



PRESS RELEASE
For 18 May 2023

70 years since the legendary pilot Jacqueline Cochran became first woman to break sound barrier: 18 May 1953

Lausanne, Switzerland, 16 May 2023 – FAI marks the 70-year anniversary of female pilot **Jacqueline Cochran** who became the first woman to break the sound barrier on 18 May 1953.

Jacqueline Cochran was already a highly decorated pilot with numerous speed records to her name when she slid into the cockpit on that day in 1953 to try and beat Fred Ascani's speed record of 1023,04 km/h, set in 1951.

She had borrowed a special Canadian-built F-86 Sabre Mk from Canadair for the attempt. Cochran recorded a speed of 1050,18 km/h, beating him by 27 km/h.

Whilst in the air she noted that shock waves rolled off the canopy of the aircraft and felt the sonic boom as she hit Mach 1. However, the dramatic sound effect was not heard on the ground, and so Cochran made a second attempt straight afterwards, which was confirmed by the control tower – she had gone through the sonic barrier.

Jacqueline Cochran was an ambitious woman who had established herself as a talented pilot by gaining her licence in just three weeks, despite taking the written test orally, as she had poor literacy skills due to her humble background.

In World War Two, she was a founder and director of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), putting female pilots in the spotlight to support the war effort.

She continued her record attempts and air racing after the war, embracing the new era of much faster jet engines, and serving in the US Air Force Reserve before retiring as a Colonel in 1970.

During her lifetime, Cochran set more FAI records than any pilot, male or female. In 1958 she was elected as the first, and to date, only, female FAI President. She also received three FAI awards including the prestigious Gold Air Medal. For her work with the WASPs during WWII, she received the Distinguished Service Medal.

Prior to World War Two, aerodynamicists and aviation experts believed it was dangerous for humans to travel faster than the speed of sound and 'break through' the sonic barrier. The rise in aerodynamic drag and insufficient thrust caused propeller aircraft to become unstable when reaching 'Mach 1', the speed of sound.

Chuck Yeager proved in 1947 that with the right aircraft, it was possible to experience a sonic boom and surpass Mach 1. Six years later, Yeager supported his friend, the pilot Jacqueline Cochran, to become the first woman to break the sonic barrier, at the highly classified US Edwards Air Base, on 18 May 1953.

Notes for editors

Cochran's FAI records: bit.ly/cochran-records

Cochran's FAI awards: bit.ly/CochranFAIAwards

FAI Presidents: www.fai.org/presidents

FAI logo: bit.ly/FAI_logo

FAI media corner: www.fai.org/media

About FAI

FAI, 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, Drones, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic activities and Space records.

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