

Los Angeles Times

Construction is complete on behemoth airship First flight planned

A massive cargo-carrying airship has taken shape inside one of the 17-story wooden blimp hangars at the former military base in Tustin.

According to aircraft maker Worldwide Aeros Corp., construction is complete on a 36,000-pound blimp-like aircraft designed for the military to carry tons of cargo to remote areas around the world.

The Montebello company hopes to have a first flight in the coming months and to demonstrate cargo-carrying capability shortly thereafter.



A new blimp-like airship is being constructed by Worldwide Aeros in a World War II-era blimp hanger at a former military base in Tustin. The airship will be used by the military to carry tons of cargo to remote areas around the world.



Engine mechanic Gerardo Esparza works on one of the three engines that will propel the new airship.



Craftsmen assemble the aft portion of Worldwide Aeros' blimp-like airship under construction in a World War II-era blimp hanger in Tustin.



The cockpit sits on the floor next to the partially assembled airship. It will be installed beneath the craft.



Fredy Zuniga trims a piece of the airship's aft section framework. "Because of the curves, every single piece has to be custom cut and fitted," Zuniga says.



Worldwide Aeros' Aeroscraft being built in Tustin is a zeppelin with a rigid skeleton made of aluminum and carbon fiber. A new type of "hybrid" aircraft that combines airplane and airship technologies, it doesn't need a long runway to take off or land because it has piston engines that allow it to move vertically and a new high-tech buoyancy control system.



The Aeroscraft is being built under a contract of around \$35 million from the Pentagon and NASA. That's a tall order for Worldwide Aeros, a company of about 100 employees.