RCHC TECH BUZZ

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STORIES IN THIS EDITION

WRITTEN AND EDITED BY RTR. ABHISHEK JAIN

AMAZON IS REPORTEDLY USING ALGORITHMS TO FIRE FLEX DELIVERY DRIVERS

Amazon's contract Flex delivery drivers already have to deal with various indignities, and you can now add the fact that they can be hired — and fired — by algorithms, according to a Bloomberg report.

To ensure same-day and other deliveries arrive on time, Amazon uses millions of subcontracted drivers for its Flex delivery program, started in 2015. Drivers sign up via a smartphone app via which they can choose shifts, coordinate deliveries and report problems. The reliance on technology doesn't end there, though, as they're also monitored for performance and fired by algorithms with little human intervention.

However, the system can often fire workers seemingly without good cause, according to the report. One worker said her rating (ranging from Fantastic, Great, Fair, or At Risk) fell after she was forced to halt deliveries due to a nail in her tire. She succeeded in boosting it to Great over the next several weeks, but her account was eventually terminated for violating Amazon's terms of service. She contested the firing, but the company wouldn't reinstate her.

FLYING CAR COMPLETES 35-MINUTE TEST FLIGHT BETWEEN CITIES

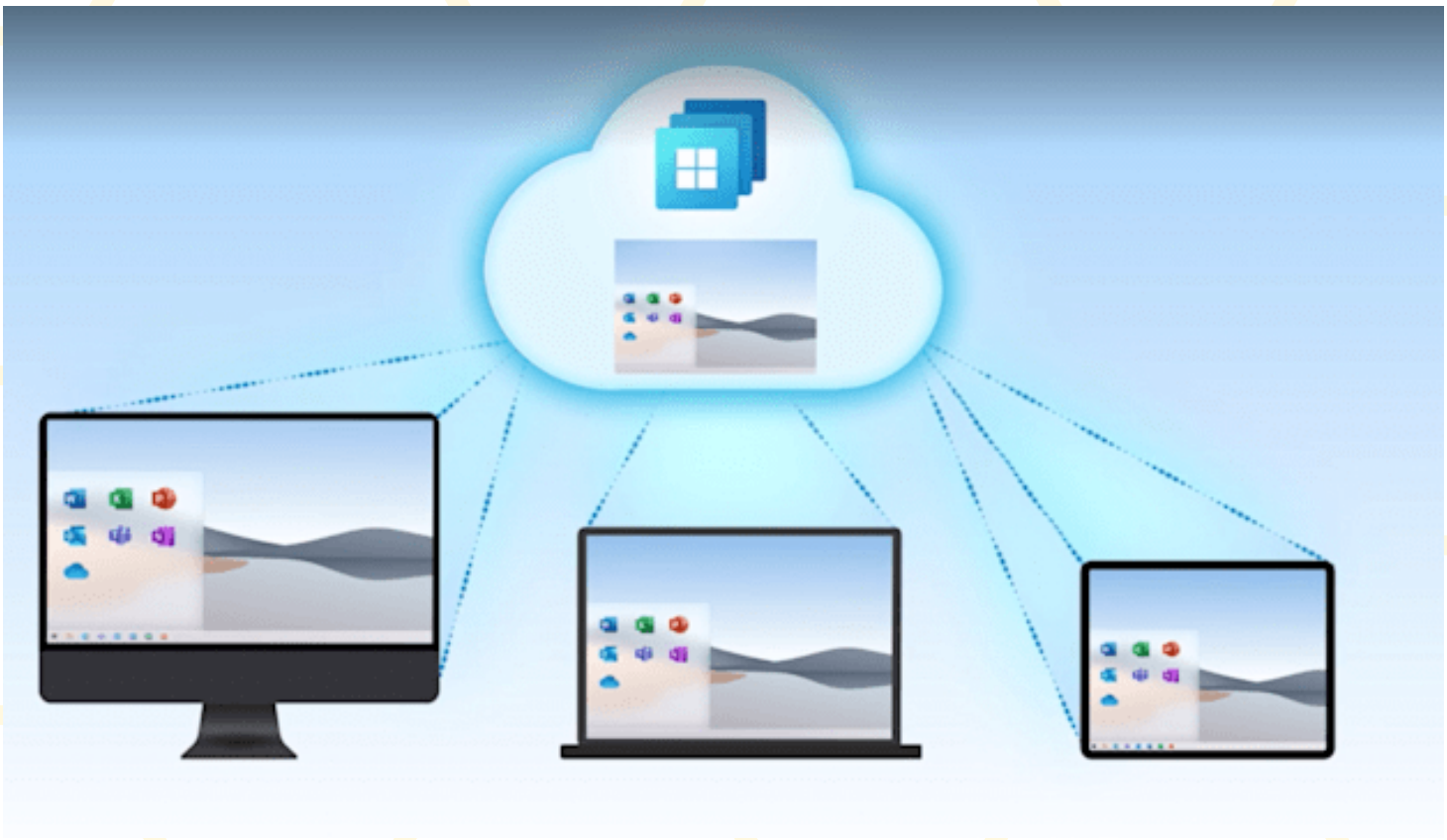
A prototype flying car has completed a 35-minute flight between international airports in Nitra and Bratislava, Slovakia. The hybrid car-aircraft, AirCar, is equipped with a BMW engine and runs on regular petrol-pump fuel. Its creator, Prof Stefan Klein, said it could fly about 1,000km (600 miles), at a height of 2,500M (8,200ft), and had clocked up 40 hours in the air so far.

It takes two minutes and 15 seconds to transform from car into aircraft. The narrow wings fold down along the sides of the car. Prof Klein drove it straight off the runway and into town upon arrival, watched by invited reporters. He described the experience, early on Monday morning, as "normal" and "very pleasant". In the air, the vehicle reached a cruising speed of 170km/h. It can carry two people, with a combined weight limit of 200kg (31 stone). But unlike drone-taxi prototypes, Sadly, it cannot take off and land vertically and requires a runway. But this early engine model modification might one day create a real flying car. (if the car does support VTOL with EDF we might need new licenses soon)

TIKTOK RIVAL YOUTUBE SHORTS EXPANDS BETA INTO OVER 100 COUNTRIES

Following an initial beta launch in September in India and a roll out in the the US in March, the platform recently expanded into Latin America, Canada and the UK. Now, YouTube is expanding the beta across more than 100 countries around the world, i.e. everywhere that YouTube is currently available. In addition to the platform's global expansion, YouTube Shorts is launching a new set of features to all existing and new markets. In a release today, YouTube states that it plans to "introduce more features as we continue to build Shorts alongside creators and artists".

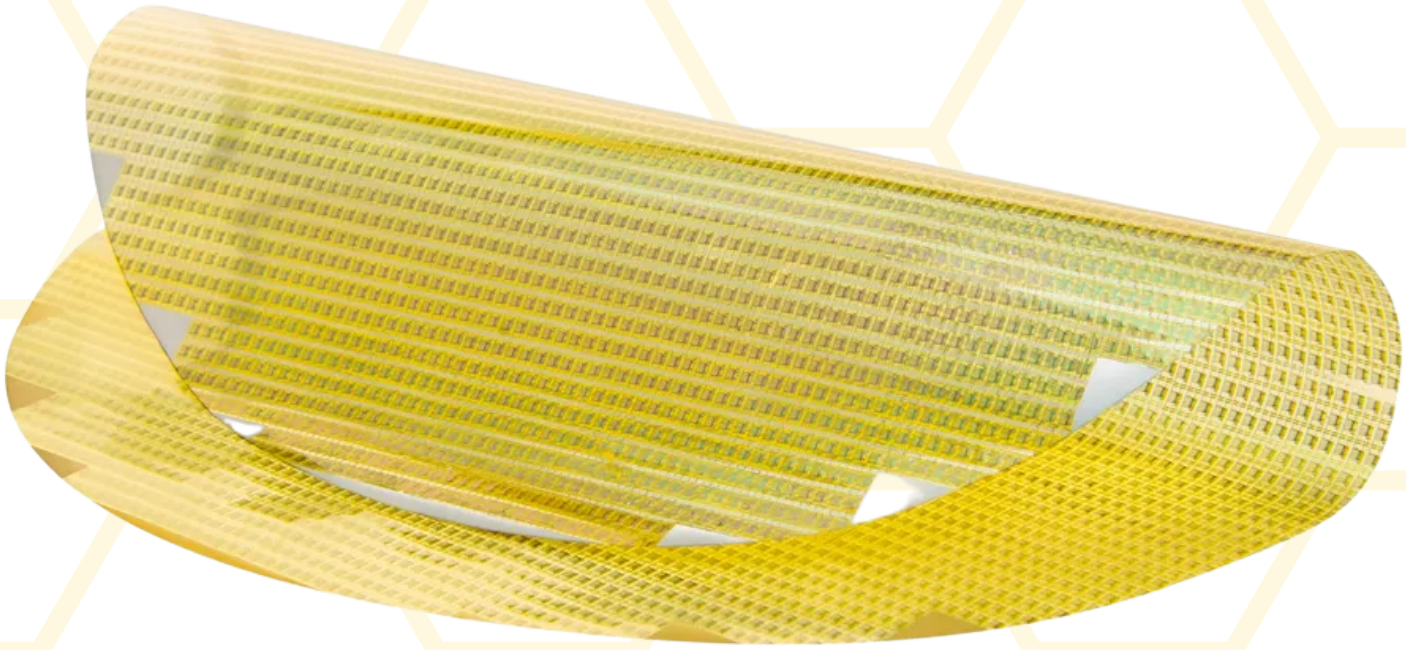
The platform's geographic expansion follows the news in May that DIY distribution company TuneCore and its Paris-based parent Believe have partnered with YouTube to provide music for Shorts. Shorts launched its beta in the US in March with 250 label and publisher partners, including Universal Music Group's labels and publishing companies, Sony Music Entertainment and Publishing, and others. YouTube has more than 2 billion logged-in users playing music on its service every month.



MICROSOFT PUTS PCS IN THE CLOUD WITH WINDOWS 365

Windows 365, a new service was announced on July 14th, at the Microsoft Inspire conference, is basically an unintentional riff on the Yo Dawg meme: Microsoft put Windows in the cloud so you can run a Windows computer while you're running your computer. You can just call it a Cloud PC, as Microsoft does. It's basically an easy-to-use virtual machine that lets you hop into your own Windows 10 (and eventually Windows 11) installation on any device, be it a Mac, iPad, Linux device or Android tablet. Xzibit would be proud.

It builds on Microsoft's Azure Virtual Desktop service, which lets tech-savvy folks also spin up their own virtual PCs, but it makes the entire process of managing a Windows installation in a far-off server far simpler. You just need to head to Windows365.com when it launches on August 2nd (that domain isn't yet live as of the writing this article), choose a virtual machine configuration, and you'll be up and running. (Unfortunately, we don't yet know how much the service is going to cost, but Microsoft says it will reveal final pricing on August 1st.)



ARM SHOWS OFF ITS NON-SILICON PLASTICARM PROCESSOR

If you think microchips are ubiquitous now, appearing in everything from washing machines to lampposts, just wait until circuits can be printed onto plastic, paper, and fabric for the price of pennies. That's what chip designer Arm is promising, with the company this week unveiling a new prototype plastic-based microchip named PlasticARM.

This isn't the first flexible chip we've seen, but it is the most complex. PlasticARM contains a 32-bit Cortex-M0 CPU (the cheapest and simplest processor core in Arm's Cortex-M family).It's comprised of over 18,000 logic gates, which Arm says is at least 12 times more than the previous plastic-based chip.

The chip was designed in coordination with flexible electronics maker PragmatIC, it's only capable of running a trio of test programs hardwired into its circuits during fabrication, though Arm's researchers say they're working on future versions that will allow new code to be installed. (Soon we might have computer chip under our skin to early detect cancer cells . . . . Future is now old man).