

Solar Plane to Fly Round the World

Plans to fly a solar-powered aircraft around the world took a step forward recently upon the successful completion of a 'virtual' test flight. Although the Solar-powered plane itself is still undergoing development, the aim is to have a finished plane ready for flight next year.

The Solar Impulse is a two-tonne aircraft of 80m wingspan. The plane will be piloted by round-the-world balloon pioneer Bertrand Piccard on what will be the world's first attempt at circumnavigating the globe using solar power. Before the record flight takes place, the plane will attempt to replicate some of aviation's great histories moments such as a transatlantic crossing.

Meanwhile, a sophisticated 'virtual' flight has already taken place. The real-time test was conducted over 5 days using a computer

model of the aircraft in conjunction with actual weather conditions. As with the real version of the plane, the development team aim to navigate the virtual version in a way that gives maximum solar exposure to keep the batteries well charged through inclement weather.

The first round-the-world solar airplane flight is on schedule to take place in 2011. It's an ambitious plan that aims to promote a positive image of sustainable development and renewable energies. The Impulse is not the first solar powered plane - indeed solar-powered models were first developed in the 1970s. But it marks the first time a serious attempt has been made to build a piloted machine that can cover great distance.



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