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Compact Drone Wins Proto Labs' Cool Idea! Award

November 17, 2015

Small in size, the Sprite drone offers alternative to larger quadcopter drones

MAPLE PLAIN, Minn.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 17, 2015-- The developers of the Sprite, a small, durable drone that offers an alternative to larger, generally more fragile quadcopter drones, have been presented with the latest Proto Labs Cool Idea! Award, a service grant given to innovative companies by quick-turn manufacturer Proto Labs, Inc. (NYSE: PRLB).

This Smart News Release features multimedia. View the full release here: <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20151117006419/en/>



Proto Labs has awarded its latest Cool Idea! Award to Ascent AeroSystems, developers of the Sprite, a small, durable drone the size of a water bottle. Quick-turn manufacturer Proto Labs awards the service grant periodically to innovative companies. The grant provided injection-molded parts for several iterations of prototype parts for the Sprite. (Photo: Business Wire)

The popularity of drone aircraft for consumer use is surging. More than 700,000 drones are expected to be sold nationwide this year, according to the Consumer Electronics Association. Drones are also getting lots of buzz as a hot holiday gift item

this year.

"Drones are already playing key roles in a variety of industries, and for military and public safety applications," says Proto Labs founder Larry Lukis. "This particular drone is innovative because of its consumer-friendly design: a smaller size, greater durability and ease of use."

The Sprite Drone, developed by Arizona-based Ascent AeroSystems, is an ultra-portable drone that collapses to the size of a water bottle and uses a coaxial rotor design (two rotors stacked one atop the other).

Proto Labs' Cool Idea! Award grant provided injection-molded parts for several iterations of prototype parts for the Sprite.

Jonathan Meringer, one of the founders of Ascent AeroSystems, says early Sprite concepts were developed on a consumer-grade 3D printer using PLA and ABS-like plastics. "While that was great for our initial development, that process didn't provide the parts with the durability we required...the injection-molded polycarbonate parts (fromProto Labs) represent production-grade quality that's added a dramatic improvement in everything from flight performance to assembly and maintainability. We were able to build several conforming vehicles that are really close to what the final product will be."

The target market for the Sprite includes outdoor enthusiasts, such as hikers, backpackers and wilderness adventurers, though significant interest has also come from public safety, law enforcement, defense, security, scientific research and other commercial end-users, Meringer said.

Earlier this year, Sprite benefited from what Meringer calls "an overwhelmingly successful Kickstarter campaign" that wrapped up in June. A total of \$406,061 was pledged, far surpassing the goal of \$200,000. Meringer says Q2 of 2016 is targeted for when the Sprite will actually reach the market. Current pricing begins at \$699.

About Proto Labs

Proto Labs is the world's fastest digital manufacturing source for custom prototypes and low-volume production parts. The technology-enabled company uses advanced 3D printing, CNC machining and injection molding technologies to produce parts within days. The result is an unprecedented speed-to-market value for product designers and engineers worldwide. Visit protolabs.com for more information.

About Ascent AeroSystems

Ascent AeroSystems, based in Tempe, Ariz., led by engineers who are also outdoor enthusiasts, designs, develops and manufactures small, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), also known as drones. More information about the company and drone can be found at ascentaerosystems.com.



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