

'Need for Speed' Not Required for World Sky Race

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An artist conception of what the finish of the World Sky Race might look like at the finish line at the Palace of Versailles.
Image World Air League

Jay Barrett/KMXT

A race promoter was in Alaska last week, speaking before the Southcentral chapter of the Explorers Club. In a state that boasts not one, but a trio of thousand-mile races, Dan Hartsell was pitching a race that dwarfed the Iditarod, Iron Dog and Yukon Quest. The race he's organizing is the World Sky Race, which would be about 30,000 miles long, depending on the route. Around the world. By airship.

"So the race starts on the Greenwich Prime Meridian, goes to Berlin, then to Rome and then to Cairo, then to the Taj Mahal and then to the twin towers of Malaysia. Hanoi, and up to Kyoto, and from Kyoto in Japan it's either to Alaska or Hawaii. Then the Golden Gate Bridge and then NASA in Texas, then to the Statue of Liberty and we get to finish this race by landing in the gardens of Versailles. And so each of these races is about a 10 day event."

Besides potentially being along the route, Hartsell says Alaska might be interested in putting together its own team to compete.

"Our goal to get these racers into the air is to have them identify around localities. Be it either a nation, a state, a region a city. So that way you have proper fan competition all across the board. And so one of the aspects of us being here in Alaska is to encourage and start that discussion on how does Alaska become involved and create a team to be in the race. Texas has one. Malaysia is developing one. We're looking for one out of the Middle East and so there's very good reasons for Alaska to be prominent in this as well."

With the cost of an airship, be it blimp, dirigible or Zeppelin, plus an aircrew and a ground crew, participating in the race will require quite an investment.

"That's one of those questions that somewhat dependent on availability for things like helium, availability of airships that are not under contract. But it'll be anywhere between \$10-million to \$20-million. And you have to ask yourself a couple of questions upon entry, and that's any team that going to be organizing it. What's your purpose for being involved? Is it to get your name out there, to emblazon your reputation locally and globally? Or is it to win? And if you're going to win, you're probably going to put a little equipment, a little more into the capabilities of the system. So, in once sense,

probably minimum \$10-million, and after that, I'd say the sky's the limit."

We'll just have to wait and see if the Alaska Explorers Club or someone else with deep pockets decides to represent Alaska in the race, but if the event actually takes off as planned in 2015, the winner will get to fly home with a \$5-million first prize.