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World's Largest Aircraft Crashes Its Second Flight

(theverge.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @07:50PM from the flying-bum dept.

Not too long after it completed its first test flight, the Airlander 10 -- the world's largest aircraft -- has crashed its second test flight. Since the 300-foot long aircraft contains 38,000 cubic meters of helium inside its hull, the crash was all but sudden. You can see in a video posted to YouTube from witnesses on the ground that the aircraft slowly descended to the ground, nose first. The BBC has published some close-up photos of the cockpit, which sustained damages. There were no injuries in the crash, according to a tweet from Hybrid Air Vehicles. The company did also deny eyewitness reports of the aircraft being damaged in a collision with a telegraph pole.

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Score: 2

by MarkedRebel (266624)

or did it?

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Re: (Score:2)

by 93 Escort Wagon (326346)

Really? They flew into a telegraph pole? When were they flying it, 1937?

I watched the video and distinctly heard someone say "Oh, the humanity!"

Re: (Score:2)

by Dunbal (464142) *

Could have been a semaphore tower, just sayin'

Re: Telegraph (?) Pole (Score:1)

by Anonymous Coward

Yes. It hit 88 mph though briefly momentarily causing a rip in time where it was damaged by a telegraph pole. Dr. Brown who led the test flight was reportedly thrilled with the outcome saying "this should be much safer than the DeLorean."

Re: (Score:2)

by AK Marc (707885)

Yeah, in the US, a https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/... [wikipedia.org] carying power and no telephone lines at all would be most commonly referred to as a "telephone pole", silly brits, using inaccurate language differently than we do.

rough landing (Score:1)

by confused one (671304)

It wasn't a crash, it was just a rough landing. They walked away. I've been in rougher landings in conventional commercial aircraft. "Any landing you can walk away from is a good landing."

When will they learn? (Score:2)

by sycodon (149926)

Building these things that are at the mercy of the elements is a bad idea.

Re: (Score:2)

by Austerity Empowers (669817)

Building these things that are at the mercy of the elements is a bad idea.

This is the set of all things.

Now get out of my cave.

Re: (Score:2)

by execthis (537150)

LOL exactly what I was thinking!

Re: (Score:2)

by AK Marc (707885)

Because no airplane ever crashed from wind/air?

Re: (Score:2)

by runningduck (810975)

No to mention all that wasted helium. People should be aware that helium is a non-renewable resource and there are signs that it is becoming scarce.

Re: (Score:2)

by rossdee (243626)

Some people refer to solar power as 'renewable'/ It is not but it will continue converting Hydrogen to Helium for a few billion years or so.

Re: (Score:2)

by haruchai (17472)

They call this thing the world's largest aircraft but it's TINY compared to the Hindenburg

Re: (Score:1)

by SpinyManiac (542071)

The Hindenburg isn't an aircraft. Well, not any more anyway. I know Slashdot is a bit slow reporting news but it caught fire and crashed 80 years ago.

Crash is in the eye of the exaggerator (Score:2)

by rmdingler (1955220)

the aircraft slowly descended to the ground, nose first.

It seems clear why this will leave less of an impact historically than the Hindenburg.

Re: (Score:2)

by Rej (128717)

Indeed. I saw in some of the pictures from earlier a big gash in the envelope that they were putting a temporary patch on. And the crash ripped open the compartment that contains a lot of electronic equipment.

That would have been an unpleasant day with hydrogen. :

Hindenbutt (Score:2)

by Tablizer (95088)

Hindenbutt: Oh the huge-fannity!

As did all the others. (Score:3)

by Brett Buck (811747) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @07:57PM (#52765641)

Every other blimp/helicopter hybrid crashed pretty early on, so this is hardly unexpected. The fundamental problem with all lighter than air craft has been landing, taking off, or being handled on or near the ground. It is an intrinsic weakness that cannot be overcome.

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Re: (Score:2)

by Rej (128717)

A design like Airlander 10 is fundamentally a lot more resistant to the common problems that plague blimps during landing, such as susceptibility to winds. It has less inherent lift, a smaller cross section, and more ability to anchor itself down with its fans. However, something clearly did not function correctly here. A blimp should never nose down like that. Either lift or thrust was for some reason configured wrong.

Re: As did all the others. (Score:2)

by Rej (128717)

Hmm, actually from rewatching it, maybe it was still in its descent phase. It's common to point downwards and power the craft down to the ground, and then level out when you near the ground. Maybe they had unexpected momentum or loss of low speed maneuvering ability..

Re: (Score:2)

by fnj (64210)

What is NOT common, what no pilot would ever do, is to keep the elevators in down-ship position all the way until the thing has crashed into the ground. Watch the video. My guess is control system failure.

Less power than a Zeppelin (Score:4, Informative)

by dbIII (701233) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @10:12PM (#52766259)

Yes but still a step below the semi-rigid airships like the Italians had in the 1920s (Norge, Italia) or the rigid airships, both of which have smaller relative cross section again.

The bit about fans doesn't sound like anything new to be honest the engines are less powerful there are less of them so don't add up to the same thrust as was seen in airships which had engines that could pivot in a similar way to this. One airship of the 1920s had five engines - each 410 kW (550 hp).

Airlander 10 apparently has four x 350 hp.

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Akron + Macon (Score:2)

by dbIII (701233)

more ability to anchor itself down with its fans

A quick wikipedia search show that the USS Akron had eight Maybach VL-II 560 hp (420 kW) engines while the Airlander 10 has four x 350 hp engines. It's a step in front of some other current small blimps but has less ability to thrust itself down than airships of the past.

Re: (Score:2)

by fnj (64210)

Did you also perhaps notice that Akron had 5 times the enclosed volume of the Airlander? Five times as big but only three times the engine power.

Weight of lighter than air vehicles (Score:2)

by dbIII (701233)

Did you notice it had a very different cross section and was much stiffer so would be loaded differently by wind and movement in general?

It's a bit hard to do a comparison on anything other than raw thrust especially since the weight is going to be around the same once the things are full of gas.

On a still day the Akron or any of the others would have far "more ability to anchor itself down with its fans" than the Airlander even if they would perform differently in other ways.

Did you also perhaps notice tha

Re: (Score:2)

by fnj (64210)

Both rigid and nonrigid airships in operation are so close to infinite structural rigidity (no significant deformation under operating loads; not infinite strength) that there is no difference in reaction to gusts. As to the difference in cross section, what is the point specifically?

I think there is more similarity to smashing the Staten Island ferry into the dock - something that has been done more than once. They are both crashes. Nothing whatever to do with sinking. On 6 May 1956, the battleship USS Wis

I forgot to add (Score:2)

by dbIII (701233)

Also it's going to be the profile exposed to wind and not volume that would matter and while that would be larger it's going to be closer to two times than five times - similar to cross sectional area from the direction of wind instead of volume. If the thing is going forward it could be much less since than the current blimp since the Akron etc were much more streamlined and is around the same maximum diameter. Almost pencil versus grid-iron football profile, just a really big pencil as thick as a footba

Re: (Score:2)

by fnj (64210)

A design like Airlander 10 is fundamentally a lot more resistant to the common problems that plague blimps during landing, such as susceptibility to winds

Highly debatable, and never proved.

It has less inherent lift

Not significantly. At most it has 1.7 times the mass of an equal volume of air. A blimp has close to 1.0 times. An airplane such as the 747 has over 200 times. The Airlander's susceptibility to wind influence during landing is very, very nearly the same as a blimp, and nothing whatever like an air

Re: (Score:2)

by fred911 (83970)

"The fundamental problem with all lighter than air craft has been landing, taking off, or being handled on or near the ground"

In any aircraft, flying is easy. It's only the mandatory part of flying that's hard, landing.

Re: (Score:2)

by dbIII (701233)

Yes but in a lot of ways this is technologically inferior to what the Italians had in 1926.

It's more of a blimp than the Norge or Italia. The "hybrid" bit is hype because tilttable engines have been a feature of blimps and airships all along. Shiny new materials and a different lifting gas but it's still an awkwardly shaped balloon with engines attached.

Article Needs Tag (Score:4, Funny)

by PPH (736903) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @07:57PM (#52765643)

"Oh, the humanity!"

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Aircraft? (Score:4, Funny)

by hcs_\$reboot (1536101) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @07:59PM (#52765661)

Call that an airship, or something, please. Even though this picture [hybridairvehicles.com] reminds me of a very flexible girlfriend of mine.

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Re: (Score:3)

by dougmc (70836)

There are several terms that could be used, but calling it an "aircraft" is completely accurate.

And as for that picture ... damn, son!

Re: (Score:2)

robotics (760688)

Aircraft is an apt description, as helicopters also qualify as aircraft. What it isn't is an airplane, but they are not trying to call it one.

Re: (Score:1)
by [Tablizer \(95088 \)](#)
[back shape] reminds me of a very flexible girlfriend of mine.
That's the last view you saw of her, eh?
Must have been your "I do Wookies" tattoo.

Re: (Score:3)
by [fnj \(64210 \)](#)
Airplanes, helicopters, and airships are all aircraft, Skippy.

Re: (Score:1)
by [hcs_\\$reboot \(1536101 \)](#)
Yes, and it could be named an "object" also. Airship is closer to what it is, than "aircraft".

38,000 cubic meters of helium? (Score:4, Insightful)
by [irrational_design \(1895848 \)](#) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @07:59PM ([#52765663](#))
Isn't helium that same stuff needed for MRI machines that I keep hearing is in short supply?

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Re: (Score:1)
by Anonymous Coward
Because capitalism and/or free markets rarely if ever work correctly?

Re:38,000 cubic meters of helium? (Score:5, Funny)
by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @08:17PM ([#52765757](#))
The helium shortage is a myth! It is a lie perpetuated by Big Noble Gas to drive up prices!
WAKE UP SHEEPL!

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Re: (Score:1)
by [sunking2 \(521698 \)](#)
That's nothing compared to the number of birthday balloons that are wasted each day at parties for 1 year olds. That's a piddle amount of something that is presumably not just released.

Re: (Score:2)
by [Rei \(128717 \)](#)
Sigh, [not this "blimps causing a critical helium shortage" meme](#) [slashdot.org] yet again....

Re: (Score:2)
by [Trogre \(513942 \)](#)
Should have used Hydrogen.

Re:38,000 cubic meters of helium? (Score:5, Insightful)
by [stephanruby \(542433 \)](#) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @11:47PM ([#52766589](#))
An MRI machine needs 1,700 litres of liquid helium, which needs to be topped off regularly. That's the equivalent of 12,724 cubic meters. The airship needs 38,000 cubic meters of helium, which I assume also needs to be topped off regularly.
In other words, the airship uses Helium at the rate of three MRI machines (according to my layman calculation). I'm not making a judgement one way or another. I just wanted to quantify the comparison.

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Re: (Score:2)
by [Joe_Dragon \(2206452 \)](#)
We can fill it with hydrogen if you want cheap out

Re: (Score:2)
by [Jon Peterson \(1443 \)](#)
The helium market is more complicated than people think. MRIs and superconductors need very pure helium, often in liquid form. Party balloons and (I assume) airships don't. So when helium becomes contaminated with air (which it does very easily) what do you do? Answer, you mainly vent it to the atmosphere, because your average research institute or hosptial can't possibly afford to install the equipment to recover pure (and possibly liquid) helium (what they need) from a helium-air gas mix. It makes more se


Re: (Score:2)
by [thegarbz \(1787294 \)](#)
Isn't helium that same stuff needed for MRI machines that I keep hearing is in short supply?
1. MRI needs high purity helium. Airships do not.
2. Helium reserves are running out. That's because the government is flooding the market with it for cheap and because of that price no one is capturing it.
3. A large portion of helium originated from mining for natural gas. We still mine for natural gas. We were producing more helium in the 70s than we were doing now purely due to economics. The government wanted it in the 70s which made it economical. If the price rises it will be economical to increase pro

Re: (Score:1)
by [Tablizer \(95088 \)](#)
Rename it "Butty McButtface"

38,000 cubic meters of helium inside its hull (Score:3, Interesting)
by [nimbius \(983462 \)](#) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @08:01PM ([#52765677](#)) [Homepage](#)
the real tragedy here is not the crash, but the fact that 38000 cubic meters of a very rare gas used for everything from advanced medical diagnostics to research into superconductors and even nuclear fusion is squandered into a single aircraft that cant be bothered to run through a computational fluid thermodynamics simulation before enjoying public humiliation.
im sure it sounds callous, but i hope this thing takes a life next time because clearly no ones thought through the ramifications of such a wasteful endeavour.


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Capitalism! (Score:5, Interesting)
by [Okian Warrior \(537106 \)](#) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @08:14PM ([#52765737](#)) [Homepage](#) [Journal](#)
the real tragedy here is not the crash, but the fact that 38000 cubic meters of a very rare gas used for everything from advanced medical diagnostics to research into superconductors and even nuclear fusion is squandered into a single aircraft that cant be bothered to run through a computational fluid thermodynamics simulation before enjoying public humiliation.
im sure it sounds callous, but i hope this thing takes a life next time because clearly no ones thought through the ramifications of such a wasteful endeavour.
Hypothetically speaking, suppose someone offered you a job at that company (and you lived near enough for an easy commute, and so on) for \$100,00/yr. Would you take it?
Or would you refuse, knowing that the helium could be put to better use in other ways?
Now suppose you own an MRI company. Do you spend part of your profits purchasing stores of Helium for future use, or do you pocket the profits (or give it to shareholders) and hope that societal pressure will fix the problem sometime in the future?
Or that governments will step in and do something about the Helium supply?
Welcome to capitalism.

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Re: (Score:2)
by [blindseer \(891256 \)](#)
It is capitalism that will likely save the helium. If it is as rare as people say then the price will reflect that, that's capitalism.
As prices rise the ability for people to afford helium for things like airships diminishes. As prices rise it becomes affordable for people to invest in new ways to obtain helium and pay for ways to prevent it being lost.
If we have the government dictate that no one can use helium for fuel saving airships like this then you have tyranny.
Seems rather unfair that we must choo

Re:Capitalism! (Score:5, Insightful)
by [toddestan \(632714 \)](#) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @11:01PM ([#52766441](#))
Actually, quite the opposite. The cost of Helium depends not on how rare it is, but how much it costs to extract it from the ground. Since it's actually a byproduct of natural gas production, the cost of extracting it is cheap (basically, free) and the main cost is actually the cost of separating it from the methane, storage, and transport. Because of this, a lot of helium isn't even captured and instead is vented to the atmosphere, where it eventually escapes to space. Why? Because capitalism. It's not profitable to capture it, so it's not captured. Nevermind that it's a non-renewable resource used for many important applications that has no substitute available. So Helium is cheap, until all of sudden it won't be.

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Re: (Score:3)
by [viperidaenz \(2515578 \)](#)
The helium supply issues aren't due to capitalism, they're due to the US government fucking around with their massive stockpile they're supposed to be selling off.

Re: (Score:2)
by [Tough Love \(215404 \)](#)
The helium supply issues aren't due to capitalism, they're due to the US government fucking around with their massive stockpile they're supposed to be selling off.
Rubbish. The helium supply issues are due to the fact that helium continuously escapes from the atmosphere into space, and is frittered away wastefully on toys such as party balloons and blimps.

Re: (Score:2)
by [hey! \(33014 \)](#)
But most helium is produced as a by-product of natural gas production, no? So you've got to either store it, use it, or vent it.

Re: (Score:2)
by [Tough Love \(215404 \)](#)
Store it, we have a winner. It is no great trick to find a capitalist willing to store a commodity that is certain to appreciate in value substantially in the future.

Re: (Score:2)
by [Crashmarik \(635988 \)](#)
the real tragedy here is not the crash, but the fact that 38000 cubic meters of a very rare gas used for everything from advanced medical diagnostics to research into superconductors and even nuclear fusion is squandered into a single aircraft that cant be bothered to run through a computational fluid thermodynamics simulation before enjoying public humiliation.
im sure it sounds callous, but i hope this thing takes a life next time because clearly no ones thought through the ramifications of such a wasteful endeavour.
I am sure they were doing it to lower the carbon footprint of air travel and fight Global Warming,

Re: (Score:2)
by [thegarbz \(1787294 \)](#)
the real tragedy here is not the crash, but the fact that 38000 cubic meters of a very rare gas used for everything from advanced medical diagnostics Let me stop you right there and start correcting you before you even finish your sentence.
1. 38000 cubic meters is not a lot of helium. It's about the same as used in a big MRI machine, maybe a tad more. But two small MRI machines already use more gas than this.
2. Helium is such a very rare gas that we vent it to the atmosphere as a byproduct of extracting natural gas from the ground. It's such a rare gas that we can extract close to 2 orders of magnitude more of it from the air than some other noble gasses

What is it really? (Score:1)
by [MouseR \(3264 \)](#)
How does this thing qualify as an "aircraft" rather than "airship"?
[Seriously](#) [youtube.com].

Re: (Score:2)
by [execthis \(537150 \)](#)
How does this thing qualify as an "aircraft" rather than "airship"?
I totally agree. That was the lamest crash vid I've ever seen.

Re: (Score:3)
by [fnj \(64210 \)](#)
Because an airship is a type of aircraft, ignoramus.

Oh The Humanity (Score:1)
by [NicknameUnavailable \(4134147 \)](#)
Blimps suck, actual news at 11.
[2 hidden comments](#)

Re: (Score:2)
by [amicusNYCL \(1538833 \)](#)
Airships are marvellous, nearly perfect aircraft for applications where speed is not vital and severe weather is not an issue.
So, never?

Re: (Score:2)
by [execthis \(537150 \)](#)
OH THE... (Score:0)
by Anonymous Coward on 2016-08-24 17:07 ([#52765709](#))
...drums fingerschecks watch ...
coughties shoelaces
HUMANITY!

LMAO I nominate this for Funniest Post of the Year!

Re: (Score:2)
by [Rei \(128717 \)](#)
Regardless of how much ground crew (an expense, by the way, that Airlander is designed to minimize) you have, blimps are not supposed to land nose down. This is a Problem(TM) that needs to be investigated and fixed.

Re: (Score:2)
by [z0idberg \(888892 \)](#)
That's great if you only want to land where a ground vehicle already exists.
Somewhat limiting requirement though don't you think?
Although I'm sure you thought of that already down the pub with your napkin.

Terminally Twerked Towards Terrain (Score:1)
by [pipinguay \(566974 \)](#)
Ow, my butt!

Re: (Score:2)
by [viperidaenz \(2515578 \)](#)
Wasted? It's still all contained in the airship. If someone needs it for another use, they can buy it.

Videos of slow things crashing (Score:2)
by [Pollux \(102520 \)](#)
After watching the video, it reminded me of [other things crashing very, very slowly](#) [youtube.com] Though this one wasn't quite as entertaining.

Oh the poor golfers... (Score:1)

by [pinzvidz \(3520933 \)](#)

...fucked their game well and truly!

• **And there was an Earth shattering "ga-boing"!** (Score:1)

by [Photonmaker \(4487443 \)](#)

When a fully inflated lighter than air-ship crashes, does it bounce?

This is what used to be LEMV (long endurance multi-intelligence vehicle). Very expensive attempt at long-loiter reconnaissance. Cost the US tax payer many many millions, and was cancelled and the thing was sold back the original builder for \$301k. <https://www.flightglobal.com/n...> [flightglobal.com]. Reminds me of the telcom bubble back in the early 2000's except this was a bubble of helium.


Oh, and the helium thing - possibly overrated - more found:

• **I know what this means** (Score:3)

by [Applehu Akbar \(2968043 \)](#) on Wednesday August 24, 2016 @10:09PM ([#52766249](#))

Ryanair is going to order fifty of them.

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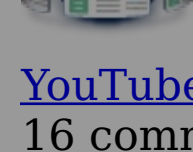
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