

2019 America's Challenge Gas Balloon Race

Team Bio

Team number: 6

Crew Nationality: USA

Balloon Name:

Balloon Registration: G-CGOZ

Pilots:

Name	Al Nels	Name	Andy Baird
Hometown	Beavercreek, OH	Hometown	Dexter, MI
Occupation	Engineer and sales rep	Occupation	President and General Manager, Cameron Balloons USA
Aircraft ratings/flight hours	Rated in hot air and gas balloons and in fixed-wing aircraft. Began flying hot air balloons in 1974; also holds a repairman certificate	Aircraft ratings/flight hours	Rated in gas and hot air balloons (has more than 1,500 hours in hot air balloons) and in fixed-wing aircraft: is a FAA certified repairman and a FAA Designated Engineering Representative, which includes being a test pilot for special shape and standard balloons
America's Challenge race history	First America's Challenge	America's Challenge history	First America's Challenge
Gordon Bennett history	None	Gordon Bennett history	None
Other notable flights/records	Two-time National hot air balloon champion, two-time world hot air balloon champion. Was part of the ground support team for the Two Eagles transpacific flight in 2015. Finished 13 th in the 2019 U.S. National Hot Air Balloon Championships.	Other notable flights/records	Experienced competitor on both the national and world level in hot air balloons; finished 6 th in the 2019 U.S. National Hot Air Balloon Championships.
Awards:	FAI Air Sports Medal, Ed Yost Master Pilot Award, awarded by the BFA for 40 years of safe flying, Balloon Federation of America (BFA) Directors Award,	Awards:	BFA President's Award, BFA Shields-Trauger Award, Past-President of the BFA. Has been President of the America's Challenge jury for the past three races.

Comments: This is one of several teams whose "rookie" status in the race belies their experience. Al Nels and Andy Baird are among the most respected balloonists in the United States and are world-class competitors in hot air balloons.

Al Nels started building model hot air balloons as a child and by 1974 was flying the real thing. He's now been flying balloons for more than 45 years and – a quarter-century removed from his multiple national and world championship victories – is still an active competitive pilot. His son also is in the top rank of U.S. hot air ballooning competitors.

Andy Baird, as a balloon manufacturer and FAA engineering representative, is a recognized expert not just in manufacturing but in balloon safety. His company has been involved in developing such innovations as a rapid-deflation system for parachute-top balloons. To test it, he fully deployed it at altitude to demonstrate to the FAA that if it were accidentally deployed it could be reset in the air so the balloon could continue flying. Gutsy or crazy? You decide.