



Text: Sébastien Dominé - Translation: Marc Arys © sbap 2016
 Pictures: Sébastien Dominé, Thomas alsina, Serge Van Heertum & Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP

The internet is sometimes quite surprising, in the good sense of the word. Indeed, some months ago, our redaction received an email from Sébastien Dominé, a French neighbour who moved to the United States. His request was simple but astonishing. Being an aviation passionate, he earned his pilot wings and had acquired a Siai-Marchetti SF.260. His dream... paint it in the colours of the Belgian Air Force and in particular to the standards of the first camouflage scheme. It was quite clear, reading this mail; we dealt with an enthusiastic and thoughtful person.

And so SBAP entered the project to help this pilot from across the Atlantic and without any hesitation we provided him with the paint drawings and detailed pictures, especially on the markings. As the project was moving in the right direction, we asked Sébastien, to tell us his aeronautical adventure and why this passion for this little trainer aircraft designed by Stelio Frati. So here you have the story of Sébastien and his ST-12 (N26AE)...(Serge Van Heertum)

Marchetti Dreams (By Sébastien Dominé)

I grew up with airplanes. First of all, those of my father, a commercial pilot at Air Inter, flying the Dassault Mercure, the Airbus A300 - his Jodel DR1051 and especially the B-17 "Pink Lady" from the association Forteresse Toujours Volante, based at La Ferté Alais.

I also grew up among pilots. My father, my brothers, my godfather and of course all the close ones having a common link with aviation. Growing up in a little village near La Ferté Alais, I was surrounded by these dreammachines and their mythical pilots, a combination which makes aviation so fascinating - the machine is nothing without its pilot, who brings it to life and pilots without their machines are just ordinary men.

La Ferté Alais is just all of that. A unique collection of airplanes tracing back this iconic aviation history - from the reproductions of the Blériot XI or Caudron G3 to the inescapable Morane and North American T-6. The team of the Amicale Jean-Baptiste Salis swiftly found a new member with my dad, who took an active part in the association. The big Mass of La Ferté is the yearly airshow held during the Pentecost weekend.

Each year the entire Dominé family and close friends attend the airshow. I started to enjoy airshows as soon as the noise of jet engines no longer made me weep. My father was part of every meeting displaying the Mercure or other aircraft from Air Inter - but also with logistical support - and that year with the pilots of the Belgian Air Force staying over at our house. Back then, all the members of the association and their relatives helped with the housing of the pilots and ground crews.

I was about 12 years old and was not really aware of the honoured guests at our house. I recall seeing two men arrive dressed in army flight suits who impressed me very much. They ate at home (my mother is great cook) and diner was well "irrigated" - I remember everybody laughing out loud as one of the pilots told funny jokes with mastery - especially the "funny Belgian stories".



"Pink Lady" in action at La Ferté
(© Serge Van Heertum)



"Seb" got the opportunity to make some flights with the B-17G
Here at Duxford during a Flying Legends airshow (© Sebastien Dominé)

The following day, I was on the airfield with my Mom and my brothers attending the airshow and it was this year that I spotted two airplanes with military camouflage and red fluorescent stripes. I felt they were not as big or impressive as the usual fighter planes. Even rather ridiculous compared to the T-6 or other warbirds from Stephen Grey's collection. So I went on to look at the aerial displays and then it was time for those two little Belgian military airplanes, of which I did not even know the type nor the manufacturer.



Dr Ing Stelio Frati (Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)

They took off in pair from the grassy runway of La Ferté but without the usual racket of the warbirds' Pratt & Whitney. Again I thought these two "David" seemed a little frail although flying at a good pace. And then, when they came back in the pattern for their display, it was love at first sight. The "Swallows" completely seduced me - open mouthed - not only by the grace and elegance of their presentation but also by the harmonious shape of this airplane - which, by the way, I still did not know anything about. One has to confess, this airplane, gear-up, releases its overall splendour which can not be appreciated totally when on the ground. It was not until years later that I figured out what caused me to have this huge crush on this plane. It was the combination of the classy Italian design from the great Stelio Frati, the sexy dress up with the classical camouflage from the Belgian Air Force, and the magical flying of these two pilots, who stayed at our home, that brought everything together to create this unforgettable love story.

The "Swallows" flew a more than graceful aerobatic display of which I can not remember all the details. Although I recall this couple of swallows in a very tight formation flying large loops with the precision of a watchmaker together with the harmonious whistle of their Lycoming engines. A real aerial ballet!

Shortly after the show, my dad received a nice dedicated photograph of the Marchettis in a tight formation in a setting sun, emphasizing their elegant shapes. He placed it in the poolroom where I regularly admired them - which reenforced the memory of this aircraft.



"Seb" father presenting the Dassault Mercure at La Ferté (© Serge Van Heertum) - "Danny" and "Xav" The "Swallows" (© Serge Van Heertum)
The souvenir picture offered to "Seb" father during the "Swallows" rest (Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)

Years went by. I completed school and found myself about to leave to the United States following my wife and go on a professional career in the software engineering. Airplanes were quite far from my mind even if I had some unforgettable flights with my dad in the B-17, when coming over to France or England.

It was not until approaching the crucial forty years of age, that the idea of flying came back to me. Laura, a friend of mine, being a pilot since her adolescence and author of the simulator Infinite Flight, finally convinced me to take a flight in the vicinity of San Francisco (one of the famous Bay Tour). I was bugged.

I got my private pilot licence some years later after a strict training given by Dominique Yarritu (flying is easy - but the radio part and the many air spaces of San Francisco add to the stress for any pilot). After this, a little 'tailwheel' training with Martin Michaud - as the C-172 is nice, but a little bit too boring :. I went on to the Citabria and Super Decathlon doing some aerobatics with some escapades with the North American T-6 and Vultee BT-13 flown by Martin. In the meantime, without further thoughts, I looked at ads of aircraft for sale published in the local flying clubs.

I saw an ad from Mike Patlin who regularly sells the type of aircraft which I fell in love with while being a kid - the Marchetti SF 260. I started to look up the history of this aircraft, of the designer and read several "Pireps" (pilot reports) on the extraordinary performances of this aircraft powered by an engine of just 260 HP. I also learned about some complexe features of the fuel management and the effect of its laminar airfoil.



Champion Aircraft Citabria (Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)



Bellanca Super Decathlon and "Seb" son (© Sébastien Dominé)



North American T-6 Texan (Coll Sébastien Dominé)



Vultee BT-13 Vaillant (© Sébastien Dominé)

Time goes by, flight time sums up gently and finally there is this opportunity. My stock-options from NVIDIA fly up enough that I could look up at the purchasing of a Marchetti. I spotted some airplanes on the market and concentrated on one in particular who seemed like a good deal. Mike Patlin is the broker and after a few phone calls we agree to set up a testflight during Thanksgiving 2015 with the owner Pete Leffe, in Santa Monica. Having my in-laws living in Los Angeles, I had the perfect alibi with my wife who did not understand yet what was happening. So here I am - having breakfast with Mike and Peter at the Spitfire grill next to the airfield. Pete brought along all maintenance and log books to show me his thoroughness maintaining his aircraft during those 25 years. I had never bought an airplane before apart from reading some articles on how to complete a deal, but apparently I did not know very much about going through the paperwork. Pete traced me back the history of N26AE. It is model 230 - of the MB serie - for the Burman Air Force ("M" for Military - "B" for Burma). Built in 1976, it is declared surplus in 1986 (?) and bought by the Belgian Aspair Company. Afterwards the aircraft went to a private American owner in 1990 to be restored. Pete bought it the same year to sell it when passing 70 years of age deciding to sail around the world.

N26AE was improved during its tenure with Pete, receiving "aileron boosts" as we find on the SF 260 C. He also cut down the flight stick to conform with the C-model.



The N26AE owned by Pete Leffe and Emily Bloom
(Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)



"Double Trouble" on taxi
(Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)

Having covered all these details on N26AE, we went to the hangar where Pete kept his Marchetti. As the doors opened I discovered the muse who conquered me more than 30 years ago. The airplane seemed to be in a much better shape than I expected and I was immediately impressed by the finesse of the leading edge and the overall level of craftsmanship of the construction. I realised it was the first time I was so close to a Marchetti SF 260. Pete let me do the pre-flight and once again I was beaten by the feeling of precision and quality on the flight controls, just by moving them from the outside. We looked at the engine which seemed okay - I did not spot any bird's nest :. He showed me the battery compartment holding a civil and lighter battery type. I noticed as well that the leading edges of the tail had lost some of its paint. Pete told me the aircraft had not been painted for the last 25 years - but was all this time kept in a hangar. This did not bother me further... Should I buy it, I would repaint it in the original colours of the Belgian Air Force "Swallows" like at La Ferté Alais, 35 years before.

Getting into the plane after a few instructions regarding how to get into the cockpit without damaging anything. The blue harness a little worn out and still wears the inscriptions of the Burman Air Force. Seats adjusted, Pete starts the engine, but he goes too fast for me to follow the action as he is used to the plane and knows it by heart. The engine hums like Wagner and the dashboard, at first look, seemingly complexe, begins to make sense.

After the necessary clearance, we start to taxi for runway 21. The nose pointing upwards preventing a good sight of the taxiway. Pete warned me he will brake a little to bring down the nose and improve the view. Run up at the "Tee-bar", everything running smoothly and I already feel the power of the 260 horses of the Lycoming O-540 will give me a completely different sensation than the IO-320 of the Super Decathlon. Tower giving us take-off clearance, we line up on runway 21. Throttle forward, the airplane hangs on the propeller and jumps forward with quite a nice acceleration and a sensation of pleasant power. At 65 knots, Pete pulls the stick a little aft and holds it there until the plane leaves the ground, mildly waking up the stall-alarm which silences rightaway as speeds continues to build up. Gears up, keeping 90 knots during the climb and retracting the flaps as soon as the red light of the gears goes out. Speed increases instantly to

110 knots with a steady climb of 1500 feet/minute - I realise that flying the Marchetti is far more complex compared to the planes I am used to fly. We fly along the coast of Malibu and Pete hands me the controls. I grasp the stick with my two hands, confirming I have control and Pete confirming back the surrender of the control. As soon as the transition is done, Pete corrects my hold of the stick, recommending to use only three fingers on top of the stick, elbow resting on my lap, as the controls are very light, precise and responsive. Transitioning to level flight, the speed builds up to 150 knots and I need to use the 'trim' to correct the stick pressure and stay level. The sight from the cockpit is magnificent. With its bubble canopy and a little nose down attitude in level flight, it feels like being on a flying carpet.

3000 feet above Malibu, I start to do some turns, trying to maintain the altitude and tightening bit by bit until the stall-alarm blinks timidly. I ease back on the stick and start a turn in the opposite direction. The airplane reacts with an extreme precision and dexterity giving me the sensation of being a part of my body.

The flight is coming to an end and Pete ordered me to fly back to Santa Monica airfield. He is doing the radio while I descend to the pattern altitude. Even having reduced the power to 15 inches, the airplane is reluctant to slow down and we need quite some time in the "downwind" to lose the necessary speed to move the flaps 20 degrees down and be ready to lower the gear around 105 knots. Turning toward runway 21 - full flaps and maintaining 90 knots on "trim". The descent rate is quite high. Pete stays at 15 inches of power until the flare. Approaching the ground with smooth and gentle correction on the stick, the airplane settles gently on the runway just before the stall-alarm starts to sound and lift disappears all at once. Stick back, applying brakes, the aircraft slows down quickly and we leave the runway towards the north-west side of the field. Quick taxi to the hangar and Pete cuts the engine. I am in shell-shocked. This is really my dream airplane, nothing to complain about. After a moment of silence and a last glance at the dashboard, I unbuckle my harness and get out of the plane. I am like in a second state of mind, a little bit of slap-happy you can have after a good scotch before dinner, grinning, just feeling happy to confirm my lust for this Italian machine of which I fell in love so many years ago.

Mike is asking for my impressions, I try to hide my overflowing enthusiasm so as not to lose all my assets when negotiating the price. I let Pete and Mike know I would think about it. At home, I immediately announced the intention of buying an airplane to my wife, who casually responded as if it was a benign purchase "no problems - go for it". I was expecting far more resistance from her with financial matters in particular, which could have made me reconsidering this exorbitance, but no...gotta love her!

A few weeks later I went back to Santa Monica at Stealth Aviation as to have Ray Myllyla do the pre-sale inspection of the aircraft and I was signing the purchase at the end of the same day. I just fulfilled another of my childhood dreams - after the one of finding the love of my life and founding a magnificent family with my three sons.

The wedding night over, the euphoria made way to the reality as I had to get qualified on the Marchetti to fly it back to San Jose. I did not have the qualifications for the "high-performance" and "complex" aircraft. Pete proposed to train me and to set up a planning as to allow me to fly the aircraft back with the instructor-pilot and having me checked-out on the return flight. A real mouthwatering proposal, being instructed by the 25 years owner of the plane I just bought. Two intensive training weekends later at Camarillo, Pete and I got along quite well and he proposed to me to do the return flight together rather than having me hire my instructor. Ray found me a local instructor, Sean Gillette, a former USAF pilot, to have me checked out before the return flight and one and a half hour later I had my endorsements to fly the Marchetti. Pete's rigorous training, at yelling at me regarding the G.U.M.P. and C.I.G.A.R., engraved the good habits necessary to manage and land the plane safely.

Pete flew with me to San Jose and stayed overnight. At last he met with my wife and my kids. I just made a new friend.

Flight hours building up regularly : flights around the San Francisco Bay, breakfast at Half-Moon Bay and Petulama, and flights with friends to show them what a real airplane looked like. But the wear of the leading edge paint on the tail and some too close encounters with other aircraft motivated me to initiate the repainting and the installation of more modern avionics, all this anticipating the need to have an ADS-B before 2020 required for airspaces around large international airports (Class B).



The real Belgian Air Force ST-12 with the first camouflage version (Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)

I already knew the paint would be the camouflage of the Belgian Air Force of my childhood. Searching the internet gave me a lot of information in general on the various paint schemes used by the Belgian army, but not enough precision as to recreate a faithful replica. Mike Patlin supplied me with more information on the military use of the SF 260 from other air forces but nothing on the Belgian Air Force. Mike even contacted AerMACchi without obtaining more specifications on the subject as this aircraft is still in use in the Belgian Air Force.

Many hours of research later without any tangible results, I started to contact former Belgian Air Force pilots and doing so I contacted Benoit Whilems, who has some very beautiful pictures of the Marchetti from the 70's and brought me in contact with other people. On the internet I also discovered the SBAP site with quite a lot of detailed pictures of the Marchetti. So I decided to contact the

webmaster who confirmed to me the possibility to obtain more information after his return from a business trip. Parallel to this I also had put my father to work to see if he could contact the people at La Ferté to see if they could complement the needed information. Following the Pentacost airshow, he brought me into contact with Yves Cartelier, who gave me some useful information but above all confirmed me the contact with the SBAP-site, Serge Van Heertum, apparently being an expert on the subject, having written a book on the Marchetti. Finally I had come full circle.

Serge provided me with very precise information, like the paint specifications (federal standard), the two-tone camouflage of the time, size and placement of the roundels, dimension of the spiral, even the details on the various markings.

A real goldmine and an illimited willingness to lend me a hand on this passionate project. I received a signed copy of his book which is THE reference on the subjet. Regular exchanges with Serge on the progress of the paint job at Corona allowed us to come full circle completely.

Moreover, after further correspondance, we realized that he was also present at the Pentacost airshow at La Ferté during which the Marchetti seduced me. He is also friend with Xavier and Dany - the two 'Swallows' pilots who stayed at our parents home back then. The culmination point of this story is a picture taken by Serge during this meeting where my father displayed the Dassault Mercure of Air Inter and where you can see the two SF 260 taxiing back on the runway.

Really the full circle !

Thanks Serge. Thanks Pete, Thanks the "Swallows" !

See also Sebastien's blog: <http://www.sf260swallows.org/>

Siai-Marchetti SF.260MB c/n 230 (21-06)



Burma Air Force SF.260MB preserved in the local air museum
(Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)



The SF.260 were replaced by the PC-7 from Pilatus 1 in 1990
(Coll Serge Van Heertum / SBAP)

This aircraft was built in 1976 and delivered to the Myanmar (Burman) Air Force. Less information's are available of this military and rather exotic period. On June 30th, 1990 the aircraft is bought directly from the Burman government by the firm ASPAIR S.A. located at Gosselies Airport. Pilatus entered the transaction as well as they sold their PC-7 in replacement of the SF.260 of the Myanmar Air Force.

The aircraft now based at Gosselies received its Belgian certification and was registered as OO-XBL but only earmarked for exportation, as the aircraft had already been sold to L.A. Welcome from Redmond (Washington State) and registered N26EA. On November 09th, 1990, she changes owners and goes to Fort Wayne Air Service Inc. On April 03rd, 1992 the N26AE is bought by a private Pete Leffe & Emily F. Bloom from Ashland (Ohio). Pete will treasure her during 23 years until 2015, when passionate Sébastien Dominé from San-José, California, became her owner.

(By Serge Van Heertum)

ROYAUME DE BELGIQUE Kingdom of Belgium		KONINKRIJK BELGIE Kingdom of Belgium	
Ministère des Communications Ministry of Communications		Ministerie van Verkeerswezen Ministry of Communications	
Administration de l'Aéronautique Civil Aeronautics Administration		Bestuur der Luchtvaart Civil Aeronautics Administration	
3952		90F GT 03434 DOF GT 034354	
Certificat de Navigabilité		Bewijs van Luchtvaardigheid	
CERTIFICATE OF AIRWORTHINESS		FOR EXPORT	
1. Marques de nationalité et d'immatriculation 1. Nationaliteits- en inschrijvingskenmerken 1. Nationality and Registration Marks OO-XBL	2. Constructeur et désignation de l'aéronef donnée par le constructeur 2. Bouwer van het luchtvaartuig en door de bouwer gegeven aanduiding ervan 2. Make of Aircraft SIAI Marchetti SF260 D	3. Numéro de série de l'aéronef 3. Reeksnummer van het luchtvaartuig 3. Aircraft Serial No 230 (21-06)	
4. Catégorie 4. Category Normal and acrobatic	Mentions d'emploi Gebruikvermeldingen c of A export Operation ratings	max. Nbr persons on board : 3 (three) Four (4) persons	
5. Le présent Certificat de Navigabilité — est délivré à l'aéronef ci-dessus désigné, conformément à la Convention relative à l'Aviation Civile Internationale, en date du 7 décembre 1944 (loi du 26 avril 1947) et aux règlements belges ; cet aéronef est réputé apte au vol lorsqu'il est entretenu et utilisé conformément aux textes, pratiques et aux limites d'emploi applicables. — n'est valable qu'associé aux documents approuvés suivants :		5. This Certificate of Airworthiness — is issued pursuant to the Convention on International Civil Aviation dated 7 December 1944 (Law of 26 April 1947) and to the Belgian regulations, in respect of the above mentioned aircraft, which is considered to be airworthy when maintained and operated in accordance with the foregoing and the pertinent operating limitations. — is only valid when associated with the following approved documents : — Pilote's manual — Certificat Data sheet n° A10EU	
6. Périodes de validité : voir verso. 6. Geldigheidsduur : zie keerzijde. 6. Periods of validity : see overleaf.	Au Nom du Ministre : Namens de Minister: For the Minister: A. NAENHAUT Directeur d'Administration a.i.		

The OO-XBL airworthiness certificate made only for export (© Sebastien Dominé)

The painting project is launched...



The paint is stripped and the aircraft coated with anti-corrosion product (© Sebastien Dominé)

COCCARDA - B -
Scala 1:5



SCRITTA - C -
Scala 1:5



VENTRE VELIVOLO
Scala 1:5

VERNICATURA VELIVOLO

APPLICAZIONE DI UNA MANO DI VERNICE

SCHEMI: 100.000000

COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000
COL. 10.000000	COL. 10.000000

ITEM	DESCRIZIONE	QUANTITA'	UNITA'	VALORE
1.1	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.2	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.3	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.4	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.5	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.6	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.7	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.8	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.9	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000
1.10	VERNICATURA VELIVOLO	1	MANO	10.000000

The painting plan made by "Seb" (© Sebastien Dominé)



Primer coating (© Sebastien Dominé)



The camouflage is painted... (© Sebastien Dominé)



Day Glo applied (© Sebastien Dominé)



The ST-12 is now applied (© Sebastien Dominé)

(© Sebastien Dominé)



The Belgian roundels (© Sebastien Dominé)



(© Sebastien Dominé)



(© Sebastien Dominé)



The masks are removed (© Sebastien Dominé)



(© Sebastien Dominé)



(© Sebastien Dominé)



Some engine works in the sun of Corona Municipal Airport (© Sebastien Dominé)



(© Sebastien Dominé)



Freshly out of Corona Air Paint facilities (© Sebastien Dominé)



Painting is finished...simply beautiful (© Sebastien Dominé)



Some years ago at Goetsenhoven airbase? No the N26AE at Corona CA airfield (© Sebastien Dominé)



Quick stop at Shellville (© Sebastien Dominé)



"Seb" and his "Agile Penguin" in flight (© Sebastien Dominé)

Air to Air for posterity



Flight between Tiburon (in the back) and Angel Island (© Thomas Alsina)



San Francisco International Airport
(© Thomas Alsina)



En route for the air to air photo session...
(© Thomas Alsina)



Between Mineta San-Jose airport and the Golden Bay bridge (© Thomas Alsina)



Along the coast
(© Thomas Alsina)



Mc Inleth loop area? ...No just near the Golden Gate bridge
(© Thomas Alsina)



Above the Golden Gate bridge
(© Thomas Alsina)



Amazing...isn't it?
(© Thomas Alsina)



"Agile Penguin" above "Sisco"
(© Thomas Alsina)



Golden Gate Bridge, Tiburon in the back and
Angel Island at the right of the picture (© Thomas Alsina)



A perfect paint...under side...
(© Thomas Alsina)



...and upper side
(© Thomas Alsina)



Playing with a ship
(© Sebastien Dominé)



San Francisco in the background
(© Thomas Alsina)



San Francisco and the Alcatraz Jail Island...Just a mytic place for the Agile Penguin (© Thomas Alsina)



"Seb" at command
(© Thomas Alsina)



The ST-12 above San Francisco Bay
(© Thomas Alsina)



Like it was in Belgium 45 years ago above the North Sea (© Thomas Alsina)



Alcatraz Jail Island
(© Sebastien Dominé)



(© Thomas Alsina)



(© Thomas Alsina)



The Pacific Ocean
(© Thomas Alsina)



After 40 years, the SF.260 remain an elegant aircraft
(© Thomas Alsina)



Above the coast
(© Thomas Alsina)



Passing above Half Moon bay airfield
(© Thomas Alsina)



Half Moon bay marina (Princeton)
(© Thomas Alsina)



Way back to Mineta San-José airport
(© Thomas Alsina)



Sun reflections
(© Thomas Alsina)



On the way back to San Jose Airport
(© Thomas Alsina)



Crossing the highway near Monté area
(© Thomas Alsina)



The new Apple Campus in construction in the background
(© Thomas Alsina)



Above the airport
(© Thomas Alsina)



Turning right above the airport runways
(© Thomas Alsina)



Those wonderful pictures were made with a Bonanza aircraft
piloted by Dan Zitter (© Sebastien Dominé)



On taxi after this splendid photoshoot
(© Thomas Alsina)



Dan Zitter the pilot and Thomas Alsina the photographer
(© Sébastien Dominé)



"Seb" a real happy guy with his SF.260. Feel free to click on the picture to watch the video of the flight (© Thomas Alsina)

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