Design Team of Boeing 747 Wins Third Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Aerospace Prize

The four engineers who designed the Boeing 747, which has carried 1.8 billion people almost 25 billion miles, have won the third Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Aerospace Prize. The design team of Joseph Sutter, Kenneth F. Holtby, Everette Webb and Robert A. Davis, will receive the prize during the "Night of 1000 Pilots" at the last Sion Air Show, to be held on June 7, 1997 in Sion, Switzerland.

The $250,000 aerospace prize is named in honor of Francois-Xavier Bagnoud, the youngest professional instrument flight rated (IFR) pilot in Europe in the early 1980s of both airplanes and helicopters. Bagnoud died in a helicopter accident in Mali, Africa, in 1986, at the age of 24.

In announcing the 1997 winners, Thomas C. Adamson, Jr., chair of the Aerospace Prize Board, said that the 747 - which rolled out of the factory in September 1968 and began commercial service in January 1970 - "brought striking reductions in air travel costs through its still unsurpassed combination of speed, range, and capacity.

"It has also been employed on many missions of mercy and to carry countless tons of freight. Truly, the world knows itself better now because of the reliable, capable Boeing 747 and its visionary developers," he said.

The 747 - the largest commercial airplane in the world with 6 million parts - has changed the face of aviation relying on 1,101 domestic and international suppliers, with 79 percent of its sales outside the United States - nearly $98.3 billion in today's dollars.

But perhaps its most poignant legacy is that the Boeing 747 has brought great quantities of people together for commerce, peace and relief, carrying enough passengers to equal one-fourth of the world's population.

The Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Aerospace (FXB) Prize was established in 1992 and is financed by the Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Foundation. This foundation and the Association Francois-Xavier Bagnoud were started in 1989 by Countess Albina du Boisrouvray, mother of Francois-Xavier, and his family and friends to continue his spirit of caring for others and rescue efforts. The prize is administered by the Aerospace Engineering department of the University of Michigan, Bagnoud's alma mater. The humanitarian works of the Association Francois-Xavier Bagnoud in pediatric HIV/AIDS, children's rights, child labor initiatives and the rescue of oppressed children are funded by the foundation.

Bagnoud participated in more than 300 successful helicopter rescue missions in the Alps, in addition to his regular piloting responsibilities with Air Glaciers, the Alpine rescue and mountain flying firm owned by his father Bruno Bagnoud. The young Bagnoud became known as "le Petit Prince des Montagnes" ("The Little Prince of the Mountains"), a reference to the hero of the book The Little Prince by aviator-author Antoine de Saint-Exupery, because Bagnoud unfailingly visited the injured whom he had rescued, a gesture the hospital staff in Sion still remembers.

Sion was chosen as the award site because it will be the last time The Sion Air Show takes place. Sion is the home of Air Glaciers and is where Francois originally learned to fly.

The recipient of the first FXB Aerospace Prize was William H. Pickering, who as head of the Jet Propulsion Lab in California was the guiding force behind the launching of the first U.S. satellite and others used in the exploration of distant planets. The U.S. Apollo Program was awarded the second FXB prize for its lunar landings. The previous prizes were used by the winners to endow fellowships, thereby enabling engineering students to pursue master's degrees in aerospace studies.

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