

# 2019 America's Challenge Gas Balloon Race

## Team Bio

Team number/Launch Order: \_\_\_\_\_

Crew Nationality: France

Balloon Name: *Le Grain De Folie*

Balloon Registration: F-PPGB

Pilots:

|                                  |   |                               |   |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Name                             | Eric Decellieres  | Name                          | Vincent Leys  |
| Hometown                         |   | Hometown                      | Born in Lille, France   |
| Occupation                       | Chemical engineer, owns his own company   | Occupation                    |   |
| Aircraft ratings/flight hours    | Licensed since 1993 in hot air balloons and earned his gas balloon license in 2010. Has about 200 hours in hot air balloons, and more than 200 hours in gas balloons.                       | Aircraft ratings/flight hours | Licensed since 1977 in gas balloons and 1979 in hot air balloons. Has more than 2,800 hours in gas balloons and more than 1,500 hours in hot air balloons |
| America's Challenge race history | First America's Challenge   | America's Challenge history   | First America's Challenge   |
| Gordon Bennett history           | 4 (2014, 2018, 2019) Highest finish: 4 <sup>th</sup> in 2014  | Gordon Bennett history        | 18, has won the race 9 times (1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2017) and holds the record for the most victories in the Gordon Bennett     |
| Other notable flights/records    | Has been an event director and deputy event director for a number of ballooning competitions in Europe and the Far East, including directing the French National Championships seven times. | Other notable flights/records |   |
| Awards:                          |   | Awards:                       | Montgolfier Diplome (2002)  |

Comments: This team is competing for the first time in the America's Challenge, but if the handicappers were setting odds, this formidable French duo might well be considered to be favorites. As the nine-time winner of the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett, co-pilot Vincent Leys is the most decorated pilot in the history of distance gas balloon competition. The Gordon Bennett, founded by American newspaper tycoon James Gordon Bennett in 1906, is the world's oldest air race and is today considered to be the world championship competition for distance gas ballooning. Eric Decellieres is relatively new to gas ballooning competition but has competed in three Gordon Bennetts and has finished in the top five.

Eric says the fascination of gas ballooning is "being in 'levitation' and taking time to contemplate the beauty of nature. He has flown all over the world and especially remembers flying a hot air balloon solo over the Sahara Desert in south Tunisia. His three young daughters have all flown in gas balloons.

Vincent writes that the fascination of gas ballooning to him is "Liberty!" and calls his experiences in the Gordon Bennett the "best expression in balloon flying."

Benoit Pelard told us in 2017, after the America's Challenge, that he hoped his good friend, the great champion Vincent Leys, would come to Albuquerque to compete in the America's Challenge. We are pleased he decided to do so.