

Solar-powered plane lands in Morocco

June 6 2012, by PAUL SCHEMM



Crew members of Solar Impulse project check the HB-SIA experimental aircraft before taking off at Barajas airport in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, June 5, 2012. The solar-powered airplane arrived in Madrid on May 25, 2012 from Payerne, Switzerland, and now goes on to Rabat, Morocco on its first transcontinental trip. The mission is described as the final dress rehearsal for a round-the-world flight with a new and improved aircraft in 2014.(AP Photo/Alberto Di Lolli)

(AP) — An experimental solar-powered plane landed in Morocco's capital late Tuesday after a 20-hour trip from Madrid in the first transcontinental journey by a craft of its type.

With the wing span of a Boeing 777, the plane appeared out of the pitch darkness over the runway, suddenly turning on its lights and gliding to a landing in Rabat, its four propellers already still.

"It was perhaps the most beautiful flight of my life, I have dreamed since I was a child of flying without using fuel," said pilot Bertrand Piccard, who has already circumnavigated the world by balloon.



The Solar Impulse HB-SIA experimental aircraft is pulled out a hanger at Barajas airport in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, June 5, 2012. The solar-powered airplane arrived in Madrid on May 25, 2012 from Payerne, Switzerland, and now goes on to Rabat, Morocco on its first transcontinental trip. The mission is described as the final dress rehearsal for a round-the-world flight with a new and improved aircraft in 2014. (AP Photo/Alberto Di Lolli)

The single-seat aircraft is fitted with 12,000 solar cells across its immense wings and but only weighs just as much as the average family

car, according to organizers.

The plane is the first of its kind to fly both during the night and day as the solar panels charge the batteries for night flying.

Piccard descended from the plane, apparently unfatigued by the long flight in the cramped cockpit. He said the Solar Impulse project had chosen Morocco because of its ambitious plans to increase its reliance on solar power.



Crew members of an experimental solar-powered airplane check the jumbo jet-size Solar Impulse plane before taking off at Barajas airport in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, June 5, 2012. The zero fuel airplane arrived in Madrid on May 25, 2012 from Payerne, Switzerland, and now goes on to Rabat, Morocco on its first transcontinental trip. The mission is described as the final dress rehearsal for a round-the-world flight with a new and improved aircraft in 2014. (AP Photo/Alberto Di Lolli)

"We came here out of admiration for Morocco's pioneering solar energy program," he said, flashing a brilliant smile and hugging members of his team on the tarmac. "All of the technology on this plane can be used in daily life."

Morocco is set to begin construction on a huge solar energy farm in the south as part of an ambitious project to lessen its dependence on fossil fuels and produce 2,000 megawatts of [solar energy](#) by 2020.



Pilot Bertrand Piccard is helped fit inside the experimental solar-powered airplane HB-SIA at Barajas airport in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, June 5, 2012. The zero fuel airplane arrived in Madrid on May 25, 2012 from Payerne,

Switzerland, and now goes on to Rabat, Morocco on its first transcontinental trip. The mission is described as the final dress rehearsal for a round-the-world flight with a new and improved aircraft in 2014. (AP Photo/Alberto Di Lolli)

It also plans to eventually export the energy to Europe.

[Solar Impulse](#) arrived in Madrid from Switzerland in late May on the first leg of the journey, but the delicate craft was delayed for several days by bad weather before it could continue its journey to [Morocco](#). The two-leg Europe to Africa trip covered 2,500 kilometers (1,554 miles).



An experimental solar-powered airplane's pilot Bertrand Piccard kisses his wife Michele Piccard before his departure at Barajas airport in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, June 5, 2012. The zero fuel airplane arrived in Madrid on May 25, 2012 from Payerne, Switzerland, and now goes on to Rabat, Morocco on its first

transcontinental trip. The mission is described as the final dress rehearsal for a round-the-world flight with a new and improved aircraft in 2014. (AP Photo/Alberto Di Lolli)

The light craft can only fly in perfect weather. The plane has managed to climb to 28,000 feet (8,535 meters) and reached top speeds of over 75 mph (120 kph), though its usual cruising speed is just over half that.



The Solar Impulse HB-SIA experimental aircraft flies after taking off from Barajas airport in Madrid, Spain, in the early hours of Tuesday, June 5, 2012. The zero fuel airplane arrived in Madrid on May 25, 2012 from Payerne, Switzerland, and now goes on to Rabat, Morocco on its first transcontinental trip. The mission is described as the final dress rehearsal for a round-the-world flight with a new and improved aircraft in 2014. (AP Photo/Alberto Di Lolli)

The mission is being described as a final dress rehearsal for a round-the-world flight with a new and improved [plane](#) in 2014 involving five stops.

The project began in 2003 and is estimated to cost about \$100 million over 10 years.

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