

45th IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)  
50th Anniversary of Manned Space Flight (1)

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## GAGARINE, A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH FRANCE

**Abstract**

There has for long been a special relationship between France and Russia, beginning in the aerospace field with Robert Esnault-Pelterie, then Ary Sternfeld, and the unique Normandie-Niemen common fighter squadron based in Soviet Union during World War II.

The historic flight of Gagarine thus had a huge impact in France, to such an extent that the French language was overnight modified, the term “cosmonaut” replacing “astronaut” – still to this day!

So it is no surprise that Gagarine made an extensive tour of France after his flight, when this, then young, author had the luck to see him in Metz in Lorraine. He also became a friend of Albert Ducrocq, the French engineer who was the greatest space populariser ever. It was the occasion for him, a fan of cars, to be given a new Matra 530 speed car, which became his preferred one.

It should not be forgotten that at the time of his flight, the corresponding launcher still was highly mysterious. It again befell upon France to be the place where the latter was finally revealed, in typical Soviet style, with a huge scale 1 mock-up during the 1967 Paris Air Show.

A research in progress even seems to show that some details about the Zemiorka were known in France well before.

This paper will detail the impact of Gagarine’s flight in France, as well as the many subsequent connections.