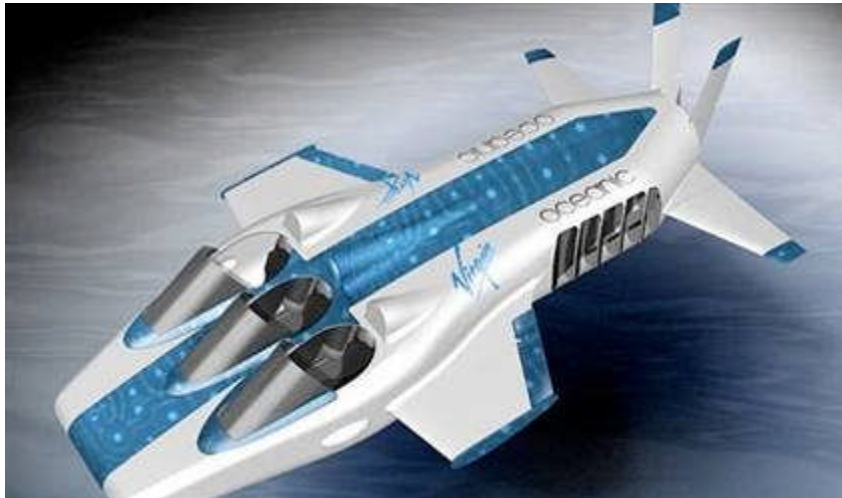


New 'underwater plane' to explore ocean depths

Virgin's three-person Necker Nymph can dive to depths of 36,000 feet



Virgin Limited's Necker Nymph will take wealthy riders on dives lasting up to two hours; the "hydrobatic" vehicle can perform dolphin-like flips underwater.

Virgin Limited Edition



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A new "underwater plane" will plunge wealthy riders down into the ocean depths for a hefty fee.

U.K. company Virgin Limited Edition recently announced the Necker Nymph, a three-person "aero-submarine" that can dive to depths of 36,000 feet – which is deeper than Mount Everest is tall.

The Necker Nymph vehicle is designed and built by San Francisco-based Hawkes Ocean Technologies and is based on the company's DeepFlight series of submersibles.

Virgin bills the Necker Nymph as a "a new class of high-performance, positively buoyant vehicles which safely extend the overall capabilities of scuba, while offering the unique experience of underwater flight."

Unlike conventional subs, which use ballast to sink in the water, the Necker Nymph uses "uses downward 'lift' on the wings to fly down to depth," Virgin explained in a statement.

Each dive can last up to two hours, during which time the "hydrobatic" Necker Nymph can perform dolphin-like flips underwater. An open cockpit provides a near 360-degree viewing experience.

Virgin says the Necker Nymph has "near-zero" environmental impact: "Its positive buoyancy prevents the sub from landing on a reef, and its low light and noise emissions ensure the fragile ocean ecosystems remain undisturbed."

But unless you're incredibly wealthy, don't expect to experience a ride aboard the Necker Nymph anytime soon. The craft is only available if you rent Necker Belle, Virgin's 105-foot (32-meter) luxury catamaran. The boat's weekly charter rate is U.S. \$88,000. Rent the Necker Nymph will cost an additional U.S. \$25,000 per week.

Virgin and its founder Sir Richard Branson have a reputation for building extreme vehicles. Virgin Galactic recently unveiled a space plane, called SpaceShipTwo, that will ferry tourists to suborbital space.

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