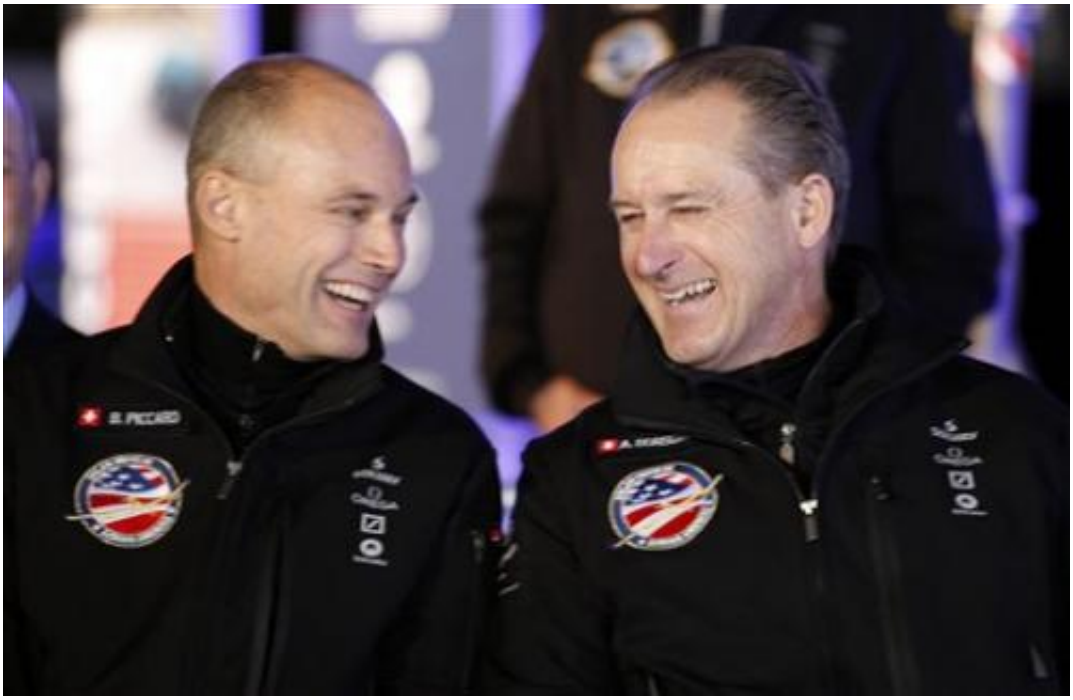
Solar-powered plane plans flight across US (Update 2)

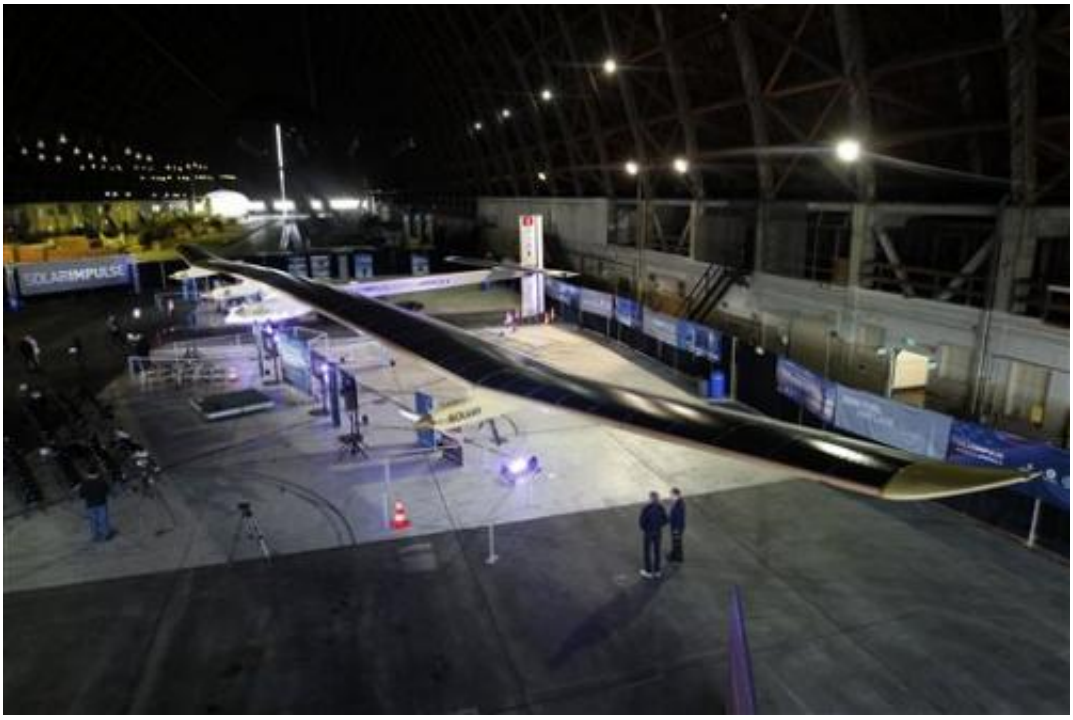
March 28 2013, by Terence Chea



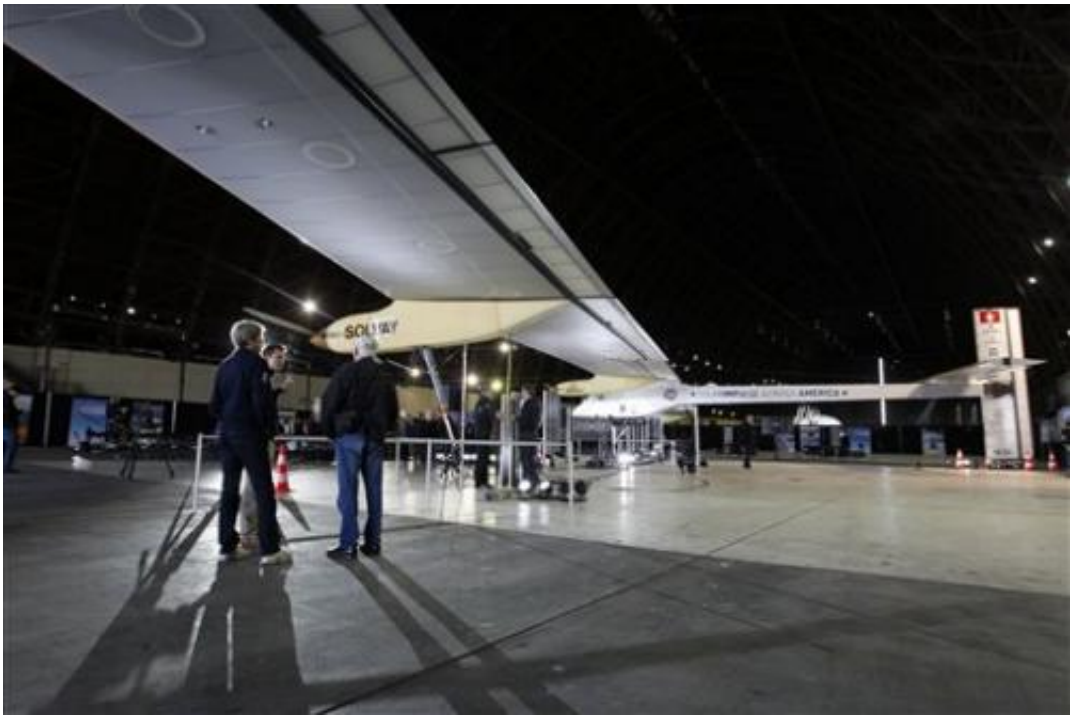
Bertrand Piccard, left, Solar Impulse Initiator, Chairman and Pilot and André Borschberg, right, Solar Impulse Co-Founder, CEO and Pilot, smile during a press conference with the Solar Impulse solar-powered plane at Moffett Airfield, NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., on Thursday, March 28, 2013. A solar-powered plane that has wowed aviation fans in Europe is set to travel across the United States with stops in Phoenix, Dallas, Washington, D.C., and New York, organizers of the trip announced Thursday. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar)

A solar-powered plane that has wowed aviation fans in Europe is set to travel across the United States with stops in Phoenix, Dallas, Washington, D.C., and New York, the plane's Swiss creators said.

Solar Impulse, considered the world's most advanced solar-powered plane, is expected to be ready to leave from NASA Ames Research Center in California on May 1, although the actual departure will depend on the weather.



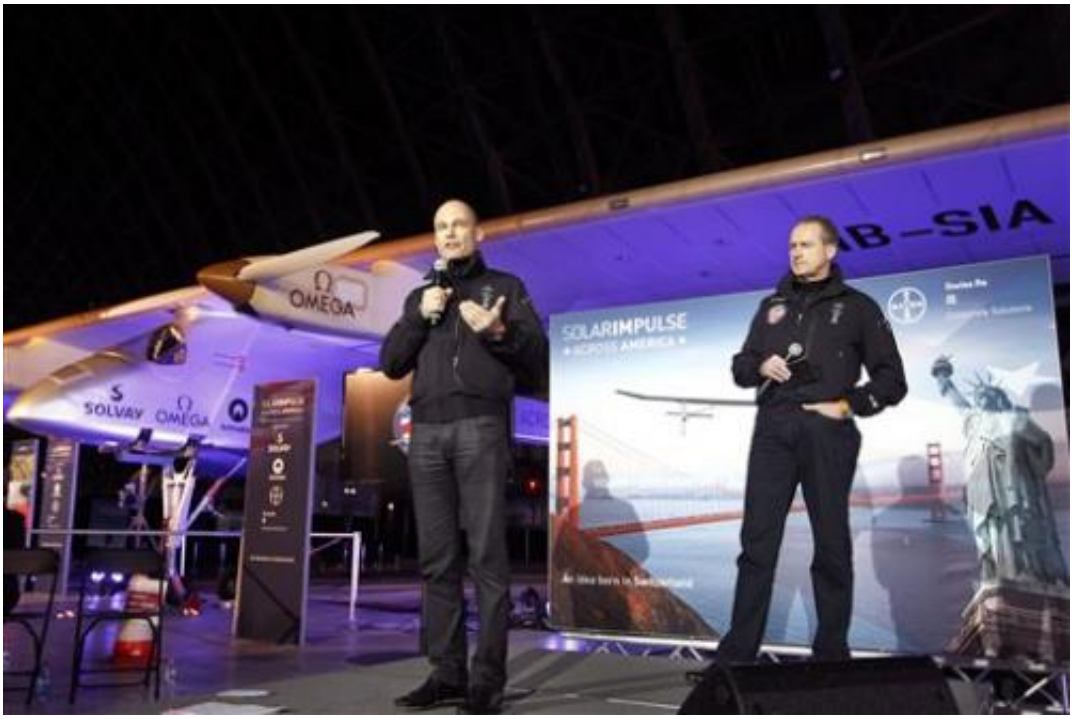
The Solar Impulse solar-powered plane is displayed during a new conference at Moffett Airfield, NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., on Thursday, March 28, 2013. A solar-powered plane that has wowed aviation fans in Europe is set to travel across the United States with stops in Phoenix, Dallas, Washington, D.C., and New York, organizers of the trip announced Thursday. The Solar Impulse is powered by about 12,000 photovoltaic cells that allow it to fly without jet fuel. It has the wing span of a commercial airplane but the weight of the average family car. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar)



Ground crew members stand next to the Solar Impulse solar-powered plane that was on display during a press conference at Moffett Airfield, NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., on Thursday, March 28, 2013. A solar-powered plane that has wowed aviation fans in Europe is set to travel across the United States with stops in Phoenix, Dallas, Washington, D.C., and New York, organizers of the trip announced Thursday. The Solar Impulse is powered by about 12,000 photovoltaic cells that allow it to fly without jet fuel. It has the wing span of a commercial airplane but the weight of the average family car. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar)

Solar Impulse plans to reach New York's Kennedy Airport in early July—without using a drop of fuel, its creators said.

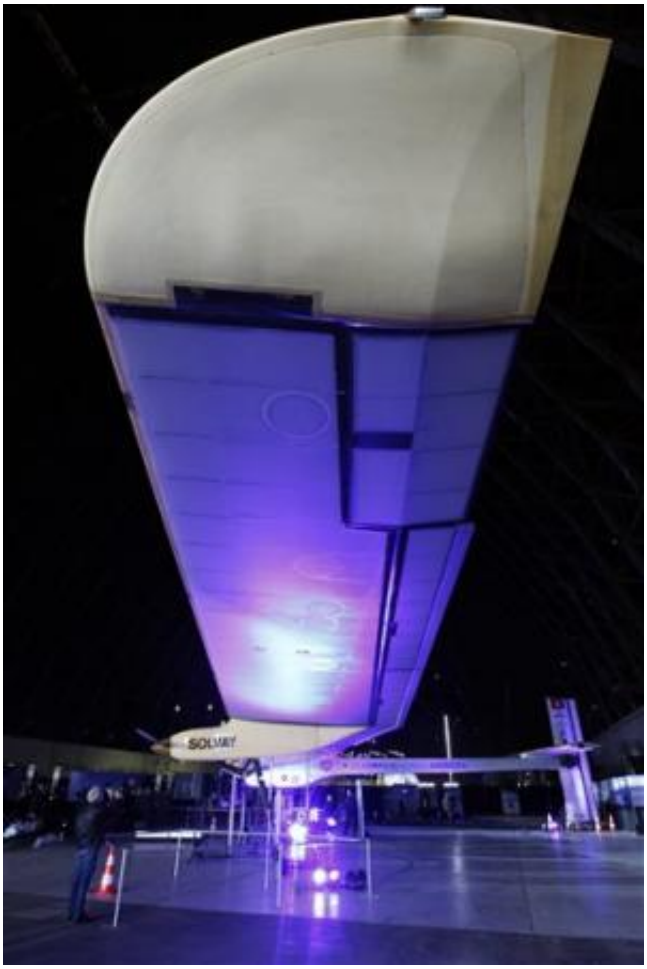
"We want to inspire the young generation to become pioneers, to help them find and develop their passion," said André Borschberg, Solar Impulse's co-founder, pilot and CEO. .



Bertrand Piccard, left, Solar Impulse Initiator, Chairman and Pilot and André Borschberg, right, Solar Impulse Co-Founder, CEO and Pilot, speak during a press conference with the Solar Impulse solar-powered plane at Moffett Airfield, NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., on Wednesday, March 28, 2013. A solar-powered plane that has wowed aviation fans in Europe is set to travel across the United States with stops in Phoenix, Dallas, Washington, D.C., and New York, organizers of the trip announced Thursday. The Solar Impulse is powered by about 12,000 photovoltaic cells that allow it to fly without jet fuel. It has the wing span of a commercial airplane but the weight of the average family car. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar)

The Solar Impulse is powered by about 12,000 photovoltaic cells that cover massive wings and charge its batteries, allowing it to fly day and night without jet fuel. It has the wing span of a commercial airplane but the weight of the average family car, making it vulnerable to bad weather.

Its creators say the Solar Impulse is designed to showcase the potential of solar power and will never replace fuel-powered commercial flights. The delicate, single-seat plane cruises around 40 miles per hour (64 kph) and can't fly through clouds.



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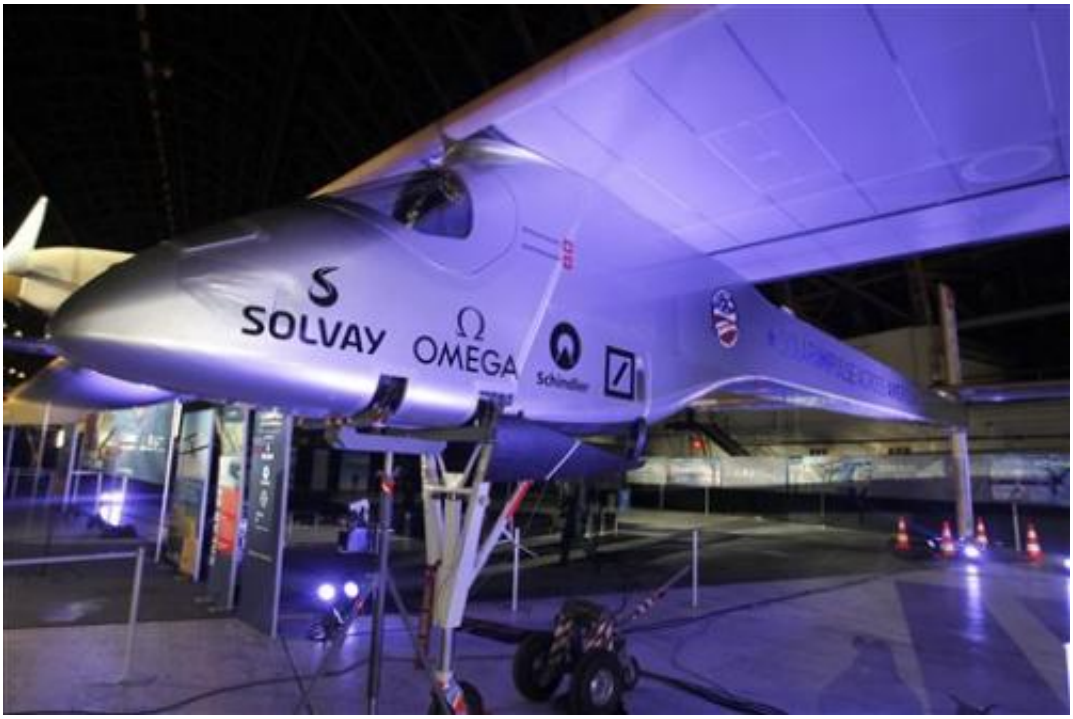
"The more you fly the more energy you have stored in the batteries, so it's absolutely fabulous to imagine all the possibilities the people can have with these technologies in their daily lives," said Bertrand Piccard, Solar Impulse co-founder and chairman.

In 2010, the solar plane flew non-stop for 26 hours to demonstrate that the aircraft could soak up enough sunlight to keep it airborne through the night. A year later, it went on its first international flight to Belgium and France.



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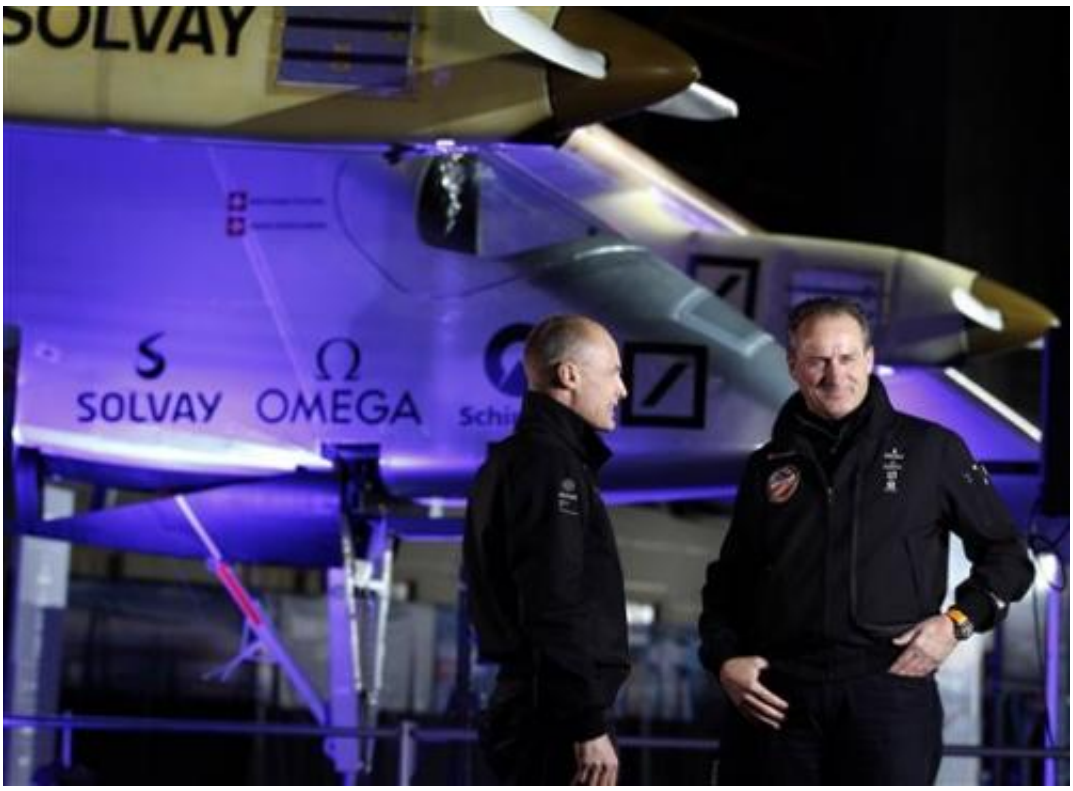
Last year, the Solar Impulse made its first transcontinental voyage, traveling 1,550 miles (2,495 kilometers) from Madrid to the Moroccan capital, Rabat, in 20 hours.

Piccard and Borschberg are planning an around-the-world flight in an improved version of the plane in 2015.



Bertrand Piccard, left, Solar Impulse Initiator, Chairman and Pilot and André Borschberg, right, Solar Impulse Co-Founder, CEO and Pilot, wait for a press conference next to the Solar Impulse solar-powered plane at Moffett Airfield, NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., on Wednesday, March 28, 2013. A solar-powered plane that has wowed aviation fans in Europe is set to

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Piccard comes from a line of adventurers. His late father, Jacques, was an oceanographer and engineer who plunged deeper into the ocean than any other person. His grandfather Auguste, also an engineer, was the first man to take a balloon into the stratosphere.

Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones made history in 1999 when they became the first people to circle the globe in a hot air balloon, flying 25,000 miles (40,230 kilometers) nonstop for 20 days.