



AV Awarded Contract for Three Autonomous Helicopters in Support of NASA's SkyFall Mission to Mars

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AV partnering with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) to unlock new research capabilities above and below the Martian surface ahead of a planned 2028 launch.

ARLINGTON, Va.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Aug. 27, 2026-- AeroVironment, Inc. ("AV"), a global defense technology leader, today announced that its MacCready Works advanced solutions team has been awarded a contract for the co-design and co-manufacture of three Mars helicopters for NASA's [SkyFall mission](#) with the agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), taking the project from future concept to a formally funded Mars science mission and a path toward launch in late 2028.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20260827821137/en/>



AV's MacCready Works will design and develop three Mars helicopters for NASA's SkyFall mission, supporting a planned launch in late 2028. (Photo/AV)

SkyFall is the first mission to fly a team of three instrument-carrying helicopters on Mars, demonstrating a fully integrated system capable of autonomous atmospheric entry and powered descent.

AV and JPL are building on their experience as co-developers of NASA's

[Ingenuity Mars Helicopter](#), which completed 72 historic flights at Jezero Crater. Together, the teams are evolving Ingenuity-derived designs into SkyFall: an active NASA mission under the Science Mission Directorate, optimized to deliver high-value science for the Mars Exploration Program.

"With Ingenuity, AV and JPL proved we could fly on Mars. Now, with SkyFall, we're taking AV's high-volume uncrewed systems mindset into planetary exploration and showing that Mars helicopters can be built as a repeatable product line, not a one-off delivery," said Jeff Rodrian, Head of MacCready Works, [AV's advanced research and development organization](#). "It's also a powerful example of public-private partnership; AV and JPL building on Ingenuity's success to create a helicopter platform that NASA can apply to many different science missions over multiple launch windows."

AV is leading the design and production of key elements of the SkyFall helicopters, including rotor systems, airframes, structures, avionics integration, and accommodation for multiple science payloads. JPL is leading the design and development of the power system, electronics, algorithms and software. The helicopters will carry a JPL-designed ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to look below the Martian surface, delivering new insight into shallow subsurface ice, central to both Mars science and future human exploration.

New to this mission is a new "SkyFall maneuver." This technique releases the three helicopters directly from the carrier spacecraft into the Martian atmosphere, where they separate, deploy, descend, and land under their own power. By eliminating the need for a single-use lander stage or a host rover (as Ingenuity required with Perseverance), this approach significantly reduces the technical and financial risk of getting to the Martian surface.

JPL's GPR instruments carried by the helicopters are designed to map subsurface ice at fine spatial resolution, enabling more precise assessment of where water ice is located and implications for science and future human exploration. In addition, each aircraft will host instruments that will provide data on the Martian atmosphere, dust particle transport, and other key environmental processes.

"Just like here on Earth, Mars helicopters can cover distance quickly and can go places that might be impossible to reach by ground," said Will Pomerantz, Head of Space Ventures at AV. "The three SkyFall helicopters are going to show us parts of Mars we've never seen before and return mountains of data for scientists to pour over. The science community may guide these helicopters to places where the ground penetrating radar can map out the precise location of ice below the Martian surface."

NASA currently plans a launch window in November 2028, followed by a cruise to Mars, with arrival timing tuned to local time, dust conditions, and power needs.

About AV

AeroVironment ("AV") (NASDAQ: AVAV) is a defense technology leader delivering integrated capabilities across air, land, sea, space, and cyber. The Company develops and deploys autonomous systems, loitering munitions, counter-UAS technologies, space-based platforms, directed energy systems, and cyber and electronic warfare capabilities—built to meet the mission needs of today's warfighter and tomorrow's conflicts. At the core of these technologies lies AV_Halo™, a modular, mission-ready suite of AI-powered software tools that empowers warfighters and enables full-battlefield dominance: detect, decide, deliver. With a national manufacturing footprint and a deep innovation pipeline, AV delivers proven systems and future-defining capabilities at speed, scale, and operational relevance. For more information, visit www.avinc.com.

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