

Solar plane lands after completing 24-hour flight

July 8 2010, By ELIANE ENGELER , Associated Press Writers



The experimental aircraft "Solar Impulse" takes off with pilot Andre Borschberg onboard from Payerne's Swiss airbase on Wednesday, July 7, 2010 on the first attempt to fly around the clock fueled by nothing but the energy of the sun. A Swiss team planning to eventually circle the globe in a solar-powered plane has started a 24-hour test flight that aims to keep the aircraft operating through the night on stored energy collected from the sun.(AP Photo/Keystone/Fabrice Coffrini/Pool)

An experimental solar-powered plane landed safely Thursday after completing its [first 24-hour test flight](#), proving that the aircraft can collect enough energy from the sun during the day to stay aloft all night.

Pilot Andre Borschberg eased the [Solar Impulse](#) aircraft onto the runway at Payerne airfield about 31 miles (50 kilometers) southwest of the Swiss capital Bern at exactly 9 a.m. (0700 GMT; 3 a.m. EDT) Thursday.

Helpers rushed to stabilize the pioneering plane as it touched down, ensuring that its massive 207-foot (63-meter) wingspan didn't touch the ground and topple the craft.

The record feat completes seven years of planning and brings the Swiss-led project one step closer to its ultimate aim of circling the globe using only energy from the sun.

The team says it has now shown the single-seat plane can theoretically stay in the air indefinitely, recharging its depleted batteries using 12,000 [solar cells](#) and nothing but the rays of the sun during the day.

Borschberg took off from Payerne airfield into the clear blue sky shortly before 7 a.m. Wednesday, allowing the plane to soak up plenty of sunshine and fly in gentle loops over the Jura mountains west of the Swiss Alps.

The 57-year-old former Swiss fighter dodged low-level turbulence and thermal winds, endured freezing conditions during the night and ended the [test flight](#) with a picture-perfect landing to cheers and whoops from hundreds of supporters on the ground.

After completing final tests on the plane, he embraced the project's co-founder Bertrand Piccard before gingerly unstrapping himself from the bathtub size cockpit he had spent more than 26 hours sitting in.

"When you took off it was another era," said Piccard, himself a record-breaking balloonist. "You land in a new era where people understand that with renewable energy you can do impossible things."

Although the goal is to show that emissions-free air travel is possible, the team said it doesn't see [solar technology](#) replacing conventional jet propulsion any time soon. Instead, the project is designed to test and promote new energy-efficient technologies.

More information: <http://www.solarimpulse.com>

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