

## HISTORIC FLIGHT OF A SONACA 200 AND A TIPSY AIRCRAFT IN THE BELGIAN SKY



On May 9, 2018, a Sonaca 200 plane took off next to a Topsy Nipper. The two aircraft accomplished a formation flight towards the Sonaca aviation group headquarters in Gosselies (Belgium). This was a very symbolic, rich and emotional moment for the two pilots, Edouard Martin and Pierre Van Wetter<sup>1</sup>.

Is the Sonaca 200 the first aircraft to be designed and manufactured at the Gosselies site in Belgium? Not exactly ...

Since the aviation adventure had already started in 1931 at the Gosselies aerodrome with the arrival of the company «Fairey Aircraft S.A.» which produced a few benchmark aircraft such as: Firefly, Fox, Hurricane and Topsy Nipper.

**Pierre Taquet**, an engineer at Sonaca and co-author of the book «Sonaca, 80 years of passion for the aviation industry<sup>2</sup>», explained: «The formation flight of the Sonaca 200 and the Topsy which we attended on May 9 is obviously a historically significant event. 60 years separate the first flights of these two machines which were both developed and produced by Sonaca and its predecessor, Fairey. As a young engineer, I know many colleagues who worked during the Topsy<sup>3</sup> era and directly participated in the studies and production of the Nipper.

I found their signature on the plans for the two-seater version which Fairey had considered at the time: The Bipper. And now it has been materialized through the Sonaca 200 with the same care in the design and realization which is the reason why the Nipper is still flying and remains in very high demand on the market. It is a pleasure to see the young Sonaca Aircraft team, which has now taken over, at work with the same enthusiasm and desire for perfection».

**Edouard Martin**, the Topsy pilot, said, «5 years ago in Great Britain, I had the opportunity to buy the last Belgian aircraft, the «Topsy Nipper<sup>4</sup>». As a Belgian pilot, I was particularly proud to be able to fly the aircraft back to its native country. More than half a century after the Nipper, Belgium is back on the aviation market with the «Sonaca 200 Trainer».

On May 9, the Nipper and its younger sibling, the Sonaca 200, accomplished a very beautiful formation flight on a sunny afternoon. It is needless to say that this was a very emotional flight! It is a pleasure to fly on these two aircraft, which demonstrate the expertise of Belgian aviation. I would like to thank Pierre Van Wetter for having organized this historic flight and allowing me to participate!».

<sup>1</sup> Edouard Martin, Belgian pilot and owner of a Topsy Nipper. Pierre Van Wetter, Belgian pilot and Co-Founder of Sonaca Aircraft.

<sup>2</sup> «1931-2011. Sonaca, 80 years of passion for the aviation industry» by Pierre Sonveaux and Pierre Taquet.

<sup>3</sup> Topsy: Ernest Oscar Topsy, Belgian engineer, founder of Fairey Aircraft S.A. in Gosselies.

<sup>4</sup> Reference book: «Topsy aircraft» by Vincent Jacobs.



Nearly a century after the first two-seater trainer (Topsy Aircraft) rolled out of the Gosselies factories; Sonaca Aircraft has met the general aviation challenge by developing a new generation of certified two-seater aircraft which is intended for pilot training and leisure flights. The symbolic flight of the Sonaca 200 and the Topsy demonstrates the local aviation dynamics, and above all nearly a century of Sonaca Group's passion for aviation.

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