

Not Just for Criminals

When the Montgolfier brothers wanted to launch their new invention, the hot-air balloon, in November 1783, King Louis XVI insisted the test pilots be criminals. He probably figured if the balloon failed, no major loss. Physicist Pilâtre de Rozier and French army major Marquis Francois d'Arlandes convinced his majesty otherwise and became the first humans to pilot an untethered balloon.

While balloon materials have changed since 1783, the spirit of homebuilding hasn't. Brooklynite Louis Vitanza built this beauty in 1993. Registered as N56LV with serial number 0693, the balloon has a 56,000-cubic-foot capacity blue and yellow nylon envelope. The two-place wicker and leather trim basket with a traditional wood floor holds two propane tanks that feed a single burner. Vitanza donated the craft in 2000, making it the only homebuilt hot-air balloon in EAA's collection.

-Kathleen L. Witman

