



PRESS RELEASE
For 14 May 2025

Didier Delsalle marks 20 years since FAI Helicopter World Record on Everest

Lausanne, Switzerland, 16 April 2025 – **Twenty years ago on 14 May 2005, French pilot Didier Delsalle flew a Eurocopter AS 350 B3 Ecureuil helicopter to the top of Everest and gained an FAI World Record for Highest take-off in a helicopter at 8848m.**

Delsalle took part in an interview with FAI to mark the 20th anniversary of the achievement.

A remarkable world first

Rising directly upwards in the **lightweight aircraft**, Delsalle gained the same altitude as the iconic peak according to the strict instructions provided by the cartographer.

He approached gently at a 45-degree angle: the mountain was accepting him, albeit against **93km/h winds and -33°C temperatures.**

The FAI record guidelines stated that the aircraft must land for two minutes in order to make the official world record.

Delsalle lodged the port skid into the snow for three minutes and 50 seconds, then made the return journey back to the landing strip in Lukla to share the good news with his team. He had set a new FAI world record: **Highest take-off in a helicopter (8848m)**, which still stands today.

Preparations for the record

Originally inspired by Jean Boulet's 1972 helicopter altitude record of 12,442m in the Aérospatiale SA 315 Lama, the project's aim was to prove that a commercially available aircraft could take on the **extreme conditions** posed by the Himalayas.

Test flights took place in Istres, France, during which three FAI world records were also made, for Time to climb to a height of 3,000, 6,000 and 9,000m. These records are yet to be surpassed.

Delsalle himself trained in the French Alps and holds a reverence for flying in the mountains. In the interview with FAI to mark the 20th anniversary, he commented: *"Flying helicopters in the mountains is pure delight, more a sentimental dance than a strong powerful technical move. Flying in high mountains should be considered as a privilege to be used with great respect to the environment."*

Pushing the boundaries

Looking back at the Everest project, Delsalle recognises that it was **not a solo achievement, but the work of a whole team** to prepare the expedition, the aircraft, and complete the administration. He points out, *"I am proud not specifically of myself, but of all the engineers and technicians that conceived and built this wonderful machine! They fully deserved this recognition because they are rarely in the spotlight. Pilots use their skills to drive the machine, but without the rest of the team, nothing would have had happened."*

Despite proving that a helicopter could land and take off in the most extreme conditions on Earth, Delsalle believes that air rescue missions will remain limited to 7000m altitude for some time to come: *"The summits above 8000m are not a place for air tourism. Even if such a rescue machine exists in the*

future, it will remain a very difficult and tricky achievement with no guarantee of success at all, because the forces of Nature you encounter at that altitude.”

His **long-lasting respect for the mountains** is evident: *“The mountain will show you her mighty forces and you have to accept and cope with them (...) You are only a visitor, not the owner.”*

Editor’s note

Drawing up rules and controlling and ratifying aeronautical and astronautical World and Continental records represent an important part of FAI’s activities. Since the first flights were recorded in 1906, FAI has registered more than 20,000 records to date.

Charles Lindbergh’s historic flight across the Atlantic Ocean, and Yuri Gagarin’s first human flight into space are amongst the great aeronautical and astronautical achievements recorded by FAI. All air sport disciplines are represented in FAI World and Continental Record archives, from human-powered flight at one extreme, to space flight at the other.

- [Delsalle’s Highest take-off record file](#)
- [All Delsalle’s FAI records](#)
- [Full 2025 FAI interview with Delsalle](#)
- [Pictures](#)
- [List of all FAI records](#)
- [How to set an FAI record](#)

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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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