

Paris, 26 November 2015
PR208 – 2015

CNES celebrates Diamant's 50th anniversary

The origins of France's independence in space

On 26 November 1965, the first French-designed, French-built launcher soared skyward from the Hammaguir launch base in Algeria, orbiting France's first ever satellite, A1, affectionately named Asterix. After the Soviet Union and the United States, France thus became the third nation to demonstrate a satellite launch capability.

On 26 November 1965, France entered the exclusive club of world space powers eight years after the Soviet Union's Sputnik and seven years after the United States' Explorer, reaching the goal that its government had set four years earlier. From then on, Diamant and A1 would help to extend the sphere of French science and technology, showing the world the ability of its engineers, technicians and scientists to overcome the hurdles of large-scale high-tech project.

A1 was a technology capsule designed to verify the launcher in operational conditions and prove its ability to orbit a satellite. It did not carry any science experiments on board. Despite a hitch when the satellite was released from its fairing, damaging its antennas and rendering it unable to communicate, this first attempt was nonetheless a success.

Commenting on this historic event for spacefaring France and Europe, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall said: "The successful launch of Diamant 50 years ago, which we are commemorating today, is highly symbolic as it was the first tangible accomplishment of France's space policy implemented by the newly created CNES. Diamant provided the foundation on which our agency was built through multiple successes that have made France one of the world's leading space nations. Today, this status means we are in the best possible position to address the main challenges facing us in the years ahead: access to space, climate research and future explorations, either through ESA, to which CNES is the main contributor, or directly in partnership with other world space agencies."

More information at:

<https://cnes.fr/fr/diamant-50-ans-revivez-cette-epopee-au-cnes>

Contacts

Pascale Bresson
Alain Delrieu
Julien Watelet

Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 75 39
Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 74 04
Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 78 37

pascale.bresson@cnes.fr
alain.delrieu@cnes.fr
julien.watelet@cnes.fr

presse.cnes.fr