

Weekly Progress Roundup

Covid is becoming milder, Boom is going supersonic, a Chinese AI model awes observers, and more.

MALCOLM COCHRAN
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XB-1 is about to go supersonic

[Boom Supersonic](#), the aviation company trying to bring back supersonic commercial flight, will soon deliver on its trade name. Two weeks ago, their XB-1 prototype [hit speeds](#) just shy of sound. Crucially, XB-1 reached that milestone at a relatively low altitude, thereby subjecting the plane to greater stress than it will have to endure during its next test flight, which, in [just a few days](#), may break the sound barrier.

Chinese AI model delivers top-class performance at low cost

A Chinese quantitative trading company has released the first real competitor to American-made artificial intelligence. The model, [DeepSeek-R1, performs as well or better](#) than many leading U.S. counterparts and at a [much lower cost](#). The economist Tyler Cowen and [other observers](#) have argued that DeepSeek’s efficiency is an [unintended side effect](#) of U.S. chip export restrictions, which are forcing Chinese firms to work with limited computational resources.

An AI breakthrough from within an authoritarian state is not, of course, unambiguously good. Still, it is a testament to human ingenuity and the potential for even more resource-efficient models.

Covid is becoming milder

The latest COVID-19 variant appears to be [much less virulent](#) than its predecessors, causing fewer hospitalizations and a lower rate of symptoms. While it’s always possible that a new, more serious variant will rise in the future, the history of respiratory viruses suggests that we are witnessing a long-term process of diminishing virulence that may eventually relegate COVID-19 to the rank of common cold.

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