

America's Challenge Launch Scheduled Saturday Evening

October 1, 2021

Posted Friday, October 1

The America's Challenge is back!

If all goes as planned on Saturday October 2, the finest gas balloonists in the United States will take flight in the hopes of besting each other in a daring race across America.

After a one-year postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 24th Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta's America's Challenge race for gas balloons is scheduled to launch at 6 PM MDT Saturday (0000Z Sunday), the beginning of the race's five-day launch window. A final go-no go decision will be made at a noon briefing (1800z) on Saturday.

The launch should be a highlight of a spectacular evening at Balloon Fiesta Park which will combine the launch of the America's Challenge with performances by Team FastTrax skydivers, the Twilight Twinkle Balloon Glow, the AfterGlow Fireworks show, and musical entertainment. For those unable to be in Albuquerque, Balloon Fiesta Live! will offer a real-time video stream of the launch; simply go to the Balloon Fiesta Live! page at <https://balloonfiesta.com/Live-Stream>.

This year's competition will be an all-American affair, with a small but highly-competitive field. Four-time winners Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo and two-time winners Mark Sullivan and Cheri White are among the competitors, along with veterans Noah Forden and Bert Padelt, and Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan, the highest-finishing American team in the most recent America's Challenge in 2019. Sadly, three European teams scheduled to compete were unable to come to the United States for the race due to COVID and issues with travel and shipping their equipment.

The object of the race is to fly further than anyone else while competing within the event rules. This year's contest is shaping up to be a very interesting tactical race with a lot of strategic options for pilots. During the Friday general briefing, meteorologist Randy Lefevre told the teams that winds in the lower levels of the atmosphere will be light – not necessarily a good thing in a distance race. However, depending on the altitude the teams choose, they can fly in almost any direction. There is also a potentially riskier alternative track at high altitudes which traverses across the southern U.S. and the Gulf of Mexico. The pilots and their weather team will need to decide which course gives them the best chance of achieving the greatest distance.

The America's Challenge features gas balloons which, instead of using hot air, use a lighter-than-air gas – in this case, hydrogen – for lift. Because hydrogen provides so much lift, they typically can stay aloft for two or three days. Pilots can release gas to come down, and drop ballast – expendable weight, usually in the form of sand or water – to go up. Since the balloons slowly lose hydrogen as the race progresses, they have to get rid of weight to stay aloft. The race winners are often the teams who best conserve and manage gas and ballast.

The launch order for the race is determined by random draw, which was conducted at the Friday briefing. This year's launch order is:

1. Team 4, Noah Forden and Bert Padelt
2. Team 1, Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo
3. Team 2, Cheri White and Mark Sullivan
4. Team 3, Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan

Once the race begins, you can follow the race via YB Tracking's live tracking map on the America's Challenge web page at www.balloonfiesta.com/Americas-Challenge, or download the YB tracking app (it's free! In your favorite app store) onto your mobile device. Once you download the app, subscribe to the America's Challenge 2021 race (also free). We will also provide regular updates on the race's progress through the website, Twitter, links to team social media sites, and our Balloon Fiesta Live! broadcasts.

America's Challenge Teams Preparing for 6 PM Launch

October 2, 2021



In the photo: Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo (Team 1), Noah Forden and Bert Padelt (Team 4), Cheri White and Mark Sullivan (Team 2) and Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan (Team 3)

Posted Saturday, October 2 1:00 PM MDT (1900Z)

The four elite American gas balloon teams competing in the 24th America's Challenge for gas balloons have waited for two long years for the chance to test their skills and knowledge in a race across North America – and later today, they'll get their chance. At today's noon briefing, race officials

gave them the go-ahead to prepare their balloons for an anticipated launch at 6 PM (0000Z) this evening from Albuquerque's Balloon Fiesta Park. Live streaming of the launch preparations will begin at 4 PM, with Balloon Fiesta Live!'s live programming beginning at 5 PM as the Fastrax skydiving team brings in the American flag.

During the America's Challenge, the two-person pilot teams use the winds and weather to try to fly the greatest distance. They stay aloft for as much as three days, and must carry with them everything they need to fly and navigate the balloon and survive aloft. The balloon is filled with hydrogen gas, and once the balloon leaves the ground, they can't get any more. In order to ascend, the teams must lighten the balloon by dropping expendable weight, referred to as ballast, usually sand or water. By conserving ballast and avoiding having to release gas to descend, teams can prolong their flight and improve their chance to win.

At today's weather briefing, meteorologist Randy Lefevre described weather conditions and potential flight trajectories. During the period of the race, light winds should prevail at lower elevations, with low-level tracks that could actually keep the balloons in New Mexico. Teams that choose higher altitudes

may travel more to the south and southeast into Texas and the U.S. southern states. The teams must stay in the United States, as Mexico and Canada are both closed to competition this year.

This year's race will be an all-American affair, with a small but highly-competitive field. Four-time winners Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo (Team 1 in the tracking) and two-time winners Mark Sullivan and Cheri White (Team 2). Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan (Team 3), who flew to a solid fourth-place finish in their first America's Challenge two years ago, and veterans Noah Forden and Bert Padelt (Team 4) are also strong competitors in what may be an evenly-matched field.

The launch should be a highlight of a spectacular evening at Balloon Fiesta Park which will combine the launch of the America's Challenge with performances by Team FasTrax skydivers, the Twilight Twinkle Balloon Glow, the AfterGlow Fireworks show, and musical entertainment. For those unable to be in Albuquerque, Balloon Fiesta Live! will offer a real-time video stream of the launch; simply go to the Balloon Fiesta Live! page at <https://balloonfiesta.com/Live-Stream>.

Once the race begins, you can follow the race via YB Tracking's live tracking map on the America's Challenge web page at www.balloonfiesta.com/Americas-Challenge, or download the YB tracking app (it's free! In your favorite app store) onto your mobile device. Once you download the app, subscribe to the America's Challenge 2021 race (also free). We will also provide regular updates on the race's progress through the website, Twitter, links to team social media sites, and our Balloon Fiesta Live! broadcasts.

Big Crowd Cheers America's Challenge Launch

October 2, 2021

Posted Saturday, October 2 9:00 PM MDT (0300Z Sunday, October 3)



And . . . they're off! Flanked by hundreds of inflated hot air balloons participating in an evening glow an all-American field of competitors soared aloft this evening to begin the 24th America's Challenge distance race for gas balloons.

Just after 6:30 PM this evening, the first balloon in the launch order, piloted by Noah Forden and Bert Padelt, was walked to the launch platform at Balloon Fiesta Park, the common takeoff point for all balloons so they launch from exactly the same spot.

Each balloon's inflation crew escorts their team's balloon to the platform, wishing their pilots well in the last moments before takeoff. It's an often emotional moment, with the excitement of finally being ready to fly accompanied by goodbyes and good wishes. On the platform, race officials work with each team to ascertain the balloon's buoyancy, taking off some sandbags to make the balloon lighter so it can ascend at a safe rate of speed and clear nearby obstacles.

The Balloon Fiesta Live! team provided commentary about gas ballooning and the teams, and was able to catch and share with viewers some of the conversations between the officials and pilots during the weigh-off process. [This coverage is available for viewing](#) on the Balloon Fiesta's YouTube channel.

As part of their strategy, Forden and Padelt took off with a slightly flaccid balloon, anticipating a flight to altitude to catch faster winds headed south and east from Balloon Fiesta Park. Other teams adopted different strategies, borne out in the two distinctly different tracks the balloons have taken since launch. Some of our early issues with altitude and distance reporting appear to have been corrected, but Americans should note that distances and altitude are reporting in kilometers and meters rather than miles and feet. The Command Center is working with YB Tracking to resolve these issues and we hope to have it fixed over the next few hours.

You can keep track of your favorite teams and try to second-guess their strategies through the live YB Tracking map on the America's Challenge web page at www.balloonfiesta.com/Americas-Challenge, or download the YB tracking app (it's free! In your favorite app store) onto your mobile device. Once you download the app, subscribe to the America's Challenge 2021 race (also free). We will also provide regular updates on the race's progress through the website, links to team social media sites (we'll post them in the morning), and our Balloon Fiesta Live! broadcasts.

A Long, Cold Night . . .

October 3, 2021

Posted Sunday, October 3, 6:00 AM MDT (1200Z)

Definition of torment (gas balloon race style): Being at 15,000 feet, on oxygen, in the dark, with temperatures in the teens and twenties . . . and slowly going nowhere. In a race where the idea is to go the greatest distance possible, and where historically teams have reached Dalhart (TX) by daylight, this is just downright frustrating.

But that's what's required to win a race like the America's Challenge distance race for gas balloons. And relief is on the way. In the next couple of hours, it'll be sunrise, bringing light, warmth, and a free ride to the team's chosen altitude, due to heating and expansion of the gas inside the balloon.

Two distinct strategies appear to have developed in the early hours of the race. Teams 4 and 2 (Forden/Padelt and Sullivan/White) went to higher altitude early, stayed further south, and have been paralleling Interstate 40 heading east. Noah Forden and Bert Padelt have the race lead at this point and are near Santa Rosa, NM, having travelled about 110 miles (177 km). Meanwhile, Team 1 (Fricke/Cuneo) and Team 3 (Cowlshaw/Duncan) have been creeping up I-25 to the northeast and are in the Santa Fe area. The winds over New Mexico, as forecast, are persistently very light, but Forden and Padelt have found at least a little bit of speed and are now moving at the blistering (!) double-digit speed of 10 miles an hour!

YB Tracking, working with the Command Center, has been tweaking the tracking app and map overnight to make distances and elevation more understandable to U.S. audiences. Distances are now reporting in miles, the U.S. standard, but we would note the official race distances are kept in kilometers and we will

periodically update those here. Altitude is still reporting in meters, but to give an example, 4900 meters is about 16,000 feet.

If you missed the launch, [you can view the live coverage](#) on the Balloon Fiesta's YouTube channel (the coverage includes the Fastrax skydive team and balloon glow also; the America's Challenge portion starts about an hour and a half in).

As the strategies continue to develop, you can watch them unfold at America's Challenge web page at www.balloonfiesta.com/Americas-Challenge, or download the YB tracking app (it's free! In your favorite app store) onto your mobile device. Once you download the app, subscribe to the America's Challenge 2021 race (also free). We'll also post updates here as the race develops.

America's Challenge Team 3 Lands Near Pecos

October 3, 2021

Posted Sunday, October 3, 10:15 AM MDT (1615Z)

The America's Challenge Command Center has been advised that Team 3, Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan, has landed safely near Rowe, NM, south of Pecos along Interstate 25. The team is fine and in good spirits, and Brenda says she's glad to be warm again. At least two of the teams have indicated that they endured a very long, cold night last night.

Under the rules, teams have up to four hours to report a landing, though in this case Brenda contacted the Command Center much more quickly. The other three teams continue to make slow progress across New Mexico. Noah Forden and Bert Padelt (Team 4) are approaching Clovis, NM, and are well ahead in the race.

We'll keep you posted on the progress of the race throughout the day today and into the night via this website and the YB Tracking app.

Decision Time! Teams Ponder Whether to Fly Through the Night

October 3, 2021

Posted Sunday, October 3, 5:00 PM MDT (2300Z)

As sunset nears in Texas and New Mexico, the three America's Challenge gas balloon teams still aloft have a big decision to make. Do they want to keep flying through the night to try to gain greater distance and keep their chances of winning alive? Or, will they decide to land, and avoid another very cold night aloft?

This "cold night aloft" thing is not to be taken lightly. At least three of the teams reported bone-chilling cold during the first night aloft. Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan (Team 3), who landed earlier today, said it was 12 degrees in their basket and even with special clothing it was simply impossible to get warm. The deep chill was a factor in their ending their flight early.

Another very large consideration will be whether they have enough ballast left to fly through the night. Ballast – sand and water being carried as expendable weight) is necessary to maneuver, and especially to ascend.

Brian and Brenda paid a visit to the Command Center a few minutes ago and shared some details about their flight. We did a short interview with them and are in the process of rendering it so we can share it with you. Watch for it in an upcoming update. But we can tell you that despite the cold, they were cheerful and had a great time on their relatively short trek to Pecos, NM.

As for the other teams, for most of the day leaders Noah Forden and Bert Padelt (Team 4) have held a very consistent, 100-mile (161 km) lead over Team 2, Mark Sullivan and Cheri White. At this writing, Team 4 has crossed into Texas and are heading roughly towards Lubbock. Meanwhile, Team 1, Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo, are continuing to pursue a different strategy further north and are about another 50 miles further behind.

At least one chase team is having an interesting day of it, too. Team 1's crew, Ray and Sue Palmer, got the Command Center laugh of the day award when they texted, "Good thing it's a slow race. Stuck . . . due to a traffic accident. We're travelling almost as fast as the gas balloon."

You can check up on your favorite team and follow their progress on this website, and on the YB Tracker free app – just download the app and subscribe to the America's Challenge race.

Team 2 Lands Safely Near NM/TX Border

October 3, 2021

Posted Sunday, October 3, 9:00 PM MDT (0300Z, Monday, October 4)

The America's Challenge Command Center has received word that Team 2, Mark Sullivan and Cheri White, has landed safely near Melrose, NM, west of Clovis. Cheri told the controllers that the team plans to rest up in Clovis overnight before returning to Albuquerque. When they landed, Team 2 was second in the race and had travelled approximately 174 miles (280 km). Sullivan and White have previously won the America's Challenge twice, in 2008 and 2012.

That leaves just two balloons in the hunt, pursuing very different strategies. Team 4, Noah Forden and Bert Padelt, have had a healthy lead since very early in the race. They're currently southeast of Lubbock TX and have flown about 324 miles (522 km). Though they are at a lower altitude as of this writing, at the beginning of the race Forden and Padelt went up to near the race altitude limit of 18,000 feet and have flown at high altitude for most of the race.

Meanwhile, Team 1, Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo, headed northeast and spent much of the day over the southern Sangre de Cristo mountains. The four-time America's Challenge champions (2001, 2010, 2013, 2016) have been as much as 150 miles (241 km) behind the lead much of the race and have been mired in slow winds for most of the day. But as they keep flying, they potentially could move up in the standings, passing Team 2 and maybe even making a run at the leaders.

This has been a most unusual America's Challenge, a race where the winning teams usually travel over 1,000 miles (1609 km). The race is playing out somewhat like a typical Coupe Gordon Bennett, the world

championships of distance gas ballooning, which is usually flown in Europe within a restricted geographical area. These are often shorter, highly strategic races of a few hundred miles, where teams employ diverse strategies to eke out a win over the competitions.

A long cold night is ahead for the two teams still aloft, and we'll keep you posted on their progress on this website, and on the YB Tracker free app – just download the app and subscribe to the America's Challenge race.

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The Hare and the Tortoise

October 4, 2021

Posted Monday, October 4, 0545 AM MDT (1145Z)

As we come towards the finish line of the 24th America's Challenge distance race for gas balloons, it's as simple as the old children's story of the hare and the tortoise. And as complicated.

Has the "hare" – the team of Noah Forden and Bert Padelt (Team 4) -- built an insurmountable lead with their strategy of flying high? Will they continue to gain ground through the morning?

Or . . . can the "tortoise" – Team 1's Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo, who plodded along slowly all day yesterday while other teams built a commanding lead – reel in Team 4 and plod over the finish line to victory?

And does either team have enough ballast and gas left to continue the chase, and the race?

The next few hours will tell, as the sun rises over Texas and the race plays out. But one thing we do know from our live tracking – Team 1 is slowly but steadily gaining ground on Team 4. This could be a relatively short race distance-wise, but with one big finish. Stay tuned!

As the race unfolds you can follow the teams' progress via the live tracking map and frequent updates on the America's Challenge web page at www.balloonfiesta.com/Americas-Challenge, or download the YB tracking app (it's free! In your favorite app store) onto your mobile device. Once you download the app, subscribe to the America's Challenge 2021 race (also free).

Race Leaders Land in Texas; The Chase is On!

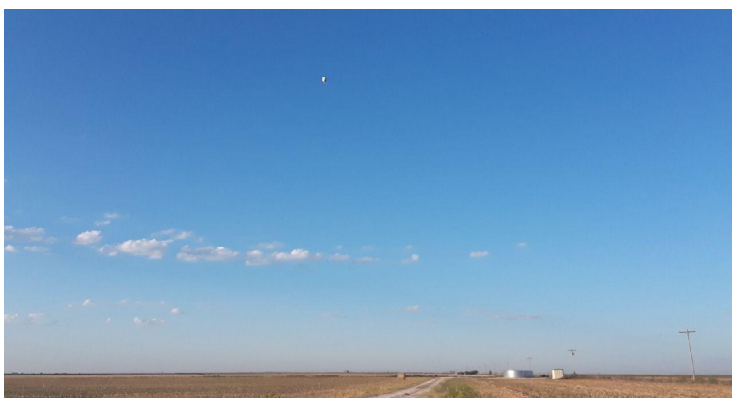


October 4, 2021

Posted Monday, October 4, 0830 AM MDT (1430Z)

The America's Challenge Command Center has received word that Team 4, Noah Forden and Bert Padelt, have landed safely at the airport in Big Spring, TX. The team sent this photo from their stand-up landing; you'll notice how flaccid (limp-looking) the balloon is, since balloons lose hydrogen throughout the flight. Noah and Bert's strategy from the beginning was to go to high altitude early, grab the lead, and ride relatively higher winds to the east and south. They've led throughout the race by a substantial margin and traveled about 356 miles (573 km). That's a short distance for an America's Challenge, but a great showing considering the extremely light winds dominating the weather pattern. Noah Forden, the experienced aviator from Rhode Island, and Bert Padelt, the master balloon builder who is revered in gas balloon circles, threw down a spectacular flight and said to their competitors, come try to catch us.

And somebody is.



Lurking well behind, but creeping up on the leaders, are Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo (Team 1) from Albuquerque, the four-time America's Challenge winners who spent more than a full day

wallowing in light winds in northern New Mexico. This photo was taken by their crew east of Amarillo, TX – you can just see Team 1’s balloon, Foxtrot Charlie, as a little white dot near the top of the image. Barbara and Peter ascended into the stronger, easterly track yesterday evening, and overnight overtook Team 2 (Mark Sullivan and Cheri White, who had landed) to move into second in the race. If Barbara and Peter have the ballast and gas to fly another 50 miles, they’ll capture the lead using a time-honored gas ballooning strategy – hang back in last place until the competition lands, then swoop in at the end to win.

Regardless of who winds up winning, this could be a great result for either team. It would be Noah Forden’s and Bert Padelt’s first win, and even if they finish second, it will be Noah’s best finish and will equal Bert’s best America’s Challenge result (second, in 2002). Should Barbara and Peter overtake Noah and Bert for the victory, they would tie the late Richard Abruzzo for the most America’s Challenge wins ever. Since Richard won his races with four different co-pilots, they would also be the first team to, as a team, win five America’s Challenge races.

How will it all come out? Stay tuned! Follow along on the America’s Challenge web page at www.balloonfiesta.com/Americas-Challenge, or download the YB tracking app (it’s free! In your favorite app store) onto your mobile device. Once you download the app, subscribe to the America’s Challenge 2021 race (also free).

Some Views from the Teams

October 4, 2021

Posted Monday, October 4,
0830 AM MDT (1430Z)

While we wait to see whether Team 4 will prevail or Team 1 will slip into the America’s Challenge lead, we just couldn’t resist



sharing this spectacular photo Noah Forden sent to the Command Center. This is sunrise at Big Spring, TX, and was taken shortly before Noah and Bert Padelt landed at the airport, on a spot near the lower left in this photo.

In a phone call to the Command Center, Team 1 pilot Peter Cuneo also commented on how beautiful the sunrise was, and Barbara and Peter’s crew sent a photo they took from the ground.

The teams often post photos and videos of their own to their social media sites. Here are the URL’s of three of them:

- Cheri White and Mark Sullivan (Team 2): FlyGas.net, and FlyGas – Cheri Edwards White on Facebook

- Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan (Team 3): Brenda Dahly Colishaw on Facebook, blc20 on Instagram
- Noah Forden and Bert Padelt (Team 4): bestaviation.com, Noah Forden/Bert Padelt on Facebook

We also thought you might find it interesting to see a [trajectory plot and analysis](#) race meteorologist Randy Lefevre put together the afternoon before the race. This is an example of the type of data the pilots receive, both from the official race meteorologists and their own weather specialists, when planning a flight. You'll notice a similarity between the forecast trajectories and what actually wound up happening during the race, especially with the two potential tracks and strategies adopted by different teams. Since balloons don't stay at the same altitude all the time, the track will vary somewhat, and you see that especially with Team 1's track as the balloon ascended and descended through middle and high altitudes.

Meanwhile, Team 1 (Fricke/Cuneo) continues to close in on Team 4's leading distance of approximately 356 mi (573 km), and we'll see if they're able to surpass Forden and Padelt for the win. Follow along on the America's Challenge web page at www.balloonfiesta.com/Americas-Challenge, or download the YB tracking app (it's free! In your favorite app store) onto your mobile device. Once you download the app, subscribe to the America's Challenge 2021 race (also free).

Forden/Padelt Unofficial America's Challenge Winners

October 4, 2021

Posted Monday, October 4, 2:00 PM MDT (2000Z)

Final race results will be released after pilot debriefings and analysis of the tracker data, but unofficially, the winners of the 24th America's Challenge distance race for gas balloons are Noah Forden and Bert Padelt (Team 4). Noah and Bert were the race leaders almost throughout, pursuing a strategically risky strategy of going to higher altitudes early to catch faster winds. Like all of the teams, they endured a bitterly cold night aloft on the first night of the race, shivering in temperatures that dropped to 11 degrees despite hand warmers and heavy clothes. But aside from the cold, Noah tells us they had a glorious flight and are, of course, very happy to win. They flew about 356 miles (573 km) in 36 hours. The full unofficial results are at the end of this post.

This is both team members' first America's Challenge win. Bert Padelt with his flying partner at the time, Louis Vitanza, finished second in the 2002 America's Challenge, and Bert and Noah were third in 2016.

Noah's and Bert's closest pursuers, Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo (Team 1), landed safely east of Pampa, TX around midday today. They flew approximately 338 miles and came very close to taking over the lead of the race before landing due to concerns with thermals. Thermals are generated by ground heating (dust devils are one kind of thermal), which can create turbulence and dangerous flying conditions for balloons. Early in the day today, Barbara and Peter agreed with each other to land at the first sign of thermal conditions, and in the interest of safety, they did so. The other two participating teams, Team 2 (Mark Sullivan and Cheri White) and Team 3 (Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan) landed yesterday.

This was an unusual America's Challenge in a couple of ways. Usually, several international teams participate, but this year, COVID restrictions and travel and shipping concerns kept the three teams with members from Europe from making the trip to Albuquerque. Then, in a race known worldwide for providing opportunities to fly long distances, exceptionally light winds in the American Southwest made for a very short race in both distance and time. Forden and Padelt's distance flown – about 356 miles (573 km) -- was the shortest in the 24-year history of the America's Challenge.

The unofficial results, pending completion of scoring, are:

1. Team 4, Noah Forden and Bert Padelt, distance 356.1 mi. (573.1 km), duration 36 hours 22 minutes, landing at Big Spring, TX
2. Team 1, Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo, distance 338.4 mi. (544.6 km), duration 40 hours 35 minutes, landing east of Pampa, TX
3. Team 2, Mark Sullivan and Cheri White, distance 173.9 mi. (279.9 km), duration 23 hours 49 minutes, landing near Melrose, NM
4. Team 3, Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan, distance 55.9 mi. (89.9 km), duration 15 hours 1 minutes, landing near Pecos, NM



It's Official! Forden/Padelt Are America's Challenge Champions

October 7, 2021

Posted Thursday, October 7, 2021, 10 PM MDT (0400Z Friday, October 8)

The data is parsed, the tracks are analyzed, the numbers are crunched, and while there were a few little tweaks, the result is the same. Rhode Island's Noah Forden and

Pennsylvania's Bert Padelt are the 24th America's Challenge champions.

Forden and Padelt (Team 4) were the race leaders almost throughout, pursuing a strategically risky strategy of going to higher altitudes early to catch faster winds.

This is the first America's Challenge win for both members of this team. Bert Padelt, with his flying partner at the time, Louis Vitanza, finished second in the 2002 America's Challenge. Noah Forden is relatively new to competition gas ballooning -- he flew his first America's Challenge in 2016. But he already has one America's Challenge trophy; he and Bert Padelt finished third that year.

The final results (you can view the [official scoring sheet, including launch/landing coordinates, here](#)):

1. Team 4, Noah Forden and Bert Padelt, distance 356.2 mi. (573.25 km), duration 36 hours 22 minutes, landing at Big Spring, TX

2. Team 1, Barbara Fricke and Peter Cuneo, distance 338.43 mi. (544.66 km), duration 40 hours 25 minutes, landing near Miami, TX
3. Team 2, Mark Sullivan and Cheri White, distance 173.96 mi. (279.97 km), duration 23 hours 46 minutes, landing alongside the historic Goodnight-Loving Trail on the Melrose bombing range, Cannon AFB, NM (west of Clovis NM)
4. Team 3, Brenda Cowlshaw and Brian Duncan, distance 55.92 mi. (89.99 km), duration 14 hours 46 minutes, landing near Glorieta, NM

This was a tough race for tough men and women. Forden and Padelt's winning distance was the shortest in the 24-year history of the America's Challenge. Exceptionally light winds over New Mexico and Texas meant the teams had to work hard to find a way to get anywhere at all. This often meant flying in bitter cold (11 bone-chilling degrees Fahrenheit in both Team 4's and Team 2's baskets), on oxygen, in near total darkness. This made for a highly tactical competition reminiscent of European gas ballooning competitions, where international borders and smaller land masses limit how far teams can fly.

Unusually, this was also an all-American race with a smaller-than-usual number of competitors. Three teams from Europe or including European members who had hoped to compete had to drop out of the race due to COVID restrictions and issues with international travel and shipping.

High Adventure! Photos and Videos from the 24th America's Challenge

October 8, 2021

The 24th America's Challenge is in the history books – a history preserved on photos, video, and social media. Here is a compilation of interviews shot by our America's Challenge staff, photos provided by the teams, and clips from social media posts. We thank the America's Challenge teams, pilots, and crews for letting us share these with you. Items not yet linked will be coming soon!

General:

- What is it like to fly in the America's Challenge? [Three of our pilots give us a quick glimpse](#)
- [Pre-launch trajectory forecast from race meteorologist Randy Lefevre](#)

Team 4, Forden/Padelt

- [Forden/Padelt Facebook page](#)
- [Video over Texas shot by Noah with selfie stick](#). The tarp around the basket helps hold in the heat and keep the basket warm at high altitudes. Note Bert catching some sleep on the basket floor.
- [In flight video shortly before sunset Sunday night near Lubbock, TX](#)
- [Preflight interview with Bert Padelt on the team's launch strategy](#)
- [Preflight interview with Bert Padelt on flying with Noah](#)

- [Photos from Noah and Bert's winning flight](#)

Team 3, Cowlshaw/Duncan

- [Brenda Cowlshaw Facebook page](#)
- [Video from Brenda shortly after launch](#) showing their spectacular view of the Twilight Twinkle Glow at Balloon Fiesta Park
- [Pre-flight interview with Brenda](#)
- [Post-flight interview with Brian and Brenda](#)

Team 2, Sullivan/White

- [Fly Gas website](#) – Cheri's and Mark's adventures in the Gordon Bennett and America's Challenge
- [Fly Gas Facebook page](#)
- How cold was it? [Cheri White's video](#) captures the bone-chilling temperatures
- [Mark and Cheri video shortly before landing](#) near Melrose, NM
- [Photos from Mark and Cheri's flight](#)

Team 1, Fricke/Cuneo

- [Photos from Peter and Barbara's flight](#)