

## Hy-Bird takes on Solar Impulse

A firm from France aims to fly a plane around the world powered by “100-per-cent clean” energy, two years before a rival Swiss team.



Photo: Patrick Martin | Erick Herzberger, left, and Luc Bernole, co-founders of Lisa Airplanes. The Hy-Bird plane was initially named the Spirit of Savoie. This was changed because the initials SOS conveyed the wrong image.

A small French company is rivaling a bid by Vaud adventurer Bertrand Piccard and his Solar Impulse team to fly an environmental plane around the world. Piccard and his associate André Borschberg revealed their project earlier this year to circumnavigate the globe for the first time in a solar-powered aircraft. But in a front-page article today, *24 Heures* reports today that a small French company, Lisa Airplanes, plans to circle the planet with its own environmentally powered Hy-Bird plane in 2009 - two years ahead of the Solar Impulse.

“Our idea is to create a spirit of competition around clean energy,” said Eric Herzberger, one of the co-founders of Lisa Airplanes. Conceived in Chambéry, Savoie, the Hy-Bird uses a fuel cell to power a 44-kilowatt engine, driving a propeller mounted on the tailfin. The 1.1-tonne plane has a 20-meter wingspan, compared to one of 80 meters for the four-engine Solar Impulse, which weighs 1.5 tonnes.

Lisa plans the Hy-Bird as a prototype of a plane it hopes to bring into production at a retail price of SFr620,000. The plane, being developed with a modest SFr6.5-million budget, would be 90 percent powered by a fuel cell and 10 percent by solar energy. Borschberg argues the Hy-Bird is not directly competing with the Solar Impulse because the Swiss plane is 100 percent powered by solar energy, using photovoltaic cells.

The Swiss project, with a SFr100-million budget, does not envisage commercial versions of its plane for the aviation market. It simply aims to use existing technologies to create an aircraft that flies solely with renewable energy, Borschberg said. The Hy-Bird needs hydrogen to operate its fuel cell, he noted. Also, the Hy-Bird technology is not unique, given that Boeing and Diamond Aircraft, a Canadian company, are also developing similar planes, he said.