

VIRGIN ATLANTIC GLOBALFLYER



PRESS RELEASE

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VIRGIN ATLANTIC ANNOUNCES LAUNCH SITE AND MISSION CONTROL FOR THE VIRGIN ATLANTIC GLOBALFLYER RECORD ATTEMPT

Virgin Atlantic Airways today announced that the launch site for the Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer record attempt will be the Salina Municipal (KSLN) Airport, Kansas, USA. Mission control will also be based in Salina at Kansas State University at Salina. The record attempt is planned to take place from early January 2005 dependent on favourable weather conditions and the route will take the aircraft over cities such as Chicago, Montreal, London, Paris, Rome, Cairo, Karachi, Shanghai, Tokyo, Honolulu and Los Angeles.

The radical aircraft will be piloted by Steve Fossett, the current Round the World Record holder in both balloons and sailboats. He will attempt to break the last great aviation record by making the first solo non-stop flight around the world. The pioneering aircraft - the world's most efficient jet plane - has been designed by aviation legend Burt Rutan. It is hoped the record attempt will be successfully completed within 80 hours. Sir Richard Branson will follow the flight in the support aircraft and is the reserve pilot.

The Municipal Salina Airport has been chosen for a number of reasons including its location near the geographic centre of the United States, the excellent facilities available at the airport itself and crucially its brand new runway which is 12,300 ft – one of the longest in North America. Mission control will be based at K-State's Kansas State University, Salina's College of Technology and Aviation, which is located directly adjacent to the Salina Municipal Airport. From there the Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer's progress around the world will be monitored through constant communication with Steve Fossett in the aircraft.

Sir Richard Branson, chairman of Virgin Atlantic, said:

"Virgin Atlantic is delighted to be launching this historic record attempt from Salina, Kansas and I hope that we can add Salina to the roll call of sites like Kitty Hawk which have been the setting for milestones in aviation history.

"The Salina Municipal Airport has excellent facilities to offer for this unique aircraft, giving the pioneering record attempt the very best chance of success. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the Salina Airport Authority and Kansas State University and the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce for supporting the record attempt and we look forward to working with our Salina partners in January."

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Steve Fossett, pilot of the Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer, said:

"This will be an endurance test for me and the Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer. Salina's location in the middle of the USA is a major advantage. If I run out of fuel in the last thousand miles, I will be able to glide to a safe landing in any airport in Western USA. If I had chosen a West Coast airport, I would risk ditching in the Pacific if I run out of fuel near the end of the Round the World Flight."

Tim Rogers, Executive Director for the Salina Airport Authority, said:

"Salina is extremely pleased to be selected as both the launch site and mission control site for the Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer. It is both an honour and a privilege to work with Sir Richard Branson and Steve Fossett."

"During the past year I've learned that the whole Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer team is the best there is. Steve's support staff and the employees at Virgin Atlantic are simply the most outstanding and professional group of individuals I've worked with."

Kevin Stass, Mission Control Director, commented:

"Salina Municipal Airport is a fantastic facility for the Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer project. Coupled with the Mission Control facility at Kansas State University, I can't think of a better place to start and finish this amazing flight. Tim Rogers, Dennis Kuhlman and Gerald Cook (President and CEO of the Salina Chamber of Commerce) have the same "can do" attitude that is the lifeblood of Virgin Atlantic, Sir Richard Branson and Steve Fossett. I look forward to working with them and being part of this great team that achieves the last great goal in aviation history."

Dennis Kuhlman, Dean of K-State at Salina, said:

"I cannot express how excited we are to host the GlobalFlyer project in the community of Salina, not to mention having mission control on our campus and to be able to share the hands-on experience with K-State students makes this an unforgettable opportunity."

Built by Scaled Composites, the aircraft is a single pilot, single engine turboprop aircraft designed for non-stop global circumnavigation. Scaled used computer aided aerodynamics to design the aircraft. The structure of the plane is entirely made from composite material and will be ultra light. The aircraft will fly at 45,000ft and travel 40,000 km at speeds in excess of 250 knots (285 mph, 440 kph). The aircraft will fly 75% further than the range record for jet-powered planes.

A dedicated web site – www.virginatlanticglobalflyer.com – will provide details of the project. It will give updates on its progress over the coming weeks and will provide an unprecedented level of live coverage of the record attempt during the flight itself. The site is being designed and managed by Conchango and hosted by Energis.

For further information, including pictures, fact sheets and footage please contact the Virgin Atlantic Press Office on 01293 747373 or log onto www.virginatlanticglobalflyer.com

For all US media enquiries please call Lori Levin on 001 609 897 7865 or email Lori on virginatlanticglobalflyer1@aol.com

NOTE TO EDITORS

Steve Fossett

Steve Fossett holds official world records in balloons, sailboats, gliders, jet aircraft and airships. He is a pilot of exceptional breadth of experience - from his tenacious quest to become the first person to achieve a solo balloon flight around the world (finally succeeding on his 6th attempt in 2002) to setting, with co-pilot Terry Delore, nine of the 19 Glider Open records, including the first 2,000 km Out-and-Return and the first 1,500 km Triangle flights. His achievements as a jet pilot for Cessna in a Citation X include records for U.S. Transcontinental, Australia Transcontinental, and Round-the-World Westbound non-supersonic flights. In 2002 Fossett received aviation's highest award, the Gold Medal of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI).