

Drones overfly Champs-Elysees in 'magical' Paris festival

September 4 2016



France is the world leader in the market for civilian drones, selling 300,000 of the devices last year—three times as many as in 2014

The Champs-Elysees was the setting of a mini-air show on Sunday as amateur drone enthusiasts flew their high-tech toys over the famed Paris avenue in the city's first festival celebrating the gadgets.

Concentrating intently, punters guided their remote-controlled flying

machines through a brightly coloured obstacle course accompanied by commentary worthy of a Formula One race.

The afternoon festival included a race and demonstrations of the remote-controlled devices that are increasingly used as toys as well as for surveillance, aerial photography and—controversially—in the secretive US counter-terror campaign.

"It's really magical to be at a site like the Champs-Elysees, one of the most famous places in the world," said Dunkan Bossian, 19, one of eight pilots who competed in the race.

A German entrant, 27-year-old Julia Muller, added: "Events like this are important to show people that drones are not only dangerous things but you can have fun with them as well."

Part of the famous avenue—which is carless on the first Sunday of every month—was converted into a drone aviary for the occasion, a space confined in netting that is about eight metres (25 feet) high and 140 metres long.

"There has been a democratisation of the drone for leisure activities," city official Jean-Louis Missika told AFP, adding that drones were last year's most popular Christmas present.



Part of the Champs-Élysées avenue—which is carless on the first Sunday of every month—was converted into a drone aviary

However, "people must absolutely understand that it is not a toy, that regulations are very strict for good reasons," Missika said. "You can't fly a drone in the park like you can play badminton."

So the festival had a teaching component, with displays on the regulations, the drone's various uses, and workshops on piloting them that allowed amateurs to try their hand.

The festival was an occasion for the postal service to demonstrate its delivery drone, which weighs 3.7 kilos (eight pounds) and can carry three kilos of mail over 20 kilometres (12 miles).

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British teenage drone pilot Luke Bannister attends the 2016 Paris Drone Festival on September 4, 2016

The industry had a turnover of some 300 million euros (\$335 million) in 2015, of which 60 million euros was in the professional drone sector.

The city on Sunday announced the opening of two permanent sites—in the Bois de Boulogne park in the west of Paris and in the Parc de la Villette to the north—where amateurs can pilot their drones on Sundays starting September 18.

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