

# French TGV train breaks record for rail speed

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**BEZANNES, France:** France's high-speed TGV train broke the record for speed on a rail Tuesday in a much publicized test.

The train reached a maximum of 574.8 kilometers an hour, or 357 miles an hour, but fell just short of the record for all types of train.

That record is held by the magnetic levitation train of Japan, whose technology means it does not touch the rail. It reached a speed of 581 kilometers per hour in 2003.

But the Japanese technology is more costly, typically runs shorter distances and is less compatible with existing rail networks.

The French train, code-named V150, is a research prototype meant to demonstrate the superiority of the TGV high-speed train and its likely successor, the AGV. Both are built by the French engineering company Alstom.

Alstom and the French railroad company, SNCF, touted the event as a test of "French excellence," building on national pride for the 25-year-old bullet train.

The train reached its maximum speed in about 16 minutes at a site about 200 kilometers from Paris on a specially chosen sector of track on the new Eastern Europe TGV line, which will begin services between Paris and Strasbourg in June. The V150 train, with a reduced number of train cars and larger wheels, incorporates technological elements that are to be used in the AGV.

SNCF and Alstom said the demonstration did not fulfill any immediate commercial purpose.

"This world speed record is intended for research, to improve security and performance. And today the train that runs the fastest is the Eastern TGV," Anne-Marie Idrac, head of SNCF, said as she left the train. "We don't see the market today for such high speed."

Others, however, say that its speed could serve as a selling point in Asia and other markets. Alstom is the world leader in high-speed train production, with 21 percent of the market, but its competitors, Siemens of Germany and Hitachi of Japan, have cut into its lead.

Alstom has 70 percent of the market for trains that reach 270 kilometers per hour or more, its chief executive, Patrick Kron, said in an interview.

"There are big developments to come in Europe, but also Latin America where we just announced we are competing for an order in Argentina," Kron said.

High-speed trains are a potentially lucrative market in developing countries. China and India are the biggest markets, with China presently spending about \$20 billion a year on its rail sector, while India is looking at developing a high-speed train network.

On Tuesday, crowds gathered on bridges overlooking the tracks to watch the train whiz by, and national television broadcast live images from the train.

France operates 400 TGV trains on 1,800 kilometers of track built specially for high speeds.