



PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

To the victors the spoils! Swiss pilots reign at Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett 2016

*Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett 2016 winners Kurt Frieden and Pascal Witpraechtiger (Team SUI 1) receive their gold medals

*Swiss champions are first ever gas balloon pilots to land in Greece

*Pilots and organisers celebrate at a glamorous gala dinner in Gladbeck, northwest Germany

Gladbeck, Germany, 24 September 2016 – **Switzerland's Kurt Frieden and Pascal Witpraechtiger (Team SUI 1) were crowned champions of the 60th Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett – the world's most prestigious gas balloon race – at an elegant ceremony in Gladbeck, northwest Germany tonight (Saturday September 24).**

Team SUI 2 pilots Nicolas Tièche and Laurent Sciboz were presented with the silver medals, while Spain's Anulfo Gonzalez and Angel Aguirre of Team ESP 1 stepped up to claim bronze.

There was rapturous applause as the winning Swiss pilots accepted their medals for a triumphant flight that ended just before 10.30am CEST on Wednesday September 21 in Stavros in central Greece.

The gas-balloonists, who have won two previous Gordon Bennett championships, had covered 1,803.48km in 58.12 hours, on what pilot Frieden described as a "perfect" flight.

"The weather conditions meant it was not very clear in the early stages how far we would be able to go, but as the weather got better and better on Tuesday, we realised we could make it to Greece," said Frieden. "It was a perfect flight."

His co-pilot Witpraechtiger believes that flexibility is the key to their success.

"One of the great things about ballooning is that you never know where you are going to land," he said. "You have to be able to adapt and change your strategy depending on the situation."

The Swiss pilots also made history by landing in Stavros, as they became the first ever gas balloon pilots to land in Greece.

"It's a very nice feeling to be the first to do something like that," Frieden added. "We were given a lovely, warm welcome."

Laurent Sciboz, of Team SUI 2, was also delighted with his silver medal-winning performance.

"For me, Gordon Bennett races are all about freedom, so it's like a dream to do so well in such a marvellous competition," Sciboz said.

Team ESP 1's Anulfo Gonzalez said it was a privilege to be so highly placed in such an experienced field.

"We were leading the race at one point, but that doesn't mean anything until everyone has landed," he said.

"We had to make the decision not to cross the sea to Greece for safety reasons, but it was one of the nicest flights we have ever done and we are very happy to be on the podium."

FAI Executive Director Frits Brink presented the race winners with their medals. "It has been a truly fascinating event," he said. "I have been following the race avidly via the live tracking, and I am very pleased to be here in Gladbeck to meet the pilots and take part in the prize giving ceremony."

FAI Secretary General Susanne Schoedel congratulated all the competitors on a fantastic race.

"This is probably the toughest FAI championship to take part in," she said.

"Pilots need endurance, as well as tactical skill and a good understanding of meteorological conditions. Well done to all the participants!"

The 60th Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett

With a field of 24 gas balloons, the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett 2016 was the biggest ever.

A total of 48 pilots – one pilot and one co-pilot in each gas balloon – set off from Gladbeck, northwest Germany around midnight on Sunday September 18.

Competitors landed in Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Italy, with the race winners making it all the way to Greece.

The 61st Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett will be held in Fribourg in Switzerland in September 2017.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Results:

www.fai.org/downloads/cia/gordon_bennett_2016_results

To find out more about the race:

Q&A: The Coupe Aeronautique Gordon Bennett in 60 seconds:

gordonbennett.aero/news/q-a-coupe-aeronautique-gordon-bennett

Official website

www.gordonbennett.aero

News stories from the race

www.gordonbennett.aero/news

Rights-free high resolution photography (for editorial use)

www.flickr.com/photos/airsports_fai/albums

Pilot portraits

www.flickr.com/photos/airsports_fai/albums/72157673779711736

Video clips

www.youtube.com/user/airsportschannel

Nations list:

Australia

Austria

Belgium (three teams)

Spain

France (three teams)

Great Britain (two teams)

Germany (three teams)

Lithuania

Netherlands

Poland (two teams)

Switzerland (three teams)

USA (three teams)

About FAI

The [Fédération Aéronautique Internationale \(FAI\)](#), also known as the World Air Sports Federation, 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, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic and Astronautic sporting activities.

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