Conductor's $22M Series A, Aurora, and the New AI Control Points

VC Tech Radar

2026-05-09

Conductor's $22M Series A, Aurora, and the New AI Control Points

By VC Tech Radar • May 9, 2026

This brief covers Conductor's $22M financing, a new cohort of agent-infrastructure startups in testing and memory, and technical signals from Aurora, local DeepSeek inference, and Aalo's reactor milestone. It also tracks the market layer: compute scarcity, generative video revenue, and where voice AI is finding real demand.

1) Funding & Deals

- **Conductor — $22M Series A around persistent multi-agent coding workflows.** Conductor raised a $22M Series A for a Mac app that lets engineers run multiple coding agents at once on isolated copies of a codebase, then review and merge the results [1]. It is also launching Conductor Cloud so those agents can keep running after a laptop is closed [1]. Founders Charlie Holtz and Jackson de Campos say the company cycled through roughly a dozen ideas before landing on the product, which began as internal developer tooling [1].
- **Magrathea Metals — $24M with unusually strong commercial pull for a critical mineral.** Magrathea raised $24M to produce magnesium electrolytically from seawater and waste brines, in a market where North America currently produces no primary magnesium and roughly 85% of global supply comes from China [2]. The company says its facilities should cost about 50% less per ton of capacity than competing approaches and that it has already signed MOUs and binding agreements for more than $500M per year of future sales, including one with a major automaker [2].
- **DeepMind / Fenris Creations — a small equity deal aimed at

richer AI research environments. Google DeepMind took a minority stake described as in the low millions in Fenris Creations, the EVE Online maker, and plans to use isolated EVE servers to study coordination, deception, long-term planning, and continual learning [2].

2) Emerging Teams

- **Ardent AI — fast database cloning for agent testing.** YC says Ardent can clone any Postgres database in under 6 seconds at TB scale so coding agents can test code without touching production [3]. YC also says the product is already used by dozens of teams, including Supermemory and Surface Labs, with more than 10TB of data across customers; founder is @vchennai2 [3].
- **HeurChain and AICTX — memory and continuity are starting to separate from the base model.** HeurChain says its MCP-based memory layer gives agents structured memory across sessions, models, and machines, with sub-50ms hot-tier reads, multi-agent support, a free self-hosted core, and 50K+ memory writes across early clusters [4, 5]. AICTX, built by an engineer with 15+ years of software experience, takes a repo-local approach and reported 25.2% lower time-to-complete and 10.0% lower API cost across two benchmark sessions, while explicitly arguing its value is continuity over repeated repo rediscovery rather than a universal token-saving shortcut [6].
- **Contral — explainability for agent-written code, with unusually young founders.** Contral is a VS Code extension that explains code written by Cursor, Copilot, Windsurf, and other coding agents in real time [7]. The team says it is being built by two 18-year-old college students in India with no funding, mentors, or family startup background, and that the first launch reached #1 Product of the Week on Product Hunt, 500+ downloads, and 20 paid users before the founders rebuilt the product for a relaunch, university pilots, and investor conversations [7].

3) AI & Tech Breakthroughs

- **Aurora — an optimizer-level efficiency claim worth close scrutiny.** Tilde Research says Aurora-1.1B achieves 100x data efficiency on open-source internet data and matches Qwen3-1.7B on several benchmarks with 25% fewer parameters and two orders of magnitude fewer training tokens [8]. The team says Aurora fixes a Muon failure mode in which large numbers of neurons die early in training by redistributing update energy more uniformly across neurons while preserving stability [8]. It argues this points toward optimizer progress coming from diagnosing real training pathologies, not only cleaner abstractions [8].
- **ds4 / DeepSeek v4 Flash — local inference keeps moving up the**

stack. Bindu Reddy highlighted Antirez's ds4 as a native inference engine for DeepSeek v4 Flash, saying the model has a 1M context window and can run locally on a 128GB Mac using 2-bit quantization [9]. She also said the architecture moves KV cache from RAM to SSD and performs especially well in agentic loops without cloud dependence [9].

- **Aalo Atomics — progress on power supply aimed squarely at data centers.** The DOE Idaho Operations Office approved Aalo Atomics's Documented Safety Analysis for the Aalo-X critical test reactor, which Not Boring describes as the authoritative safety basis for DOE nuclear facilities and equivalent to an NRC license for commercial reactors operating under DOE jurisdiction [2]. Aalo is targeting zero-power criticality by July 2026, and its commercial Aalo Pod is a 50MWe block of five sodium-cooled, factory-built reactors purpose-designed to sit next to hyperscale data centers [2].
- **Math capability signals are surfacing in public.** Mathematician William Timothy Gowers wrote that a model proved a result that, in his assessment, would make a reasonable PhD thesis chapter in a couple of hours, using prompts that contained no mathematical input [10]. In a related post, he warned that if AI mathematics continues at its current rate, mathematics departments may face a crisis soon and should prepare urgently [11]. Marc Andreessen amplified both posts [12, 13].

4) Market Signals

- **Supply, not demand, still looks like the main bottleneck in frontier AI.** On All-In, the panel said xAI leased all of Colossus 1 to Anthropic, adding more than 220,000 Nvidia GPUs and over 300MW of energy, and that the deal quickly doubled Claude Code rate limits, removed peak usage caps for paid users, and increased API volumes for Opus models [14]. The same discussion argued Anthropic and OpenAI are primarily constrained by compute and power, while Harry Stebbings amplified the adjacent investor view that more AI applications mainly benefit infrastructure owners such as Amazon, Microsoft, and potentially Google [14, 15]. Stebbings separately highlighted the capital intensity of the category, saying roughly \$4-\$5 of capex is needed for each \$1 of run-rate revenue [16]. One panelist added that roughly half of the 9GW of new power expected this year is already facing protests, which could tighten supply further [14].
- **Agent-era control points may sit below the application layer.** Harry Stebbings summarized one investor view that the real competitive question is what vendors and LLMs AI agents choose for workflows, since agents will increasingly make those selections themselves [16]. In the same discussion, Google was framed as a likely beneficiary because it wins whether demand goes to Gemini or Anthropic and can route compute

across internal needs and external customers [16].

- **Generative video is starting to show enterprise-scale revenue.** Runway said it has added more than $40M in net new ARR so far this quarter, despite being less than halfway through it, making this the biggest growth period in company history [17]. The company also said Amazon and Robinhood are using Runway daily on its video and world models, and co-founder Cristóbal Valenzuela described the moment as an inflection point [17, 18].
- **Voice AI looks increasingly like a business market first.** Newcomer reported that Wispr Flow is one of the buzziest user-facing voice products, with founder Tanay Kothari saying the product learns users' comma patterns and Ramp ranking it as the third-fastest-growing software vendor [19]. The same piece pointed to customer support, dictation, and companion agents as the main use cases drawing attention, while noting that consumer voice still appears slower to mature than business applications [19]. Technically, it said the market is moving from cascaded speech stacks toward voice-to-voice models, with OpenAI preparing models that reason through interruptions and preserve conversational context [19].
- **Tech spending still dominates business investment.** a16z said tech now represents 55% of all business investment in the US [20].

5) Worth Your Time

- **Gary Tan on Thin Harness, Fat Skills.** Covers Tan's current coding workflow across Claude Code, Codex, agent reviews, testing, and the argument that personal AI should remain user-controlled rather than toolcontrolled. Watch [21] 

Thin Harness, Fat Skills: The New Way To Build Software (0:00)

- **All-In on Colossus, Anthropic, and the FDA-for-AI debate.** Covers xAI's Colossus lease to Anthropic, the immediate impact on Claude usage limits, and the current argument against an approval-style model review regime in Washington. Watch [14]

Elon's Anthropic Deal, The Next AI Monopoly?, "FDA for AI" Panic, Trading the AI Boom (4:39)

- **Aurora thread from Tilde Research.** Covers the claimed 100x data-efficiency result and the neuron-death failure mode Aurora is designed to prevent. Thread [8]
- **Newcomer on voice startup leaders.** Covers Wispr Flow, Tolan, Wabi, and why voice-to-voice models are becoming the next platform shift. Read [19]
- **Conductor Founder Firesides.** Covers how Conductor's founders cycled through roughly a dozen ideas before landing on the product that just raised a $22M Series A. Watch [1, 22]

Sources

1. X post by @ycombinator
2. Weekly Dose of Optimism #192
3. X post by @ycombinator
4. r/SideProject post by u/desexmachina
5. r/SaaS post by u/desexmachina
6. r/SideProject post by u/Comfortable_Gas_3046
7. r/EntrepreneurRideAlong post by u/contralai
8. X post by @tilderesearch
9. X post by @bindureddy
10. X post by @wtgowers
11. X post by @wtgowers
12. X post by @pmarca
13. X post by @pmarca
14. Elon's Anthropic Deal, The Next AI Monopoly?, "FDA for AI" Panic, Trading the AI Boom
15. X post by @HarryStebbings
16. X post by @HarryStebbings
17. X post by @agermanidis
18. X post by @c_valenzuelab
19. Customer Support & Dictation Loom Large As Voice Startup Leaders Prepare for a World of Talking Machines
20. X post by @a16z
21. Thin Harness, Fat Skills: The New Way To Build Software
22. X post by @ycombinator