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Flying Saucer from Earth

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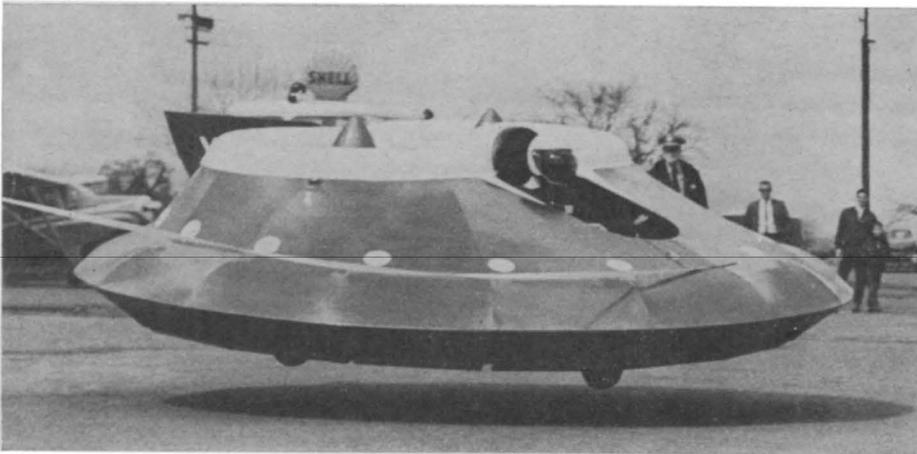
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Bill Crouch

At Davis, Calif., airport, Dr. Moller takes off in his homemade saucer.

Flying Saucer from Earth

Tomorrow's commuters, says a California engineer, may travel to and from work in their own UFO's.

A dozen years ago, the U.S. Air Force decided to build a flying saucer. Five years later, after pouring more than \$10 million into a vehicle that never got more than four feet off the ground, it abandoned the project. Recently, a similar but much less elaborate



Bill Crouch

Dr. Paul Moller

saucer has been flying in California. Though it has only accumulated about two hours of test flying time, three feet in the air, its inventor believes that the flying saucer could be developed into a mass-produced commuting vehicle, readily available for the price of a new car.

A pair of 90-horsepower outboard motors power the 14-foot-diameter machine, which was developed by Dr. Paul S. Moller, an assistant professor of mechanical engineering at the University of California's Davis campus. The engines drive a pair of horizontal propellers, like those on a hovercraft, which suck air downward through a ducting system which he designed. Dr. Moller claims that his saucer, unlike hovercraft, can climb as high as small fixed-wing aircraft; because he is not a licensed pilot, he is so far operating under a self-imposed three-foot ceiling.

He already thinks it is a more efficient hovercraft than it is a flying saucer, however. "When it's near the ground and can take advantage of the

air cushioning effect," Dr. Moller says, "it will be able to lift 10 times its own weight—we should be able to find an immediate application for it in crop dusting. At higher altitudes, however, it will be able to support only its own weight and that of the pilot. After you reach a certain size, a helicopter is a more practical and efficient vehicle."

A smaller, more efficient saucer has already been built, but has yet to fly. It was built in the same way as its predecessor: in Dr. Moller's garage, with the help of some of his graduate students. Only eight feet in diameter, the improved version will be powered by four motorcycle engines driving a sort of continuous propeller with blades running around the outside of the machine. Dr. Moller predicts that it will be in the air within six months and have a speed of about 150 miles per hour.

Dr. Moller came to the University of California from a Canadian aircraft company, Canadair Ltd. Working in Toronto, he became familiar with the work done by A. V. Roe and Co., the firm that had tried to develop a saucer for the U.S. Air Force. "Perhaps they had too much money and were able to afford a lot of inefficiencies," he said. "We were able to take up where they left off."

That Dr. Moller's flying saucer is able to get off the ground, however, does not prove the concept. Hovercraft are now being used commercially in several countries, and with inexpensive helicopters being produced in increasing numbers, the flying saucer may meet with no more acceptance than its reported outer space counterparts.

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