Hypersonic Craft Ready for Test Flight

Editor's Note: I have friends who think that the military forgot more about aerospace technology than NASA will ever know. (They also believe that the Aurora pulse-wave-detonation hypersonic craft exists, too.) Whatever your position, making things go extremely fast is incredibly cool.

(MSNBC.com [1]) - Hoping to bridge the gap between airplanes and rocketships, the U.S. military is preparing to test an experimental aircraft that can fly more than six times faster than the speed of sound on ordinary jet fuel.

Officially, it's known as the X-51, but folks like to call it the WaveRider because it stays airborne, in part, with lift generated by the shock waves of its own flight. The design stems from the goal of the program — to demonstrate an air-breathing, hypersonic, combustion ramjet engine, known as a scramjet.

"We built a vehicle around an engine," said Joseph Vogel, the X-51 project manager with Boeing, which is building a series of four test planes under a $246.5-million program managed by the Air Force Research Laboratory in Dayton, Ohio.

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