



**PRESS RELEASE**  
For immediate release

## **The 61<sup>st</sup> Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett Gas Ballon Race launched tonight**

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Gruyères, Switzerland, 8 September 2017 – **This evening 21 gas balloons from 13 countries launched from Gruyères airfield (Switzerland) that sits below the famous chateau for the 61<sup>st</sup> Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett Race. Over the next few days the teams will aim to fly as far as possible, measured in a straight line from the launch field to the landing site. Meteorological experts are forecasting that the balloons will follow a north-eastern route.**

The balloons took off one after each other with their national anthems being played. For the first time in many years the launch took place in daylight so that 15'000 spectators and balloonists alike were able to enjoy the beautiful Swiss backdrop to the launch.

According to the weather forecast the winds at altitude are towards the northeast, taking the balloons over Germany and then Poland. The competition will involve many difficulties with air traffic control. Especially for those teams who will try to fly through the narrow corridor between Belarus and Kaliningrad towards Lithuania.

### **A very tight competition – it will be neck and neck**

It is going to be very difficult to predict the winner. There are some very experienced pilots participating like the twice world champions team SUI-1 Kurt Frieden and Pascal Witprächtiger who are sure to be challenged by the local team SUI-2 of Nicolas Tièche and Laurent Sciboz vice world champions in 2016.

Other equally experienced teams will compete, the German team of Matthias Zenge and Benni Eimers. For the first time Benni will replace his father Willy who is nicknamed the “recordman” after competing in the race 26 times with four victories to his name.

The French teams with also likely to be serious contenders with FRA-1 Vincent Leys, already an eight-times winner.

We can't forget the Spanish team who finished third in 2016 one place ahead of team USA-1, who will be looking to improve this year.

### **Information for editors**

Event: 61<sup>st</sup> 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)

Live tracking: [gordonbennett.aero/livetracking](http://gordonbennett.aero/livetracking)

To find out more about the race:

Official website: [www.gordonbennett.aero](http://www.gordonbennett.aero)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/Course.Gordon.Bennett](https://www.facebook.com/Course.Gordon.Bennett)

Rights-free high resolution photography: [www.flickr.com/photos/airsports\\_fai/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/airsports_fai/albums)

FAI Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/airsports.fai](https://www.facebook.com/airsports.fai)

### **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 team which is the glorious winner will bring the competition to their country. This means that the 61<sup>st</sup> Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett is hosted in Switzerland this year thanks to the victory of Team SUI 01 in 2015. The 62<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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.

For more details, please contact the FAI:

Faustine Carrera  
Communication Manager  
0041 21 345 10 70  
[communication@fai.org](mailto:communication@fai.org)

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