

IS THE AIRBUS A330 A POTENTIAL VLAT?

Posted by Ryan Mason | Sep 14, 2021 | Aerial Fire News, International Operations, LAT, Retardant, Tanker Bases, Technology, VLAT | 0 | ★★★★★

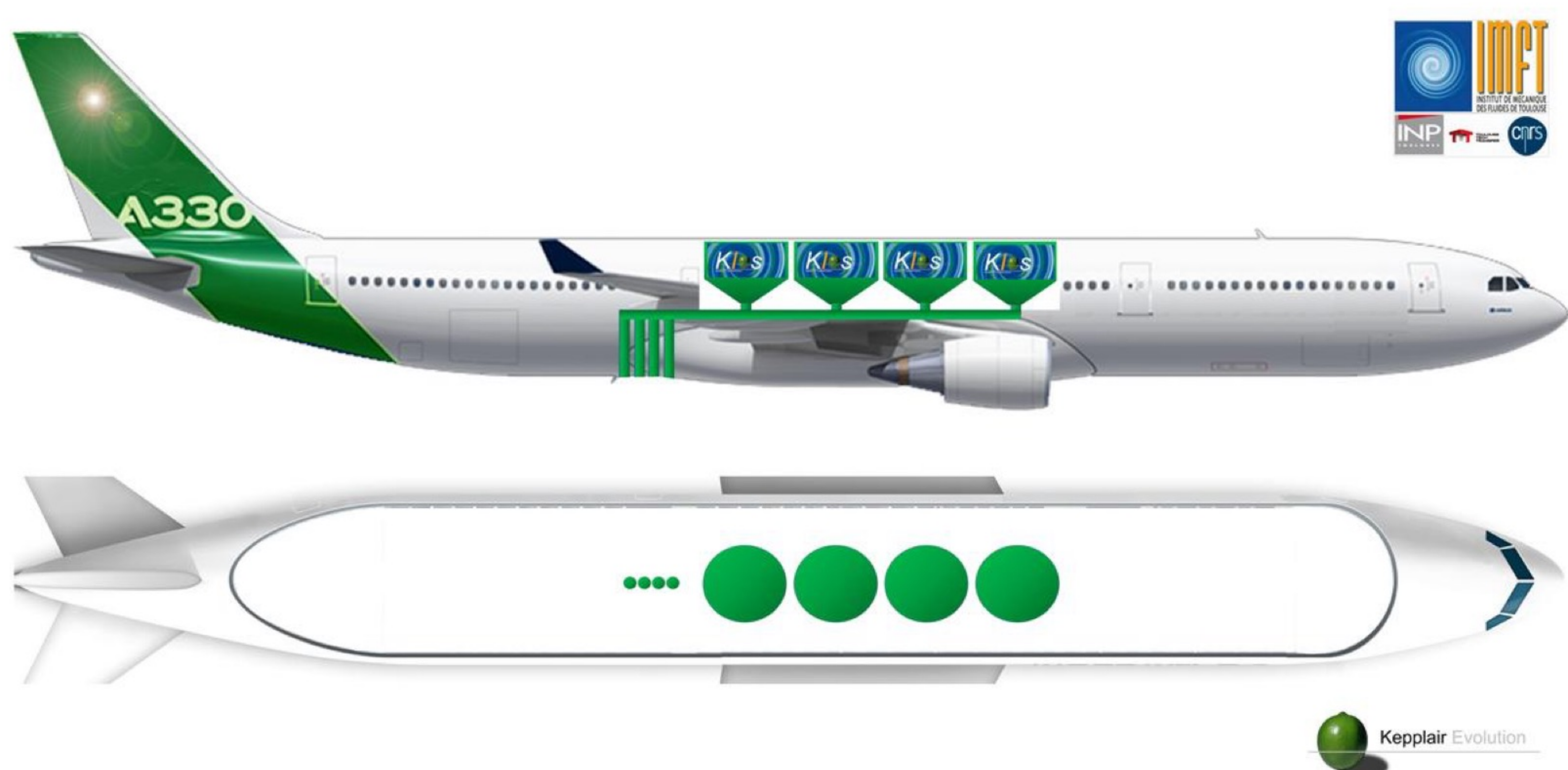


Numerous fires have ravaged the south of France during their summer months and concerns persist about increasing wildfire risks in the years to come. A new tool could however join the fight against devastating wildfires.

VLAT aircraft have had much success in the aerial firefighting industry, even with the retirement of the world's largest VLAT, the Global Supertanker, whose funding was pulled earlier in 2021. The former global supertanker was recently seen after its sale to National Airlines as a freight carrier decked in a National logo just last week.

The idea of new VLAT technology development is far from over, however. Coulson Aviation has proven with the continual growth of their 737 Fireliner aircraft. In a recent article published in French media, a new idea has been gaining traction in the European market. That of a VLAT tanker aircraft based on the Airbus A330 airframe.

This idea was initially floated by airline pilot David Joubert, who was inspired by VLAT development in the US and Canada. Forming a partnership with Dominique Legendre, a professor from the Toulouse Institute of Fluid Mechanics, the two formed Keplair Evolution. A company that has now been recognized with a patent for a retardant delivery system named Kios patented in 2019.



The Kios system invented by the pair is designed to be installed in the Airbus A330 airframe. According to the company "The interest of the project is not to replace existing firefighting equipment and modules but to provide additional assistance to public authorities" explains David Joubert.

The Kios system touts the capacity to drop more than 10,000 gallons (40,000 liters) of retardant which is four times that of traditional French tankers currently at work around the region that are capable of dropping a maximum of 2600 gallons (10,000 liters) deploying a swath line over 1600 feet (500 meters) long and 130 feet (40 meters) wide. As with other VLAT aircraft, one of their main advantages is speed, to reach the scene of a fire in time to make a difference. The Airbus A330 having a cruise speed of 542 knots.

As with other VLAT products, Joubert's project it touted to also have the capacity to carry vital firefighting products from site to site in addition to a full load of retardant, increasing the planned effectiveness of the aircraft, should it make it into final production, realizing the full potential of the project for service both in Europe and overseas.

Joubert also touted the economic stability of the project and the viability of bringing the aircraft to fruition, claiming that a used A330 will cost between 3 and 8 million euros (3.5 to 9.6 million USD) to purchase, and a conversion cost of between 15 and 20 million euros (17.75 to 23.68 million USD) to make it an operational firebombing aircraft. Joubert compared the cost of recent government Dash 8 water bombers in France costing a total of 400 million Euro (473,78 Million USD) or 66 million euros (78.17 Million USD) per aircraft

French media organization Le Figaro contacted the General Directorate of Civil Security and Crisis Management, who expressed some reservations about the use of airliners to fight forest fires. Stating that the aircraft in question would seem "better suited to the fight against large established fires (California type, Siberia), without the presence of a ground component in contact with the fire". The DGSCGC also indicates that it is now favoring "airplanes with propeller engines, more suited to the geography of European areas of operation". The smaller Canadair CL415 and DASH8 have, for example, a "capacity for rapid rotation between fire and refueling stations or scooping sites" specifies the DGSCGC.

Keplair Evolution, while having lofty goals as a startup with big ambitions and in need of a large cash influx to accomplish their goals, has plans of being integrated into the rescUE European civil protection mechanism, to offer the European Union "long-term contracts or one-off contracts to respond to emergencies".

While the European Union may still be gun shy of such a lofty target, the international need for more VLAT's has already been demonstrated over recent years where overlapping international fire needs stretched internationally available resources to their limits.

The company hopes to be able to put the first aircraft into service before the 2024 Olympic Games allowing the aircraft to be on standby for any wildfire threat that may jeopardize the games. As a long term goal, Joubert aims to transform seven planes in total, hoping that the global need for VLAT aircraft increases

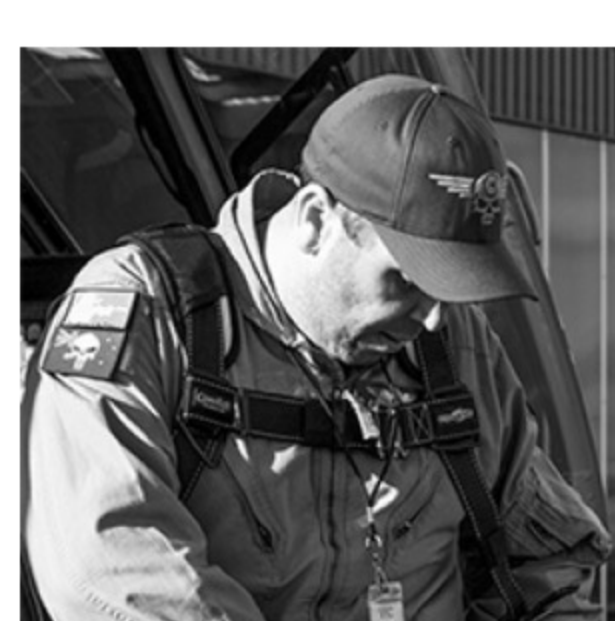
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Originally from Melbourne, Australia, Ryan is a former police officer that turned his skills toward the aviation industry. After a decade of providing story and photography content featured globally in the industry, Ryan joined Marsayl Media as the editor of AerialFire in 2019.