

Eurocopter celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the maiden flight of the Alouette 2, the first turbine-powered helicopter to enter series production

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On 12 March 1955, the Alouette 2 prototype took to the air for the first time from the Buc airfield near Paris. It went on to become the very first turbine-powered helicopter in series production in the world.

This astounding saga saw the light of day in the 1950s when the helicopter's two designers, Charles Marchetti and René Mouille, made the decision to abandon the Alouette 1 equipped with a somewhat "lethargic" piston engine for a helicopter powered by a gas turbine. At the time, Turbomeca had developed two gas turbines: the initially selected Artouste 1 developing 250 hp, and the Artouste 2, which the company president and founder, Joseph Szydlowsky, finally agreed to cede to the two designers.

The engine proved its worth in bench tests, and the SNCASE¹ Design Office - based in La Courneuve and one of Eurocopter's ancestors - decided to design a new airframe around the Artouste 2.

This is how the SE 3130 – 01 found itself on the Buc airfield on the morning of 12 March 1955 to make its first flight, with Chief Test Pilot, Jean Boulet, at the controls and Flight Test Engineer, Henri Petit, monitoring the instruments.

The flight was an all-round success that would revolutionize helicopter design. With such a power-to-weight ratio, the helicopter's performance opened up a wide variety of operating possibilities and made it into the fantastic tool it is today.

On 25 May, a second prototype took to the air. The promising results from both machines prompted an attempt on the altitude record. Thus, on 6 June 1955, before a blue ribbon panel of officials and commissioners, Jean Boulet pushed the Alouette 2 up to a record altitude of 8,209 meters.

Just 13 months after the prototype's maiden flight, the first production Alouette 2 lifted off. In 1957, the SGAC – the certifying agency at the time - awarded the helicopter its Certificate of Airworthiness.

¹ Société Nationale de Constructions Aéronautiques du Sud Est

In 1961, the Alouette was rejuvenated with a more powerful gas turbine engine - the more fuel-efficient Turbomeca Astazou 2 developing 530 hp. The new version was named SA 3180 Alouette 2 Astazou.

Production of the helicopter was finally stopped in 1975 when the 1324th machine was delivered. The 284 Alouette 2s still in service logged 27,000 flight hours in 2004.

Eurocopter is a wholly owned subsidiary of EADS. EADS is a global aerospace, defence and associated services company, with revenues of €30.1 billion in 2003 and a workforce of about 109,000. The EADS group includes the commercial aircraft maker Airbus; Eurocopter, the world's largest helicopter manufacturer; and the joint venture MBDA, the world's second largest missile company. EADS is also the biggest partner in the Eurofighter consortium, and the prime contractor for the Ariane launch vehicle. EADS is developing the A400M military transport aircraft and is also the major industrial partner in the European Galileo program for satellite navigation.

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