit www.merlinlabs.com or follow us on X @merlinaero.

Cautionary Statement Regarding Forward-Looking Statements

This press release contains forward-looking statements within the meaning of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Forward-looking statements can be identified by words such as “anticipate,” “believe,” “estimate,” “expect,” “forecast,” “intend,” “may,” “plan,” “potential,” “project,” “target,” “will,” and similar terms. All statements other than statements of historical fact should be considered forward-looking statements, including without limitation statements regarding: Merlin's plans to pursue a civil certification strategy for large aircraft, and the anticipated timing and outcomes of that strategy; Merlin's plans to apply the technical foundation and regulatory experience developed through its small aircraft certification program; Merlin's plans regarding continued flight testing, demonstration activities, and commercial operations in New Zealand; expected synergies and compounding benefits across Merlin's defense and civil programs; and the anticipated benefits and future development of Merlin's autonomous flight technology. These forward-looking statements are based on our current expectations, assumptions, and projections about future events and trends. These forward-looking statements are neither promises nor guarantees, but involve known and unknown risks and uncertainties that could cause actual results to differ materially from those expressed or implied by the forward-looking statements, including without limitation the risks and uncertainties detailed under the section entitled "Risk Factors" of our final prospectus, dated May 13, 2026, filed with the SEC on May 13, 2026, and in our Quarterly Reports on Form 10-Q. This press release also contains estimates and other information regarding our industry and market, including the size of the large commercial aircraft market, operator spending levels, and pilot supply and demand projections, which are based on management estimates, which have been derived from third- party sources, as well as data from our internal research. While we believe the estimated industry and market data included in this press release are generally reliable, such information, which is derived in part from management's estimates and beliefs, is inherently uncertain and imprecise. Except as required by applicable law, we undertake no obligation to update any of these forward-looking statements after the date of this press release.

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