

# **Jury Report – 68th Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett**

## **Metz, France – September 3–13, 2025**

### **Jury recommendations & remarks**

#### **General notes – invitation process**

The invitation process went smoothly. Everything was done correctly, without errors, and in line with the rules. Communication was effective: emails were answered in a timely manner, and both the FAI website and the organizer's site were kept up to date.

#### **Organization & event flow**

The race was seen as a great success. Similar to Gladbeck 2011, there were 24 teams. Now with 11 different countries.

The Event Director decided to proceed with the planned Friday launch. Weather conditions were ideal, and not a single balloon had to land early due to adverse weather.

The overall organization was outstanding. Considerable effort went into public engagement, including drone shows, fiesta gas balloons, night glows, and even a hot air airship.

#### **Cooperation between organizers**

From the French sponsors to the local ground teams, cooperation was excellent across the board.

#### **Facilities**

The launch field was excellent—an old military airfield. Hangars were used for catering and sand distribution.

#### **Opening ceremony**

A true highlight thanks to the unique setting: the Centre Pompidou in downtown Metz. The venue was impressive, speeches were strong, and the reception with drinks and snacks completed the event nicely.

#### **Briefings & meteorology**

The general briefing by the Competition Director was well conducted, held in the museum auditorium. Each team had seating for the pilots and one crew member.

The meteorologist provided accurate and very useful forecasts.

#### **Command center & staff**

The Competition Director was supported by a deputy director, a safety officer and a team of ATC coordinators.

The tireless work of Cathy Picard as Chairwoman should also be acknowledged and is highly appreciated.

#### **Communication**

The use of several WhatsApp groups by the organizers worked very well and should definitely be encouraged for future events. This made communication smooth and efficient for everyone involved.

#### **Air traffic control (ATC)**

Cooperation with air traffic control was excellent. Each balloon had a pre-filed flight plan, provided in print before launch and opened by ATC. Pilots were instructed to close the plan with the last ATC unit they contacted. Throughout the event, ATC coordinators were available to assist teams

and organizers.

## Inflation & launch

All 24 competition balloons and 3 fiesta balloons were inflated without issues.

The launch ran like clockwork: first, the sponsor's fiesta gas balloon from Westfalen, followed at 19:59 UTC by the 24 competition balloons—launched over 76 minutes (last one at 21:15 UTC), roughly three minutes apart. The last two fiesta balloons then took off.

Note: The maximum number of people allowed on the launch podium was not consistently respected by different teams. This should be addressed for future events.

Note: the planned start of 21:00 hrs was delayed to 22:00 hrs.

## Flight & race progress

Weather conditions made the race unusual. Overnight, balloons lingered around Metz, forming a spider-web of tracks. Forecasts suggested two options: northwest or southeast. In the end, most chose southeast, heading toward Serbia and Romania.

Tracking worked well overall, though there were occasional gaps of 20–30 minutes. The backup tracker provided by YB proved valuable and is recommended for future events.

## Safety

The safety check process took longer than expected. Many pilots were not immediately familiar with where their equipment was stored or how certain items functioned. A suggested improvement: include a checklist as an appendix to the rules, allowing pilots to pre-verify equipment before inspection.

Closing the flight plan and consistent use of English remain issues to be addressed.

One balloon made a night landing due to a leak, handled without incident.

A German team needed to show ATC clearance when landing in Serbia. The command center quickly provided the necessary paperwork, satisfying local authorities.

No serious incidents occurred.

## Fiesta balloons & public engagement

Three fiesta balloons launched alongside the competition balloons.

The event drew large crowds—easily over 10,000 spectators. Additional parking was arranged, and public access was effectively separated from the launch area.

## Social events

Meals were served in the hangars at the airfield.

There was a great atmosphere at the opening dinner, the Welcome Back Party, and the awards ceremony.

A nice touch: participants enjoyed the chance to visit the museum between the general briefing and the opening ceremony.

(CHECK!)

## gordon bennett tv

Gordon Bennett TV continues to be an indispensable feature of the event. Multiple daily broadcasts, including live feeds from balloons at altitudes above 5,000 meters, significantly enhance the event experience for both spectators and participants.

## Event debriefing

Held at the hotel—more details in the full notes.

(CHECK!)

## Awards ceremony

Once again at the Centre Pompidou, Metz. A festive event with speeches, medals, trophies, and a closing ceremony.

(CHECK!)

## Protocol issues

No

(CHECK!)

## Conclusion

The jury recommends releasing the Event Performance Bond in full.

The organizers fully met their obligations to participants and officials. The quality of organization and facilities was excellent.

All three jury members endorse this report and its recommendations.

(CHECK!)