



**PRESS RELEASE**  
For immediate release

## **French pair win world's most prestigious gas-balloon race**

- Vincent Leys and Christophe Houver flew more than 1,800km to win the Gordon Bennett Cup 2017

Gruyères, Switzerland, 11 September 2017 – **French balloon pilots Vincent Leys and Christophe Houver won the 61st Gordon Bennett Cup over the weekend of 8-10 September 2017. The Gordon Bennett Cup is the oldest and most prestigious gas-balloon race in the world.**

The pair travelled 1,836.06km having launched on Friday 8 September 2017 from Gruyères near Fribourg, Switzerland.

Twenty-one gas balloons took off on Friday evening to compete in the race, which sees gas-balloon pilots fly through the night over several days. Whoever goes furthest, wins.

Windy conditions this year saw the balloonists pushed northeast overnight. The direction of travel meant on Saturday many crews had to land in Poland in order to avoid violating Russian airspace around Kaliningrad.

By Sunday morning just five teams remained in the competition. Only Leys and Houver managed to squeeze through the narrow airspace corridor between Kaliningrad and Belarus, giving them the win.

Behind them, Switzerland's Kurt Frieden and Pascal Witprächtiger (SUI-1) and Spain's Anulfo Gonzales Redondo and Angel Aguirre Rial (ESP-1) hung on to land a few kilometres short of the Lithuanian border.

The win is the second for the pair flying together as a team – they also won in 2013, when they flew 1,402.42km after launching from France. Vincent Leys however has been in the winning team eight times.

The win means that the 2019 Gordon Bennett Cup will launch from a location in France.

Established in 1906, the Gordon Bennett Cup was re-started for the modern era in 1983. Since then it has attracted many of the world's top balloon pilots, providing a challenge unrivalled anywhere else in the ballooning world.

### **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)

Tracking: <http://yb.tl/gb2017fr>

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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