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May 17, 2016 5:50 am

# World's first commercial jetpack prepares for lift-off

Jamie Smyth in Christchurch, New Zealand



Peter Coker spent his early career flying fighter jets for the Royal Air Force. Now the 60-year-old is close to turning science fiction into reality, by mass producing what he says is the world's first commercial personal jetpack.

Next month Australia-listed Martin Jetpack will begin manufacturing its P-14 aircraft, a carbon fibre, petrol-powered jetpack that can reach heights of 3,000ft and speeds of up to 74km per hour — all for a price tag of between \$200,000 and \$250,000.

“We are at the start of the journey,” said Mr Coker, Martin Jetpack's chief executive. “We will begin deliveries to customers by the end of the year.”

Dubai Civil Defence and a US company, Avwatch, have signed memorandums of understanding with Martin Jetpack, which it hopes to translate into orders. The plan is to deploy the jetpacks for use with emergency services such as fire, police and border security.

Some 35 years ago Glenn Martin, founder of Martin Jetpack, began working on a dream to improve the Bell Rocket Belt — a device that inspired many when it featured in the James Bond film *Thunderball* but was ultimately discontinued.

“The problem with the Bell rocket belt was that to fly it you had to weigh less than 65kg and I haven't weighed less than that since I was 12 years old,” said Mr Martin. “The fuel was volatile and dangerous and the belt could only fly for 26 seconds. I wanted to fly for half an hour and carry 120kg.”

Until recently Martin Jetpack's aircraft used a two-stroke V4 petrol engine to power two ducted fans that provide airflow to keep a human airborne for up to 45 minutes. The new P14 and P15 models will incorporate a more powerful rotary engine. Each aircraft contains a ballistic parachute as a safety feature.

“Why use a jetpack? Firstly we don't have rotors, which means we can get into confined spaces, be it the top of buildings or between buildings,” said Mr Coker. “It is very easy to fly and very safe. It is also a lot more fun and cheaper than flying a helicopter.”

Martin Jetpack has grown rapidly since Mr Coker, a former executive at Lockheed Martin, was appointed in 2013. Since then the company has added more than 70 staff and listed on the Australian Securities Exchange.

The expansion is being supported by Kuang-Chi Science, a Hong Kong-listed company. It invested A\$21m in the initial public offering in February 2015 and a further A\$23m through a convertible note in February 2016, giving it a 52 per cent stake in Martin Jetpack and access to its technology.

Martin Jetpack and Kuang-Chi are forming a joint venture to sell jetpacks in China and plan to establish a factory on the mainland that will produce 1,000 jetpacks a year.

But Martin Jetpack's focus on the emergency services market rather than on personal jetpack for leisure use has prompted a split with Mr Martin, who resigned from the board in June saying the company has a different vision from his.

Mr Coker said there is often a stage reached where commercial realities outgrow an entrepreneur's dreams. But he insisted he is not ditching the company's vision of selling jetpacks to the rich and famous.

“A lot of people expressed interest in us after we presented at last month's Monaco car show, where we talked about how you could put jetpacks on super yachts,” said Mr Coker. “I will drive the best value for shareholders and at the same time look after Glenn Martin's dream.”