



PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

France takes the gold at the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett 2017

Gruyères, Switzerland, 16 September 2017 - **The winners of the 61st Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett 2017 said they were “overjoyed” to be awarded their FAI gold medals at a ceremony in Fribourg, Switzerland on Saturday 16 September 2017.**

French pilots Vincent Leys and Christophe Houver won the famous gas-balloon race over the weekend of 8-10 September 2017, and had made the long journey back to Fribourg to accept their medals.

Leys said: “Winning the Gordon Bennett Cup 2017 is a dream come true.”

The Gordon Bennett Cup is the oldest and most prestigious gas-balloon race in the world. Taking place each year it attracts the best gas-balloon pilots in the world, who take off and fly as far as they can. Flying through the night and across international borders, whoever goes the furthest wins.

This year 21 gas balloons took off on Friday evening, 8 September 2017.

Leys and Houver travelled 1,834.72km to take the win. They landed at 8.35am CEST on Sunday 10 September.

They were the only team that managed to navigate through a thin corridor of airspace between Kaliningrad and Belarus, which allowed them to fly northeast across Lithuania and Latvia. They landed in Estonia before the Russian border.

Some 500km behind them, many pilots had to land in Poland because of airspace around the city of Kaliningrad and the country of Belarus.

Switzerland’s Kurt Frieden and Pascal Wutprächtiger (SUI-1) landed just short of the border with Lithuania to come second, winning silver. They had flown a tactical but slower race, landing at 7pm CEST on Sunday after covering 1,366km.

Close behind them in third place, Spain’s Anulfo Gonzales Redondo and Angel Aguirre Rial also landed close to the Lithuanian border. They covered 1,334km.

Leys was particularly delighted with this year’s race because of, “the extraordinary location, the warm welcome and the optimal conditions to prepare our balloon.”

When asked about his team's strategy, he said: “We worked hard with our ground crew in France to prepare for the race. We had two options at the time of take-off: fly north, which meant running the risk of being stopped by a storm and landing at night; or try to pass through the narrow [airspace] gate between Kaliningrad and Belarus. We chose the latter option.”

He added: “We decided to fly up to 6,000 metres just after Zurich. We knew that this strategy would reduce our autonomy, however we wanted to have enough speed to be at the Kaliningrad-Belarus corridor early enough before the storm. In the end the weather conditions were stable and we were able to fly as planned.”

Although the race ended on 10 September, the prize-giving ceremony took place on Saturday 16 September. This was to give each team the time to retrieve their balloons and pilots, and to make the long journey back to Fribourg by road.

The win is the second for Leys and Houver flying together as a team – they also won in 2013, when they flew 1,402.42km after launching from France. Vincent Leys has now been one-half of a winning team a total of nine times.

Houver said: “This victory is especially satisfying considering all the time we spent preparing for the race, and all the mental and physical energy we put into it.

“This year we completely reviewed all aspects of our preparation, including our equipment, our ground team and our training methods. In particular we are now working in a more collaborative way. Overall things turned out very positively.”

The win for the French team means that the 2019 Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett will now take place in France. Traditionally, whichever country wins the race hosts it two years later.

Established in 1906, the Gordon Bennett Cup was re-started for the modern era in 1983. Since then it has attracted most of the world’s top balloon pilots, providing a challenge unrivalled anywhere else in the ballooning world.

Information for editors

Event: 61st Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett

Take-off: 8 September 2017

Prize-giving ceremony: 16 September 2017

Location: Gruyères, Switzerland

21 balloons from 13 nations:

Australia

Austria

Belgium

Czech Republic

France (three teams)

Great Britain

Germany (three teams)

Japan

Lithuania

Poland (two teams)

Spain

Switzerland (three teams)

USA (two teams)

Full results: <http://bit.ly/2faTPuE>

Tracking: <http://yb.tl/gb2017fr>

Rights-free high resolution photography: www.flickr.com/photos/airsports_fai/albums

About the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett, the FAI World Long Distance Gas Balloon Championship

The Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett, the FAI World Long Distance Gas Balloon Championship, is the oldest and most prestigious event in aviation and the ultimate challenge for the pilots. It is a story full of adventure, skill, courage, survival and luck. The goal is simple: to fly the furthest non-stop distance from the launch site.

The international competition was initiated by adventurer and newspaper tycoon James Gordon Bennett Jr. in 1906, when 16 balloons launched from the Tuileries Gardens in Paris, France. Little did the crowd of 200,000 spectators know that this race was to continue throughout the 20th century. The winning

team brings the competition to their country. The 61st Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett was hosted in Switzerland this year thanks to the victory of Team SUI 01 in 2015. The 62th edition will also be held again in Switzerland (Bern) in 2018, as Team SUI1 also won in 2016.

About FAI

FAI, the World Air Sports Federation (www.fai.org), is the world governing body for air sports and for certifying world aviation and space records. The FAI was founded in 1905 and is a non-governmental and non-profit-making organisation recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

FAI activities include Aerobatics, Aeromodelling, Airships, Amateur-Built and Experimental Aircraft, Balloons, Drones, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic and Astronautic sporting activities.

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