



**PRESS RELEASE**  
For immediate release

## **Eric Decellières & Benoit Havret fly 2661.40 km to win the 66th Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett**

- The two French pilots flew for 85h49m aboard their gas balloon, travelling from Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA to land near Jacksonville, North Carolina, very near the Atlantic Coast.

Albuquerque, USA, 12 October 2023 – **The 66th Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett has concluded after a thrilling competition and breath-taking final duel that resulted in the triumph of Eric Decellières & Benoit Havret of France (Team FRA-2) over 2022's winners, father and son Wilhelm and Benjamin Eimers (GER-1). It is the French pair's first win in aviation's oldest competition.**

Launching from Albuquerque, New Mexico on Saturday 7 October alongside 16 other gas balloons, the finale boiled down to just two remaining teams – FRA-2 and GER-1 – who flew through a fourth night just a few kilometres apart.

As followers watched from across the globe via Gordon Bennett's livestream tracking, GER-1 finally landed on 11 October at 0959 MDT near Wilmington, having travelled 2587.22km.

FRA-2 persevered to the coastline and made a triumphant touchdown shortly afterwards at 1100 MDT, just outside Jacksonville, North Carolina, less than 50km from the Atlantic Ocean's shores.

Team FRA-1 (Benoît Pelard and Benoît Péterlé), secured a third place finish with 2359.95km after landing their balloon close to Savannah, Georgia, during the afternoon on 10 October.

### About Team FRA-2

The FRA-2 victory does not come as a surprise. In just a few short years, Decellières and Havret have established themselves as an important presence in the world of gas ballooning.

They finished second in the 2021 Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett, and previously attained impressive Gordon Bennett results with two top five finishes and an additional four top tens. Moreover, Eric Decellières came in second in the America's Challenge in 2019 alongside the great Gordon Bennett champion Vincent Lëys.

Their reputation precedes them as tough and gutsy competitors who always give their utmost effort. Outside of competition, Decellières is a businessman and entrepreneur, and Havret works in real estate.

The French team achieved the difficult feat of beating the German father and son reigning champions Wilhelm and Benjamin Eimers. Wilhelm Eimers has participated in thirty Gordon Bennett races, more than any other balloonist in history and won the competition five times.

All the teams will reconvene in Albuquerque on 14 October for the prize-giving ceremony.

### About the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett

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 and 21st centuries. The next edition of the race will take place in Münster, Germany, on 13 September 2024.

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

Take-off: 7 October 2023

Prize-giving ceremony: 14 October 2023 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

The official results remain subject to final confirmation by the FAI jury.

17 balloons from 9 nations:

- Austria (two teams)
- France (three teams – one didn't take-off)
- Germany (three teams)
- Great Britain
- Lithuania
- Poland (two teams)
- Spain
- Switzerland
- USA (three teams)

Find out more about the race:

To find out more about the race:

- Full results: [www.fai.org/news/gb2023-winners](http://www.fai.org/news/gb2023-winners)
- Livetracking: <https://live.gordonbennett.aero>
- Website: [www.gordonbennett.aero](http://www.gordonbennett.aero)
- Launch Images: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjAYce4>
- Teams images: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjAYjmi>
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Course.Gordon.Bennett](http://www.facebook.com/Course.Gordon.Bennett)
- Instagram: [www.instagram.com/CoupeAeroGordonBennett](http://www.instagram.com/CoupeAeroGordonBennett)
- X: [https://twitter.com/gb\\_fai](https://twitter.com/gb_fai)
- Youtube (Gordon Bennett TV): [www.youtube.com/c/gordonbennettv](http://www.youtube.com/c/gordonbennettv)
- Legends & history: <https://legends.gordonbennett.aero/>
  
- FAI logo: [bit.ly/FAI\\_logo](http://bit.ly/FAI_logo)
- FAI media corner: [www.fai.org/media](http://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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