



AMERICAN
INTERNATIONAL
CLUB OF GENEVA

Bertrand Piccard - 2013

Solar Impulse across America

Adventurer, initiator and co-founder of the Solar Impulse Project, with his partner, André Borschberg, they aim to fly a solar powered aircraft around the world in 2014. They took a step in this direction in 2013 when they flew the four-engined prototype, powered by solar panels in 5 stages across the United States.

The Solar Impulse plane has a wingspan of an Airbus passenger plane, weighs the same as a car and has the capability to fly day and night. It defies what many people think is possible. The AIC Club audience learned about one of Piccard's inspirations; an aviation pioneer Calbreath Perry Rodgers, who made the first transcontinental flight across the US. Despite setbacks, including 16 crashes, 3 stays in hospital and a broken leg, he landed his primitive plane on the beach in California in 1911.

The Solar Impulse team faced its own setback when the wing broke on the plane that is to be used on the around the world flight. They decided we either lose a year or gain a year. Disassembling the pieces of its prototype, they flew them in a transport plane to the US, where it was reassembled. Their record breaking flight covered 3'511 miles, from Mountain View California, to New York. Preparations are afoot for 2014's planned round the world flight. With flights across oceans, predicted to take six days or more, they are taking an innovative approach to how the two will manage to sleep. They are both now practicing hypnosis, so that they can teach themselves to sleep for very short 20 minutes spans.

Solar Impulse has attracted a number of sponsors, but he revealed the team is still searching for 20 million francs to reach its goal. Piccard talked of the need to apply the same pioneering spirit to end poverty and promote renewable energies and sustainable development. Innovation is being stymied, as there is little incentive to use new technologies, arguing new policies were needed to get rid of old polluting technologies. He favors the term « clean technology over green technology, arguing the former promotes job creation and development, whilst the latter suggests limitations. « I want to inspire others to dare » he said. « The biggest adventure of all, is not to fly to the moon, it is life itself. »

Malcolm Curtis

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