**“A New First in Flight.”**

**CALAIS, France** (Achieve3000, August 21, 2015).

Amid much excitement and fanfare, European aircraft manufacturer Airbus flew an electric plane across the English Channel on July 10, 2015. The E-Fan plane flew about 22 miles (35.5 kilometers) from Lydd,England, to the French port of Calais, a flight path that was not coincidental: The symbolic route traced the journey of French pilot Louis Blériot, who in 1909 became the first person to fly an airplane across the English Channel.

Electric planes, which are battery operated, represent a promising technology that could drastically reduce the pollution caused by the airline industry. Several aviation companies in different countries are developing electric planes. They hope to offer a fuel-free, noise-free, [emissions](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16688&step=19&c=1&asn=)-free flight alternative for the future. While Airbus warned that it may be a long time—perhaps decades—before air-polluting planes are replaced by cleaner, electric ones on a larger scale, the E-Fan's flight across the Channel is an encouraging and significant step toward making electric airplanes a [viable](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16688&step=19&c=1&asn=) option in the long term.

"It's a great victory, but it's also a start," said E-Fan pilot Didier Esteyne, referring to his flight across the Channel. "For us, it's an adventure" that permits the world to imagine commercial flight on electric or [hybrid](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16688&step=19&c=1&asn=) planes. "It's really the beginning of great [innovations](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16688&step=19&c=1&asn=)," he said.

Airbus wanted to be the first to cross the English Channel in an electric plane, but that distinction went to independent French pilot Hugues Duval. About 12 hours before Airbus' Channel flight, Duval quietly took his two-engine, one-seat Cri-Cri plane from Calais to Dover,England, and back. He beat the aeronautics giant in taking this symbolically important step.

"I was really motivated to go," Duval said. Duval, whose father had also flown across the Channel, described the trip as a family goal. "Our vocation [as pilots] is to take on challenges."

Duval lacked authorization to take off from Calais, so a fuel-driven plane towed his 220-pound (100-kilogram) Cri-Cri for the start of the trip. Then, he separated from the helper plane and flew independently to Dover and back. At times, he said, his plane reached a speed of 93 miles (150 kilometers) an hour on his 32-mile (52-kilometer) journey. Duval said his successful flight was a "relief" and an "important moment" after years of fine-tuning the plane and flying it over land.

Airbus officials who had gathered in Calais to celebrate the landing of the E-Fan would not comment on Duval's trip.

Both the Airbus plane and Duval's plane are powered by twin electric motors. But the motors on the Airbus plane are nearly twice as large as those on Duval's plane. The twin-seater E-Fan plane is also larger than Duval's one-seater Cri-Cri. The E-Fan weighs 1,300 pounds (590 kilograms), is 22 feet (6.7 meters) long, and has a wingspan of 31 feet (9.5 meters). Duval's plane weighs only 220 pounds (100 kilograms). The Cri-Cri is 12 feet 10 inches (3.9 meters) long and has a wingspan of about 16 feet (4.9 meters).

The E-Fan operates exclusively on batteries, and since there's no oil or water, the jet releases zero emissions. Airbus aims to begin selling its two-seater plane in 2017. It will market the E-Fan to training facilities for entry-level pilots. The company does not plan to end there, however.

"Our objective here is to make a hybrid-electric 100-seater for the future," said Chief Technical Officer Jean Botti. He said it's an ambition Airbus could realize by 2030.

Other companies share Airbus' [aspirations](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16688&step=19&c=1&asn=)—both short and long term. Slovenian aircraft company Pipistrel was also hoping to send an electric plane across the English Channel.Engine-maker Siemens blocked the trip at the last minute, however, according to Ivo Boscarol, Pipistrel's general manager. He said that the plane didn't have authorization to fly over water.

Boscarol said he felt that his plane was ready for the journey and estimated that about 10 other electric planes currently in development are also capable of making the flight. He said he hopes to continue working with Siemens in the future to develop the plane.

He compared the 2015 flights to those of Blériot long ago.

"The Channel, in aviation, has a special place," said Boscarol.

*The Associated Press contributed to this story.*