

# Record solar plane's first 'hop'

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Solar-powered plane makes first historic 'hop'

**The Solar Impulse prototype plane, part of a planned solar-powered circumnavigation of the globe, has left the ground for the first time.**

The maiden flight was dubbed a "flea hop" by project leaders, at 350m in length and a height of just one metre.

The plane will now be transported to a different airfield for a flight of a few hours in March.

The final version of the plane will attempt a transatlantic flight in 2012 prior to the round-the-world trip.

The prototype first ventured outside a hangar in November, with a range of on-the-ground tests and a run-up of the plane's motors.

Thursday's flight, with test pilot Markus Scherdel at the controls, was the first time the plane had been brought to takeoff speed.

"The airplane flew the way we have experienced it in the simulators," said Bertrand Piccard, a founder of Solar Impulse and the first person to carry out a round-the-world balloon flight.

"That's of course a very big comfort for all the engineers who've worked for six years to build this airplane."

The next flight, at the Payerne air force airfield in western Switzerland, will see the plane reach an altitude of nearly 9,000m.

Only after this flight will the plane make its first "solar flight" - that is, powered by the solar generators rather than the on-board batteries.

The team plans a flight of a full day and night in the summer of 2010, building up to a transatlantic flight in small steps as the crew ensure the plane's behaviour is well-understood.

"It's a completely new flight domain," said Dr Piccard.

"It's the first time in the history of aviation that an airplane so big and so light using so little energy gets in the air - basically everything is new."



