

Gordon Bennett Media Materials:

Balloon Fiesta Hosts Gas Balloon World Championships

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ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Seventeen gas balloon teams and many of the world’s greatest gas balloon pilots are coming to Albuquerque in October to compete in the world’s oldest and most prestigious air race, the 66th Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett. The Gordon Bennett, founded in 1906, is the world championship for long-distance gas ballooning. The object is simple: achieve the greatest distance from the race’s starting point.

The race is traditionally hosted by the home country of the team winning the race two years previous, so most Gordon Bennett competitions are held in Europe. Albuquerque and the Balloon Fiesta were tapped to host the race after this year’s original host city was unable to hold the competition. The Gordon Bennett has been held in the United States only 13 times before, and this will be the fifth time the Balloon Fiesta has hosted the race (the others were in 1993, 1999, 2005, and 2008).

The launch window for the Gordon Bennett will open at 6:00 PM MDT on the first Saturday of Balloon Fiesta, October 7. The race is scheduled to launch at the beginning of the window, but if weather conditions are poor in Albuquerque and/or downrange in the direction the balloons will travel, the launch can be delayed. The launch of the Gordon Bennett is a spectacular sight, with each team being honored by the playing of their national anthem as they head aloft.

The two member teams fly 1,000 cubic meter (approximately 35,000 cubic foot) hydrogen balloons. They cannot refuel in flight and carry with them everything they need to survive for several days aloft.

Last year’s champions, Wilhelm Eimers and Benjamin Eimers (father and son) from Germany, will be here to defend their title. Willi Eimers is a five-time Gordon Bennett champion and holds the race’s duration record (92+hours) and the record for the number of times a pilot has competed in the race. He has flown a total of 32,201 km (20,009 miles) in Gordon Bennett races. Many of the competing pilots are past participants in the Balloon Fiesta’s America’s Challenge gas balloon race. Three U.S. teams, all of whom are previous America’s Challenge champions, will fly in the race: Noah Forden and Brenda Cowlshaw, Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo, and Mark Sullivan and Cheri White.

The race can be followed live via <https://live.gordonbennett.aero> or the "YB Races" app (free). The event’s official livestreamed television channel, Gordon Bennett TV (<https://tv.gordonbennett.aero>), provides pre-race features, coverage of the launch, opening ceremony, and four daily video updates during the race. More details about the event can be found under <https://www.gordonbennett.aero>.