

# A Concise History of Air Racing

By Don Berliner

## Chapter 4 -- A World War in the Offing

### Part 1-1934

#### All-American Air Races

Information on this January 11-13 racing meet at Miami will be added as it becomes available

#### Coupe Deutsch de la Muerthe

The second race in this third series—May 27 at Etampes, France—saw the emergence of the Caudrons as unbeatable racers. With Renault straight-six engines and two-position Ratier propellers, they were not to be seriously challenged. This year saw Maurice Arnoux win in the fixed-landing gear C.450 at 241.70 mph, followed by a fixed-landing gear C.366 flown by Louis Masotte at 224.15 mph, and Albert Monville in a C-460 at 211.92 mph. Yet another C.460 completed the first stage at 240.48 mph. The updated Potez 53's were out-classed.

#### The 13<sup>th</sup> King's Cup Race

The race operated out of Hatfield, and was flown on a 798-mile course on July 13-14. The first round consisted of six heats with 41 starters. From these, the top 24 raced in four heats. The top 14 then raced in two semi-final heats, with the best 10 flying for the King's Cup. The winner, in a Monospar ST-1 was H.M. Schofield at 134.16 mph. In second was Tommy Rose in a Miles Hawk Major at 147.78 mph. And in third place was Laurance Lipton at 124.18 mph in a Gypsy Moth. Of greatest long-term significance was the entry of the prototype Percival Mew Gull by Edgar Percival.

#### The National Air Races

Held August 31 to September 4, the races saw the final display of Wedell Williams domination, and the debut of the Greve Trophy Race for airplanes having no more than 550 cu. in.

The Bendix Trophy Race from Los Angeles had the shortest entry list ever: two Wedell Williams and the GeeBee R-6 "Q.E.D." 1929 Thompson Cup winner Doug Davis won in a Wedell at 216.237, with J.A. Worthen second in a Wedell at 203.213 mph. Lee Gehlbach arrived too late in the stretched GeeBee.

The Greve Trophy Race consisted of three 30-mile heat races, with the winner determined by points. In first, with a fastest heat of 206.241 mph, was Lee Miles in the Miles & Atwood Special. Tied for second were Roger Don Rae (Keith Rider "San Francisco") at 211.03 mph and At Chester ("Jeep") at 203.382 mph.

In the finale Thompson Trophy Race, for 10 laps of a 10-mile course, Roscoe Turner won at 248.13 mph in Wedell Williams #57. Second place went to Roy Minor in the Brown "Miss Los Angeles" at 214.93 mph, and third went to James Worthen in #92 Wedell at 208.38 mph. Doug Davis died in a crash.

## The MacRobertson Race

It has been called "The World's Greatest Air Race". It started on October 20 at Mildenhall, England, finished October 23 at Melbourne, Australia, and covered 11,300 miles. There were 59 entries from 12 countries, of which 19 started and 9 finished. The winners of both the Speed and Handicap Divisions were Scott and Campbell-Black in a bright red deHavilland 88 Comet, one of three designed and built for the race. Second in both Divisions were Parmentier and Moll in a Douglas DC-2 of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines. Third in the Speed Division were Roscoe Turner and Clyde Pangborn in a Boeing 247 airliner.

## Part 2 – 1935

### The All-American Air Races

The January 11-13 meet was held near Miami, Florida. Details will be provided as available.

### Coupe Deutsch de la Muerthe

The 2,000-km race around a 100-km. course south of Paris was held May 19. Caudron C.460's took the first two places, with Raymond Delmotte averaging a record 275.89 mph, and Yves Lacombe 263.60 mph. The only other finisher—a Caudron C.450 flown on the first lap by Albert Monville, and the second by Maurice Arnoux, whose C.460 averaged 276 mph for the first lap—was clocked at 216.67 mph. All five starters flew Caudrons.

### The National Air Races

This has been called the "Benny Howard National Air Races", as his airplanes won all three major events. The Bendix went to Ben in his high-wing "Mr. Mulligan", edging Roscoe Turner in #57 Wedell Williams by 24 seconds, as they averaged 238.70 mph to 238.52 mph. In third was Russell Thaw in a Northrop Gamma at 201.93 mph.

All three heats of the Greve Trophy Race were won by Harold Neumann in Howard's "Mike", with a best speed of 212.716 mph. Second on points was Roger Don Rae in the Keith Rider R-1, with a best of 210.126 mph. Third was Art Chester in his "Jeep" with a best of 199.078 mph.

The classic Thompson Trophy Race saw a nip-and-tuck battle between Neumann in "Mr. Mulligan" and Steve Wittman in his Curtiss D-12-powered "Bonzo". Neumann won by 15 seconds after 150 miles of racing. He averaged 220.19 mph, Wittman was at 218.69 mph, and third-place Roger Don Rae flew the Keith Rider R-1 at 213.94 mph.

## The 14th King's Cup Race

Hatfield was the site of this September 6-7 race, which started out with a 1,303-mile qualifying race to Scotland, Ireland and back. The best then flew six laps of a short course, with the winner being Tommy Rose in a Miles Falcon Six at 176.28 mph, second was H.R.A. Edwards in a Miles Hawk Major at 158 mph, and third was Charles Gardner in a Percival Gull Six at 170.08 mph. Three pilots flew the new, race-modified Miles Hawk Speed Six.

## All-American Air Races

The re-named All-American Air Maneuvers were held at Miami on December 12-14. When information becomes available, it will be added.

### Part 3 – 1936

## The 15th King's Cup Race

The July 10-11 race from Hatfield consisted of an eliminating round of two laps of a 612-mile course, followed by the final round's six laps of a 26-mile "short" course. The winner, at 164.47 mph, was Charles Gardner in a Percival Vega Gull. Second was Tommy Rose in a Hawk Speed six at 185 mph, and third was J.B. Wilson in a B.A. Double Eagle light twin at 181 mph.

## The National Air Races

Construction at Cleveland Airport again necessitated a move to Los Angeles for the September 4-7 races. Michel Detroyat and his dark blue Caudron C.460 dominated the major closed-course races, demonstrating the value of advanced streamlining and of extensive testing and proving.

The Bendix Trophy Race ran for 2,466 miles from New York and was the slowest ever. When the favored custom-built airplanes dropped by the wayside, women pilots persevered. Louise Thaden and Blanche Noyes won in a Beech 17 Staggerwing at 165.35 mph, followed by Laura Ingalls in a Lockheed Orion at 157.47 mph. William Gullick was third in a big Vultee V-1A at 156.49 mph.

The Greve Trophy Race was a more conventional single heat for 20 laps of a 5-mile course. Michel Detroyat won easily at a record 247.300 mph, more than two minutes ahead of Harold Neumann in the Folkerts "Toots" at 225.858 mph. Art Chester was third in his "Jeep" at 224.682 mph.

The Thompson saw another big win for the Frenchman, as he again won by more than two minutes over the 150 miles. He averaged a Thompson record 264.26 mph to 248.04 mph for Earl Ortman in the Marcoux-Bromberg, and 236.56 mph for Roger Don Rae in the Keith Rider R-4.

Considerable unhappiness was displayed by the American pilots, which they eventually turned into new, faster airplanes.

## Coupe Deutsch de la Muerthe

Problems with temperamental Renault engines spoiled the debut of two new Caudron racers. The C.560 was a C.460 with a 450 hp V-12, while the C.561 also had a flush canopy. The only new machines to start the race were a pair of C.461's, C.460's with flush canopies. The winner was the 1934/1936 winning C.450, fixed landing gear and all. Yves Lacombe averaged a disappointing 242.01 mph. In second was Maurice Arnoux in a C.461 at 229.66 mph. Raymond Delmotte, in the other C.461, failed to finish the first stage, but turned in the fastest lap at 268.55 mph.

Attempts were made to conduct races in 1937, 1938 and 1939, but insufficient airplanes were ready in time, and soon the prospects of war began to have their impact on France. Some fascinating designs had been under construction, including the Bugatti 100 with its buried engine driving contra-rotating propellers, and two Payen canard-deltawings.

## Schlesinger Race

This race was for the 6,150 miles from Portsmouth, England, to Johannesburg, South Africa, and was limited to British Commonwealth airplanes and crews. It started September 29 and finished October 1. The only crew, out of nine starters, to finish was MacRobertson Race winner Charles Scott and Giles Guthrie, who flew a Percival Vega Gull in 52 hours, 56 minutes. Scott's MacRobertson co-pilot, Tom Campbell Black, died a few days before the race when his Percival Mew Gull was destroyed in a ground accident.

## The All-American Air Maneuvers

This Miami race meet was held December 10-12. More information is forthcoming.

## Part 4-1937

### The International Air Races

This meet was held May 29-31 at Lambert-St. Louis Municipal Airport, St. Louis, Missouri. There were two featured races: Sunday's 50-mile 549 cu. in. Free-for-All, and Monday's Missouri Brewers' Association Trophy Race. The first was won by Rudy Kling in a Folkerts Racer at 233.7 mph, with Marion McKeen second in the Brown B-2 at 229.2 mph, and Steve Wittman third in his "Chief Oshkosh" at 201.1 mph. In the second featured race, Gus Gotch won at 251.6 mph in the Schoenfeldt Special (Keith Rider R-4). Second was Marion McKeen at 220.5 mph, and third was Wittman at 212.3 mph

### The Circuit of the Alps Race

This was an example of how the sport of air racing could be used for propaganda purposes. The Zurich (Switzerland) International Week included three divisions of the 230-mile race around Alpine peaks and through picturesque valleys on July 25. The first went to German Maj. Seidemann in a 650 hp Me-109 fighter at 240.9 mph. The second went to German Maj. Polte in a Dornier Do.17 bomber at 233.5 mph. And the third was won by a 640 hp Me-109 at 255 mph, with Charles Gardner second at 220 mph in a 200 hp Percival Mew Gull.

## The Istres-Damascus-Paris Race

To replace the cancelled New York-to-Paris Race, a race of 3,850 miles from the south of France to Syria and back to Paris was scheduled for August 20-21. Two dozen entries were received, of which 13 started and 7 finished. Italian Air Force Savoia-Marchetti SM.79 tri-motored bombers took the first three places with times between 17:32:45 and 18:03:35. In fourth was Alex Clouston in the MacRobertson-winning Comet.

## The National Air Races

The Americans quickly recovered from the embarrassment of losing to a French pilot and airplane, and produced some of the closest racing ever seen.

In the Bendix Trophy Race from Los Angeles to Cleveland, Frank Fuller won in a prototype of the Seversky P-35 Army pursuit, clocking 258.24 mph to break Jimmy Haizlip's 1932 record. In second, at 224.83 mph, was Earl Ortman in the Marcoux-Bromberg, and in third was Jackie Cochran in a Beech 17 at 194.74 mph.

The Greve Trophy Race saw three pilots finish in the space of 4½ seconds: Rudy Kling in the Folkerts SK-3 at 232.272 mph, Steve Wittman in "Chief Oshkosh" at 231.990 mph, and Gus Gotch in the Keith Rider R-4 at 231.593 mph.

In the 200-mile Thompson Trophy Race, Rudy Kling dove at the finish line to nip Earl Ortman by 0.6 seconds: 256.91 mph to 256.86 mph. Roscoe Turner was third in his new #29 "Meteor" at 253.80 mph, Frank Sinclair was fourth in a Seversky at 252.36 mph, and Steve Wittman was fifth in his V-12 powered "Bonzo" at 250.11 mph.

## The 16th King's cup Race

It started on September 11 from Hatfield, with a first-day's race being an all-out speed affair for 787 miles around the British Isles. For the second day, it was a handicapped race of 656 miles. The 31-plane starting line up may have been unmatched for variety and sportyness. The winner was Charles Gardner in a Mew Gull at 233.7 mph, second was A.C. Lewin in a Miles Whitney Straight at 145 mph, and third was Edgar Percival in his latest Mew Gull at 239 mph.

## All-American Air Maneuvers

Held December 3-5 at Miami, Florida. Rudy Kling crashed fatally in the Folkerts SK-3 Jupiter at the scatter pylon.

## Part 5 – 1938

### The Pacific International Air Races

Held at Oakland (California) Airport from May 28-30, it attracted most of the big names in the sport. Young Tony LeVier dominated the 549 cu. in. races in the Schoenfelt "Firecracker" by winning the 75-miler at 249.351 mph and the 100-miler at 251.01 mph. In the latter, Gus Gotch crashed fatally in the Folkerts "Toots", just re-named "The Foo". The main race of the weekend was the 150-mile Unlimited Golden Gate International Exposition Trophy Race. It was an unusually exciting event, with Earl Ortman (Marcoux-Bromberg) repeatedly swapping the lead with Roscoe Turner ("Meteor"). Ortman prevailed by 0.6 seconds, as he averaged a closed-course record 265.539 mph to Turner's 265.457 mph.

### The 17th King's Cup Race

Hatfield on July 2 was again the base for this long-running handicap race. This time it was for 20 laps of a 50.6-mile course for a total of 1,012 miles. The winner, among 19 starters, was Alex Henshaw in a Mew Gull at 236.25 mph. Second was Giles Guthrie in another Mew Gull at 221 mph, and third was L.H.T. Cliff in a Miles Hawk Major at 146 mph.

### The National Air Races

The trend toward very expensive airplanes requiring major sponsorship or very good connections was growing. The "little guy" who designed and built his racer in a small shop was slipping into the background.

The Bendix Race saw all six finishers flying manufactured airplanes. In first was Jackie Cochran at 249.77 mph in a Seversky military prototype. In second was Frank Fuller at 238.60 mph in a similar airplane. And in third was Paul Mantz in a Lockheed Orion at 206.58 mph.

The Greve Trophy Race, for 550 cu. in. engines, was a shining exception to the new trend. Tony LeVier won at 250.886 mph in the "Firecracker", while Art Chester was second in his new "Goon" at 250.416 mph. The margin of victory after 200 miles was 5 seconds.

The Thompson Trophy Race went to Roscoe Turner by more than three minutes, with a record 283.42 mph in his 1,000 hp "Meteor". Earl Ortman was second at 269.72 mph, and Steve Wittman was third at 259.19 mph.

## Part 6 – 1939

### The all-American Air Maneuvers

It was held near Miami, Florida, on the weekend of January 5-7

### The King's Cup Race

It was scheduled for September 2 at Birmingham, but was cancelled because of the expected declaration of war.

## The National Air Races

During the September 2-5 Labor Day weekend races, the German army invaded Poland, starting World War II. The races went on, as America was still isolated from Europe.

The Bendix Race was the preserve of factory-built airplanes, with not a single custom-built racer involved. The winner, Frank Fuller, flew a Seversky prototype and averaged a record 282.10 mph. In second place was Arthur Bussy in the novel tri-motored Bellanca 28-92, at 244.49 mph. Paul Mantz was third in his Lockheed Orion at 234.88 mph.

The final Greve Trophy Race had just four starters, with Lee Williams crashing fatally in the Brown "Miss Los Angeles". Art Chester, the only finisher, clocked a record 263.390 mph. Tony LeVier was averaging 272 mph when he was forced to drop out on lap 12 of the 20-lap race.

The 1939 Thompson Trophy Race was the end of an era dominated by true racing airplanes. Roscoe Turner won his third Thompson and second in a row by averaging 282.54 mph. Tony LeVier was second in the "Firecracker" at 272.54 mph, and Earl Ortman was third in the Marcoux-Bromberg at 254.44 mph.

## Part 7 – 1940

### The All American Air Maneuvers

They were held January 5-7 at Miami, Florida

## Part 8 – 1941

### The All American Air Maneuvers

They were held January 10-12 at Miami, Florida.