

Solar Impulse 2 pilot becomes aviation legend

July 4 2015, by Marie-Noëlle Blessig



Solar Impulse 2 pilot Bertrand Piccard (L) and pilot Andre Borschberg celebrate after Borschberg landed at Kalaeloa Airport, Hawaii on July 3, 2015

At 62 years of age, Swiss Solar Impulse 2 pilot Andre Borschberg has made aviation history with a record breaking solo flight across the Pacific that he has called "an interior journey".

After travelling more than 8,000 kilometres (4,900 miles) on the latest leg of the round-the-world trip, he arrived in Hawaii Friday.

His Pacific [flight](#) from Japan totalled 118 hours, almost five full days, smashing the previous record for the longest nonstop solo flight of 76 hours and 45 minutes set by US adventurer Steve Fossett in 2006.

The Swiss pilot's arduous journey was by no means in the lap of luxury. His plane runs on solar power alone, so its weight had to be kept to a minimum.

Borschberg flew alone in a cockpit where he could only sit or lie down, and slept for intervals of 20 minutes with a vibrating armband waking him up in case of an anomaly.

Before taking off, the pilot said that this journey would be an "extraordinary occasion to discover myself".

When he landed he tweeted "it's a dream coming true".

Borschberg partnered with Swiss psychiatrist and balloonist Bertrand Piccard to launch the unprecedented flight around the world on a plane powered exclusively by [solar energy](#).

Solar Impulse 2 set off from Abu Dhabi earlier this year in a multi-leg attempt to fly around the world without using any fuel.

The plane will now be flown across the United States and eventually, if all goes according to plan, land back in Abu Dhabi next March.

It has 17,000 solar cells and onboard [rechargeable lithium batteries](#), allowing it to fly through the night.



The Solar Impulse 2, piloted by Andre Borschberg, lands at Kalaeloa Airport, Hawaii on July 3, 2015

Its wingspan is longer than that of a jumbo jet but it weighs only 2.3 tonnes—about the same as a car.

A passion for aviation

The pilot, born in Zurich, is no stranger to adventure. Fifteen years ago, he narrowly escaped an avalanche, and then in 2013 he was involved in a helicopter crash, which left him with minor injuries.

He earned his degree in mechanics and thermodynamics from the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne in Switzerland, following up with master's degrees from MIT in the US and HEC Lausanne.

Borschberg has previously worked as an army pilot and consultant for Swiss firm McKinsey, before dabbling in entrepreneurship, co-founding

a company specialising in microprocessors.

He supervised the construction of the first Solar Impulse plane, and in 2010 for the first time in history flew 26 hours straight using only solar energy.

In 2013, over a period of two months, the dynamic aviation duo made the journey across the US.

Beginning on March 12, the two men began another journey with the Solar Impulse 2, with Borschberg piloting the plane and Piccard in charge on the ground.



This handout photo released on July 2, 2015 shows André Borschberg during his flight after three consecutive days

Finding strength with yoga

With an imposing stature and an athletic build, Borschberg attributes his mental strength to yoga and meditation, which he practises in his garden at his home on the shores of the idyllic Lake Geneva.

Borschberg didn't let the tiny cockpit of the Solar Impulse plane stop him from practising yoga. The pilot transformed his tiny bench into a yoga mat, using specialised postures custom-tailored for him by his personal yogi, Sanjeev Bhanot.



Yoga teacher Sanjeev Bhanot massages Andre Borschberg in the hangar at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad on March 11, 2015

"Yoga is a great support for this flight above the Pacific: it positively affects my mood and mindset" Borschberg tweeted Thursday with a photo of himself in a pose.

After starting off without a hitch, Borschberg experienced a medical problem with one of his eyes, which forced him to cut his flight over Asia short and return to Switzerland for several days.

Along with the medical problems, the flight experienced several delays due to weather, and was forced to stop in Japan before beginning the leg of the journey to Hawaii.

Borschberg landed shortly after dawn Friday at Kalaeloa Airport on the main Hawaiian island of Oahu, finishing his historic flight across the Pacific and flying straight into the record books.

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