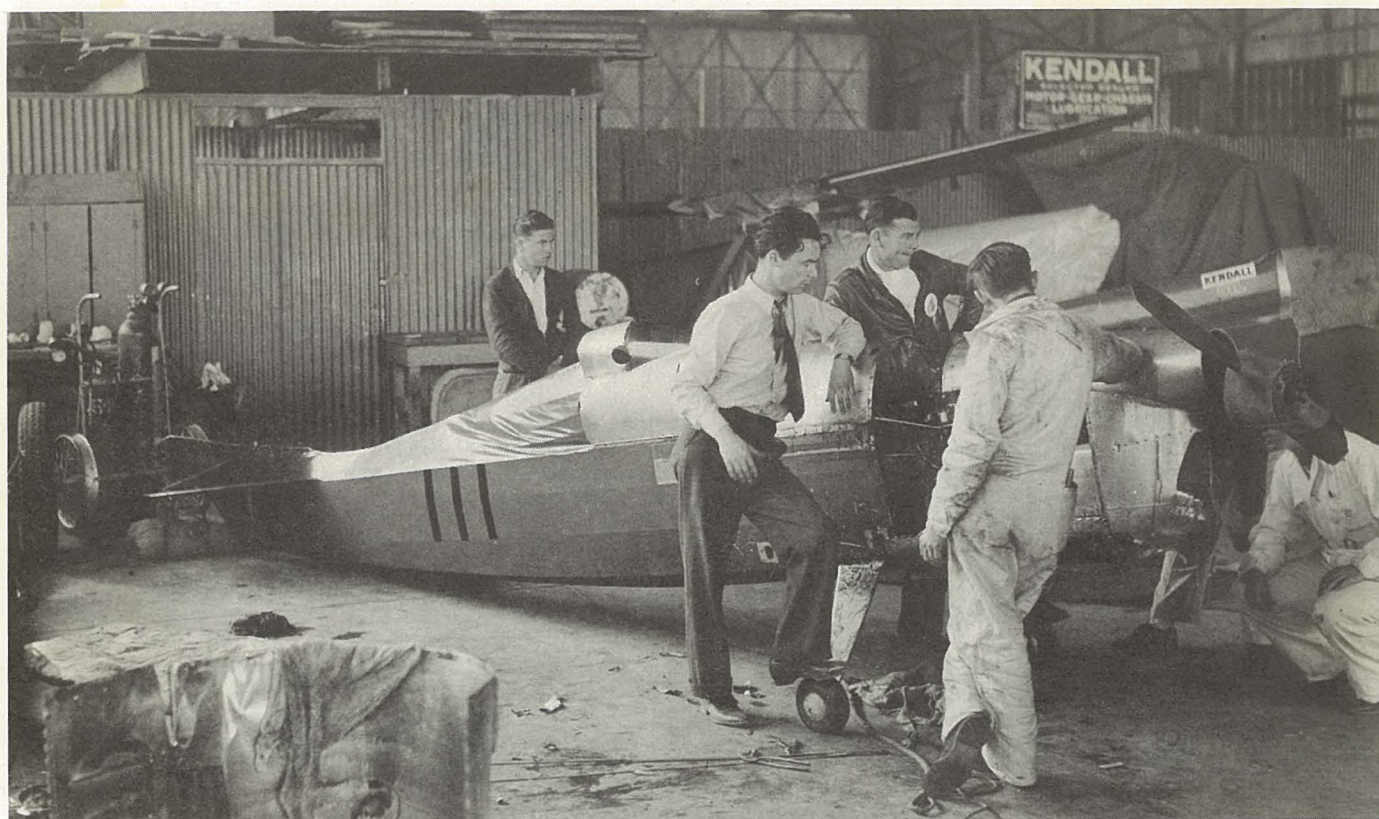




Drama and heartbreak of air racing are strikingly portrayed in this scene. Steve Wittman's "Chief Oshkosh" is studied in hangar by his crew after he made a forced landing during race of May 29th. Race number 111, the Wittman Special was licensed R 14866, powered by a Menasco C4S and was red with aluminum nose and black letters. (W. T. Larkins)

Pacific International Air Races

By JAY E. WRIGHT

From the grandstand an air race is a roaring, smoke-screaming spectacle that keeps the spectator on the edge of his seat. In the crowded office behind the stands, however, the promoters and officials are working in an atmosphere of quiet chaos. What the crowd never sees are the thousands of agonizing, heartbreaking man-hours of frustration that go into putting the show together.

On a cold January day in 1938, a small group of aviation buffs sat glumly around a table at an Exchange Club Luncheon in Berkeley, California. An invitation had been extended to the National Air Races to hold their 1939 meet in the San Francisco Bay Area to coincide with the opening of the Golden Gate International Exposition--more familiarly known as the San Francisco World's Fair. The glumness was due to a letter from the National Air Races regretfully declining the invitation. The Nationals were committed to Cleveland in 1939.

In a rash moment of innocent optimism the group decided to promote their own show and the Pacific International Air Races was born, a baby destined for a short and hectic life.

The original intention was to make it an Exchange Club project and many, well-known California businessmen, Exchange Club members, lent their support. A non-profit corporation was formed with the important sounding name of "The International Air Race Association of America, Incorporated". James Rowan Ewing, an experienced air

race promoter, was engaged as the Managing Director, all other officers and directors served without pay. The neophyte organization had no trouble in obtaining rosy promises of financial support from local civic and industry leaders.

Oakland Airport, historic starting point for many of the record-making flights of the '20s and '30s was chosen as the race site. The dates of May 28th, 29th and 30th, 1938 were picked for the first annual races.

As the race time drew near, grandstands started going up at the north end of the field and, as the money began to flow out, the promised financial support started melting away. The civic and industry leaders who had been so glib with their promises a few months before, were now mysteriously unreachable by telephone and conveniently out of town when a personal call was made to their offices.

Young, 25-year old Tony LeVier got word of the races and threw himself into the job of getting the Schoenfeld "Firecracker" (Keith Rider R-4) ready. He was an unknown, whose only racing appearance had been in the Pobjoy-powered "Flag Special" at the 1937 Nationals. This appearance had failed to impress anyone.

Owner, Bill Schoenfeld, had purchased the Keith Rider R-4 in 1936 and rebuilt it, replacing the Menasco B6S engine with a more powerful C6S4 and making other minor modifications. He hired Gus Gotch as pilot and they entered several races in 1937, including the Nationals.

The plane placed well but, because of various mechanical problems, did not take any first places. Both Schoenfeld and Gotch were "typical hot-headed Germans" who did not get along too well and came to a mutual parting of the ways after the 1937 Nationals.

LeVier tried to get on as pilot with Schoenfeld and finally, after the '37 races when he was pretty well fed-up with the plane, Schoenfeld turned it over to LeVier, telling him to do what he wanted to get it ready for the 1938 season. LeVier worked from October 1937 to May 1938 overhauling both the engine and airframe single handedly. After the overhaul the old Convair Gang, builders of the Flagg Special, pitched in and helped Tony assemble the plane at Long Beach Airport. LeVier had no experience in flying anything approaching the power and performance of the "Firecracker", so he asked Roger Don Rae, who had flown the plane in the 1936 Nationals, to come to Long Beach and check him out.

The first test flight was made on a Sunday. LeVier was in the cockpit with the engine running and ready to go when he yelled to Don Rae and asked him how to handle the plane. Don Rae stuck his head in the cockpit and said, "As you apply throttle, the nose will pull to the left and down, apply rudder to keep her straight and ease back on the stick". Following these instructions to the letter, LeVier poured on throttle and was off the ground in four to five seconds.

Landing after a short test flight, a minor lateral trim adjustment was made and the plane disassembled and hauled to Oakland.

In speaking of the performance of the "Firecracker", LeVier has said, "For its size and engine displacement, I believe it was one of the highest performing airplanes of the time. As I look back and compare it with today's aircraft, it accelerated faster than most of our present high performance fighters like the F-104--it was fantastic".

Four days before the races were scheduled to open, a movable 60-foot pylon collapsed while being erected, killing one worker and severely injuring another. Although these men were employed by a private contractor, the contracting firm had failed to provide workmen's compensation insurance and a suit was filed by the families of the workers, naming both the contractor and the race corporation. A court order was issued, freezing all the race funds.

While desperate legal moves were being made behind the scenes to release the impounded money so the show could go on, pilots and planes began arriving at Oakland for practice and qualifying trials.

Late in the afternoon of May 25th, Dave Elmendorf took off in his "Elmendorf Special" (Keith Rider R-5) for a practice run around the pylons. After completing his run, he came in for a landing. The plane touched down, bounced and veered to the left. Elmendorf applied full throttle to regain control and tried to lift the

plane over a dike at the west edge of the airport. He almost had it made but one wheel struck the dike, tearing it off. Elmendorf made a low pass over the field and an alert airport attendant held the wheel over his head to signal the pilot. Warned, Elmendorf came in and made a masterful "greased-on" landing but as the plane lost speed, the wing dropped, hooked on the ground and the plane ground-looped.

David Elmendorf stepped out with a cut under one eye and a determination to work night and day to get back in the air by race time. A closer examination, however, showed that it would be impossible to make the plane air-worthy in time to qualify for the race. Elmendorf's name does not appear in air race records after 1938, but he was at the 1938 Nationals in some capacity (although not as a pilot) with the Marcoux-Bromberg Group.

Qualifying flights were started on May 26th and Tony LeVier was first to the line. He was nervous as he forced his six-foot one-inch frame into a cockpit designed for a much smaller man. The fact he could wear no chute was only a small part of his worries. Tony LeVier was an unknown and not only had to qualify his Schoenfeld "Firecracker" but also had to demonstrate his ability to fly around pylons. Even though this was only his second flight in the plane, LeVier qualified at a respectable 236.2 mph. He breathed easier as he taxied in and got a "thumbs-up" from the course referee.

Just before his flight, one of the pilots had remarked that his engine sounded "ratty" like it was missing. One of LeVier's friends quickly asked, "How many cylinders are missing?" The pilot replied that it sounded like at least one, and the friend retorted, "That's nothing then, we can beat you with two cylinders out." Later Benny Howard told LeVier that he had never heard a sweeter sounding engine.

Art Chester was next on the line but a sick engine in his "Jeep" caused him to postpone his try until the following day, when he cranked out 251 mph. Chester had built the "Jeep" in his garage in 1932 after racing stock planes for several years. He completed the plane too late for the 1932 Nationals but entered it in the 1933 event. The little racer went unnamed until 1936 when it appeared with a new paint job and the name "Jeep" lettered on the cowl. Chester's racing philosophy was to build simple and strong with careful attention to small details. His usual habit was to thoroughly prepare the plane before bringing it to the races so he could spend his time familiarizing himself with the course and plot his race strategy.

Meanwhile, Frank Fuller, Jr., named the "Flying Ambassador" for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition, took off from Mills Field in San Francisco in his Seversky SEV-S2 for a non-stop dash to Seattle. He set a new record of 2:31:41 between the two cities, clipping nearly an hour from the old mark. Fuller and Ray Moore made a good team. Frank Fuller, of the aviation-minded



Buckler Jungmeister in which Alex Papanas thrilled crowds at Oakland with his aerobatic flying. (W. T. Larkins)



Another aerobatic performer at Oakland was Tex Rankin's Ryan STA Modified, shown at another airport. (Larkins)

Fuller Paint family, flew the Seversky to numerous cross-country records. Ray Moore of San Francisco, flew the closed course events. Moore had made his first big time racing appearance at the 1931 National Air Races flying the Keith Rider R-1 and made his first appearance in the big silver Seversky in the 1937 Thompson Trophy Race where he took sixth place.

Roscoe Turner in his Turner-Laird qualified at 259.44 mph and at the end of his qualifying run pulled up and circled the field for 30 minutes. Timers and participants were a little upset with this action, since no one else could use the course until Turner landed. When he did come down it developed that a gas line had come loose from the bottom of his fuselage tank and flooded the floor of the cockpit with gas. Turner realized that if he landed in that condition he might throw up a rock with a wheel and cause a spark that would bring a colorful end to a colorful career. He wisely flew around until the gas had evaporated and the fumes dissipated.

Original design of the Turner-Laird Special was commissioned by Roscoe Turner to two University of Minnesota professors, and the Lawrence W. Brown Aircraft Company of Los Angeles (builders of the famous Brown Racer) was commissioned to build it in 1936. The new machine proved impractical to construct as designed and a redesign was done by the Brown Aircraft Co. In August 1936 a welding explosion ended any chance of completing the new racer for the upcoming National Air Races, and work was stopped on the plane. Later it was shipped to Matty Laird's shop in Chicago where it was rebuilt with a number of changes being made to the design.

Saturday, May 28th, was a bright sunny day and although the promoters were still having financial headaches, the way had been cleared for the races to go on, and spectators began to fill the grandstand. Cars were backed up on the road leading to the spectator parking area and someone conceived the brilliant idea of sending ticket sellers down the road to speed things up by selling tickets to the cars full of eager people. This did speed things up considerably and the practice was followed all three days. It was not until the following week that the disillusioned promoters learned that some of the ticket sellers had gone into business for themselves. This was possible since only a ticket stub was necessary for entrance to the general admission area.

The seller would sell a group of tickets to one car, tear them in half and sell the other halves to people in the car following.

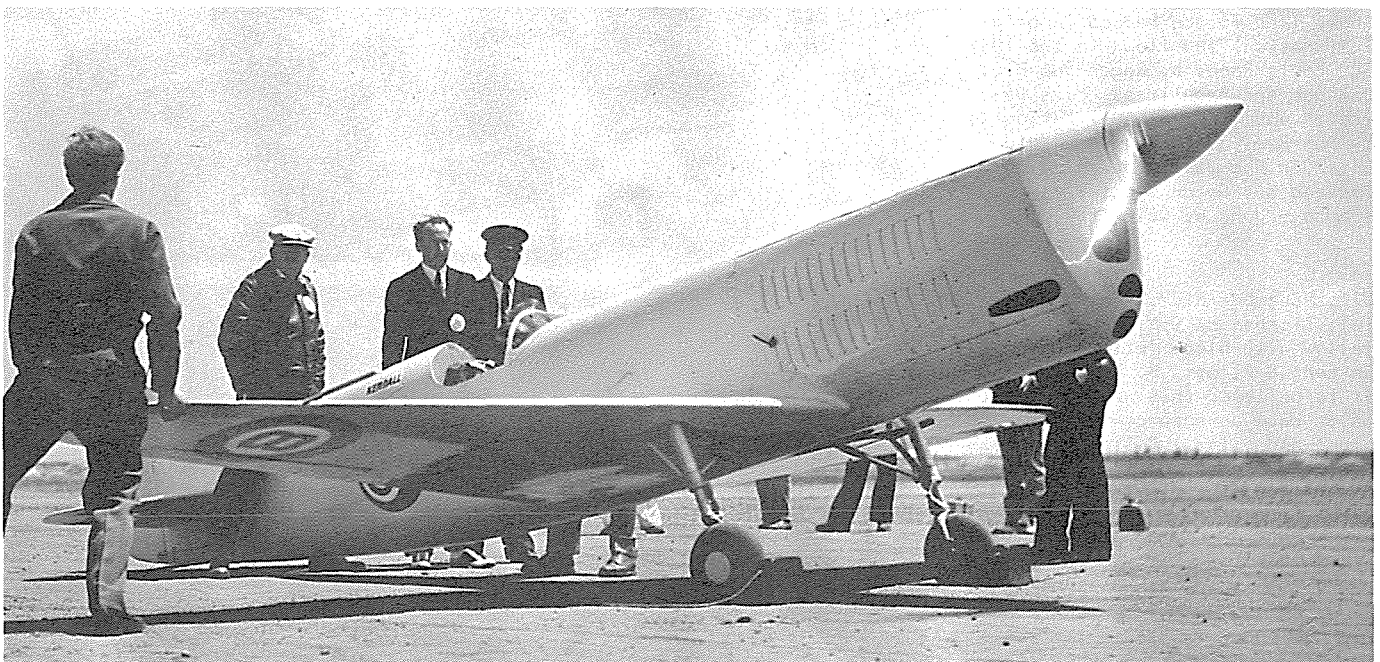
Just before the first event was to take place, a sheriff's deputy showed up in one of the ticket booths, served a subpoena and picked up all the money that had been taken in. The workers in the booth had a hard time convincing him to leave enough money so they could make change. Word of this action got around quickly, and one of the corporate officers circulated among the other ticket booths, a few steps ahead of the deputy, and picked up their proceeds. These were then taken to a special counting room, known to only a few, that the officials had thoughtfully reserved at the Oakland Airport Hotel. This went on all afternoon and the puzzled deputy never could figure out why there was so little money with so many spectators.

The first event on the program was listed as Manufacturer's Demonstration. Ralph Johnson, Southern California representative for Waco and a WW I Royal Canadian Air Force pilot flew his powder blue Waco Cabin from east to west across the front of the grandstand at a 100 foot elevation. He pulled up into a loop and announcer, Bill Royale, said, "He's saluting the crowd". Johnson started another loop directly in front of the stand. He started down the back side of the loop and never pulled out. The Waco hit the ground and burst into flames. Johnson was thrown clear but killed instantly. His wife witnessed the accident from a special section of the stands reserved for families and friends or the participants and officials.

The first race of the day was a stock plane race won by Jack Anwiler at 129:917 mph. Second place was taken by Harry Sham and third by Joe Wisenback. Charles Brown was disqualified for cutting a pylon. Nowhere do the records list the types of planes flown in this race, but a hazy memory brings to the mind's eye a biplane flown by Harry Sham with a blue fuselage, red wings and a shiny, polished metal NACA-type cowl, probably a TravelAir.

Military representation in the show consisted of Grumman SF-1s from the Naval Reserve Base on the field. On Saturday and Monday the fly-by was by the Naval Reserve Squadron VS-15R and on Sunday the same planes were

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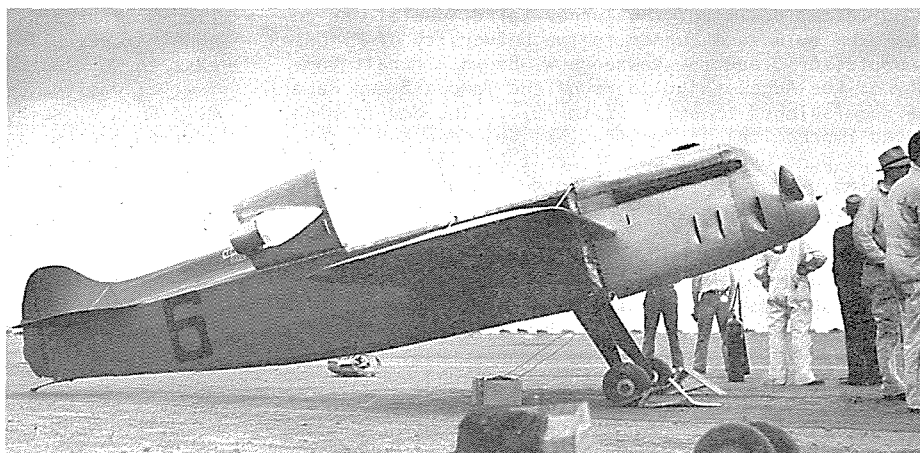


At the races but not a performer was the Keith Rider Special R-6, "Eight Ball", NX 96Y. Powered by a Menasco C6S4 engine and painted pale blue with black letters, number 8 was to be an entrant of the Union Airplane Co. (W. T. Larkins)

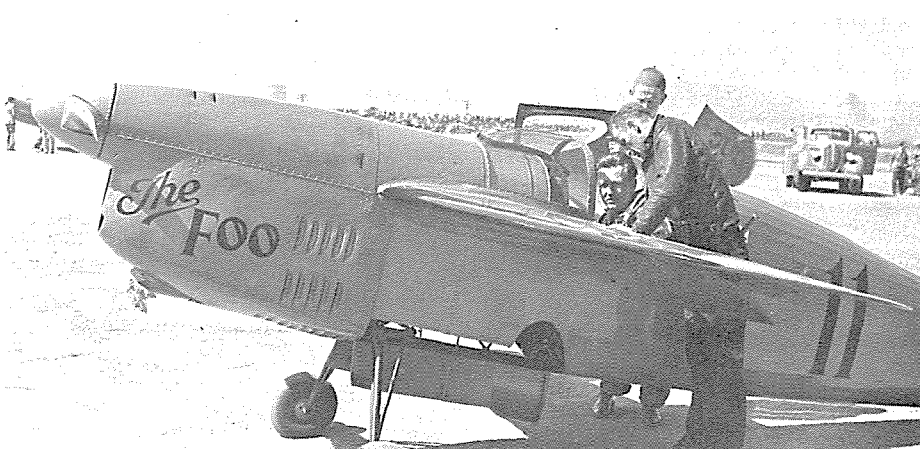
#5, "Jeep", Chester Special, license NR 12930, Menasco C4S, cream, black trim and letters.
Entrant & Pilot: Art Chester.
Built in 1932 in Chester's garage "Jeep" went unnamed until it appeared with a new paint job in 1936. Chester's racing philosophy was to build simple and strong with careful attention to small details. This was "Jeep's" last appearance with Chester at the throttle. He completed his new "Goon" in time for the 1938 Nationals and sold "Jeep" to Tom Stauch. It was rebuilt into a Goodyear racer after WW II.
(Photo - William T. Larkins)



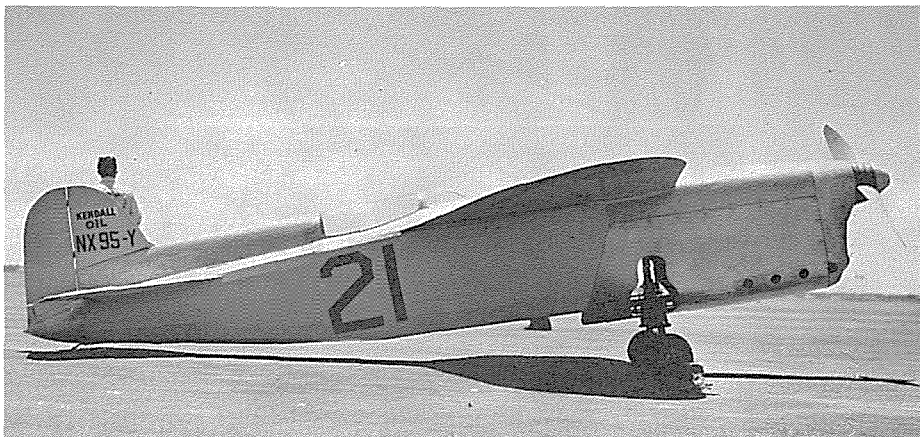
#6, "Bonzo", Wittman Special, license NR 13688, Curtiss D-12, red, aluminum and black trim.
Entrant & Pilot: S. J. Wittman.
In "Bonzo" Wittman took an old, in design-age, liquid cooled engine, wrapped it tightly in sheet aluminum and hung it on the front of the smallest, simplest airframe he could devise to handle the power and torque. Although dogged by various mechanical troubles, Wittman flew "Bonzo" from 1934 to '39 and often beat out planes with over twice the horsepower. "Bonzo" is now on display in the EAA Museum at Franklin, Wisconsin.
(Photo - William T. Larkins)



#11, "Foo", Folkerts SK-2, R283Y, Menasco C4S, red, black letters.
Entrant: Georgia E. Fordon.
Pilot: Gus Gotch.
First appeared as "Toots" during 1936 Nationals, owned by Clayton Folkerts and flown by Harold Neumann. Sold to Fordon-Brown Air Shows (Ted Fordon helped in original design) and flown in the 1937 St. Louis Races by Roger Don Rae. Damaged and rebuilt as "Miss Detroit" and flown at 1937 Nationals by Don Rae. There is some evidence Don Rae was to be pilot at Oakland but Gotch did the flying.
(Photo - John W. Caler Coll.)

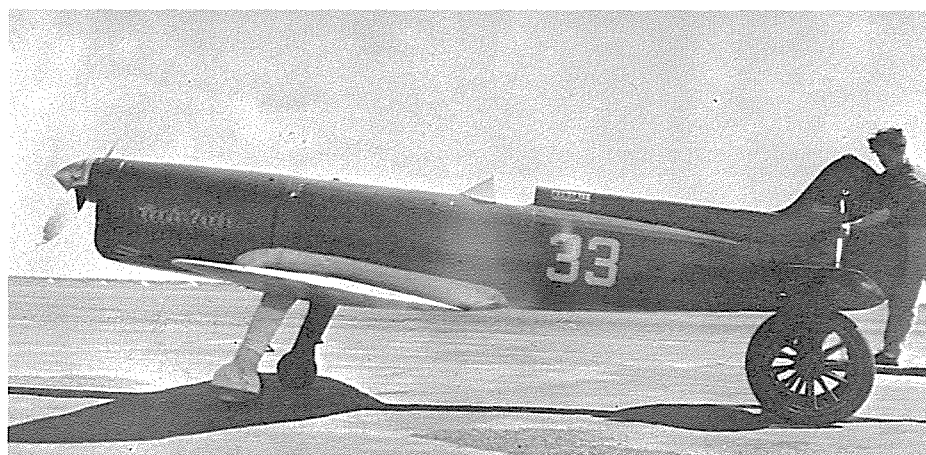


#21, "Chambermaid", Chambers Special, License NX 95Y, Menasco B-4, yellow with black letters.
Entrant & Pilot: R. G. Chambers.
It is believed this was the first major race appearance for both plane and pilot. Built by Chambers who wanted to call it "Parlormaid", since it was built in a parlor. Reporters at Oakland dubbed it "Chambermaid" and the name stuck. It was smallest, 13' 8" span, and lowest powered, 95 hp, plane at the races. Chambers cracked up on landing after qualifying for 1938 Greve Trophy Race and died of head injuries.
(Photo - William T. Larkins)





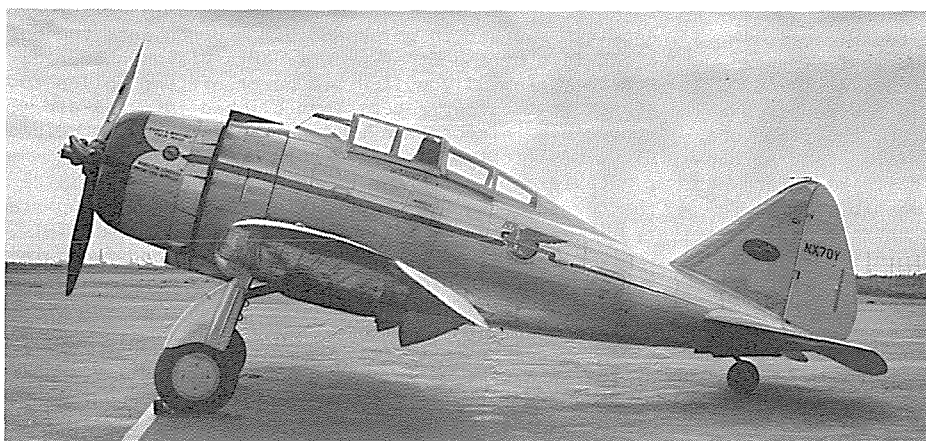
#22, "Elmendorf Special" (Keith Rider R-5), license NX 264Y, Menasco B6S, cream and black. Entrant-Pilot: Dave Elmendorf. Similar to the R-4, Schoenfeld Special, #22 had two foot more span and was some 80 lbs. heavier. The only Keith Rider known to have been built by someone other than Rider. First appeared at the '36 Nationals, did not race at all in 1937 and, after the accident here, was sold to the Marcoux-Bromberg combine, rebuilt, modified and flown as the "Jackrabbit" by Earl Ortman. It is now owned by Jim Garvin, Walnut Creek, California. (Photo - William T. Larkins)



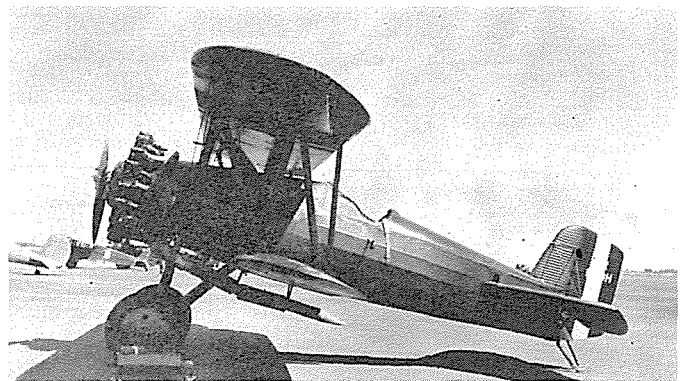
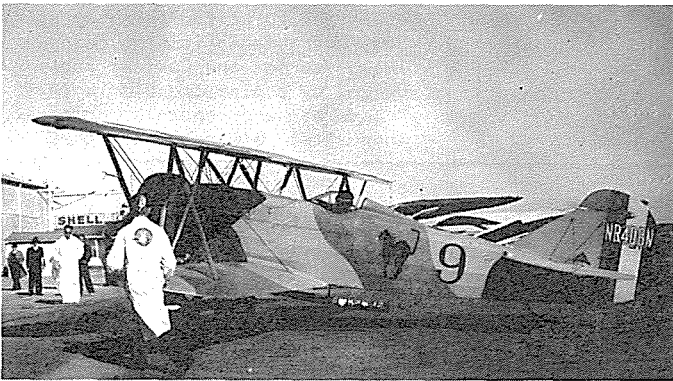
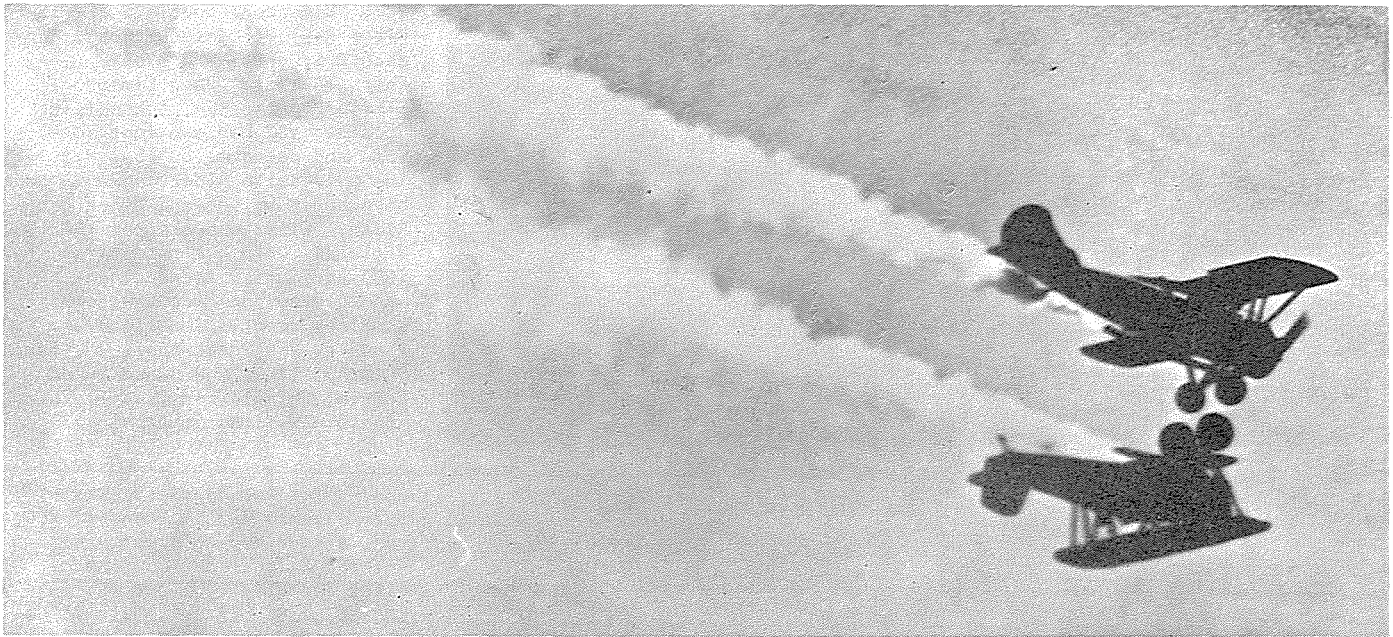
#33, "Miss Los Angeles", Brown B-2, license R 255Y, Menasco C6S, red, silver and gold letters. Entrant-Pilot: Marion McKeen. First raced in 1934 and was purchased by McKeen in 1935. It depended, for its speed, on a low power to weight ratio and careful attention to streamlining details. New, retractable landing gear was installed for the Oakland races. Dogged by engine trouble in 1935, McKeen had a dependable performer thereafter, always managing to pick up eating money against newer planes. Lew Williams killed in crash of plane at 1939 Nationals. (Photo - William T. Larkins)



#70, "Firecracker", Schoenfeld Special (modified Keith Rider R-4), license NX 261Y, Menasco C6S4, yellow with maroon letters. Entrant: William Schoenfeld. Pilot: Tony LeVier. Departing from his usual monocoque construction, Rider built the R-4 with a steel tube, fabric covered fuselage entering it in the 1936 Nationals. Schoenfeld bought the plane late in 1936 and hired Rider's crew to rebuild it. He entered it in 1937 Nationals with Gus Gotch as pilot. He then turned it over to LeVier who rebuilt it and came to Oakland. (Photo - William T. Larkins)



#77, Seversky SEV-S2, license no. NR 70Y, P & W Wasp Sr., aluminum. Entrant: Frank Fuller, Jr. Pilot: Ray Moore. An executive version of the P-35, plane was a first rate cross-country racer--Fuller taking 2 firsts and a second in the Bendix--but its size and weight handicapped it for closed course racing. Brute power pushed it on the straights, but it couldn't bend the pylons like the smaller planes. It was especially handicapped at Oakland because of the short, eight and one-third mile course which meant more turns per race. (Photo - William T. Larkins)



Frank Clarke and Paul Mantz, the "Hollywood Duo", finished their flying act wheels to wheels--Clarke above in the TravelAir D-4000 which is shown at the left, and Mantz inverted below in his Boeing Model 100 shown at the right.
(Photos - Courtesy of Costa Mesa Daily Pilot, top; William T. Larkins, lower two)

flown by Marine Reserve Squadron VMS-8R.

For the aerobatic enthusiast the races were a real treat. Flying every day were such greats as Captain Dick Granere, a Canadian World War I ace; Rumanian Captain Alex Papana; Tex Rankin, reigning World Aerobatic Champion; and Frank Clarke and Paul Mantz, billed as the "Hollywood Duo".

Clarke and Mantz each flew an individual routine before going into a separate act in which they put on a mock dog fight, then criss-crossed one another's smoke trails and, for a finale, attempted to touch wheels in flight with Mantz inverted and Clarke upright. Mantz flew his Boeing 100 and Clarke flew a TravelAir D-4000 with WW I camouflage to make it resemble a Nieuport.

Alex Papana flew a Bucker Jungmeister, the first one seen in this country and probably one of the best aerobatic aircraft ever built, even to this day. He later went on to win the World's Aerobatic Championship in it. Papana was a pilot's pilot; he flew with extreme precision and grace; he originated the "slow roll in eight movements", not a difficult maneuver but one that must be performed with exactness to be effective. Papana's roll was a joy to behold. His finale was to pick up a "handkerchief" from the ground with a hook on his lower wing tip--a stunt that never failed to bring the crowd to its feet.

Having set a new San Francisco to Seattle record three days before, Frank Fuller, flying his Seversky, left

Vancouver, Canada at noon and roared back to Oakland, establishing a record 3:08:43 and arriving over the field in the middle of the Navy fly-by.

Feature event of the first day was the 75 mile race for 549 cubic inch displacement planes, nine laps of the eight and one-third mile course. Six planes lined up for the race-horse start. The flag dropped and four planes leaped into the air. The engine in Russ Chamber's "Chambermaid" sputtered and coughed and Chambers aborted his takeoff. Marion McKeen, behind Chambers in "Miss Los Angeles", swerved to go around him and ran into the dust cloud left by the other racers. His vision obscured, McKeen regretfully pulled his power off and rolled to a stop. Of the four racers that climbed into the air, the Schoenfeld "Firecracker", with its tremendous acceleration, was first off the ground.

LeVier astounded the crowd by keeping to one side of the course, reducing power and pulling his nose up steeply while the other three planes streaked by him. This, however, was a planned maneuver. LeVier had found in his two previous flights that he would have trouble retracting the landing gear at high speed so he established this procedure to slow down. It worked, the gear came up cleanly, and LeVier settled down to get back at the head of the pack. He passed Gus Gotch in the Folkerts "Foo" and then pulled past Art Chester in the "Jeep". Steve Wittman in "Chief Oshkosh" was still ahead and LeVier applied more power and passed Wittman. Wittman poured

the coal to the "Chief" and took the lead again, but finally the "Firecracker" pulled ahead and took the checkered flag with a speed of 249.351 mph. Wittman and "Chief" were close behind with a speed of 247.934 mph; Chester was third and Gotch was fourth. An exuberant Tony Le Vier, deaf from the noise of his engine, extricated his big frame from the "Firecracker's" too-small cockpit, jumped into a truck that was to carry him to the announcer's stand, fell backwards and broke the windshield out of the truck!

Although first test-flown at Oakland, just prior to the races, Keith Rider's "Eight Ball" did not compete in any of the closed course races and placed out of the money (fifth) in the Joel W. Thorne Speed Dash with 224.353 mph. Nowhere in the records is the name of the pilot revealed, but it is thought to have been Roger Don Rae. He was scheduled to race it but had just recently been hired as an airline pilot, and his new employers apparently felt that the knowledge that one of their pilots also competed in races might tarnish their image. It was first planned that Don Rae would appear as "Mystery Pilot" but this plan was dropped.

Weather for the three days of racing had the sparkle only a gentle sea breeze can produce, and the crowds were even better than anticipated. The promoters were unable to pry loose the grip of the law from the corporation bank account but, by continuing the brisk round of the ticket booths ahead of the deputy sheriff, they managed to keep the creditors reasonably well satisfied and thus kept the show from being closed down.

Wide-spread radio and newspaper publicity of the Saturday show brought out even greater crowds on Sunday. They were thrilled by the flying acts that preceded the actual racing. Tex Rankin at that time was still flying his Ryan ST, an exceptionally strong little plane but hopelessly outclassed in the maneuverability department by such planes as the Jungmeister. Nevertheless, Rankin's daily exhibition showed why he was the "Champ". For the knowledgeable aerobatic fan the climax of his act was a heart-grabber. The Ryan's inverted flight system was a wobble pump in the cockpit that had to be constantly pumped to maintain fuel pressure while the plane was inverted. Rankin would fly across the field in front of the stand upside down and barely off the ground, pumping the wobble pump madly with his right hand, waving gaily to the crowd with his left hand and flying the plane with the stick between his knees.

Dick Granere and Mike Murphy put on a comedy act in two Cubs that tickled the spectators, especially when they would both be on the ground, rolling into what looked like a sure head-on collision. Just before impact, one Cub would jump in the air over the second and then touch-down on the other side, brining a roar of relieved laughter up from the crowd.

The feature event for Sunday was again limited to 549 cu. in. planes or under; this time for 100 miles. Six planes were airborne on the race horse start but only five made it around the first lap. Gus Gotch, flying G. E. Fordon's red Folkerts Special dived into the mud flats at the edge of the airport at the first pylon. A Coast Guard boat and a Grumman JF-2, number VI37, were immediately at the scene. The tail of the Folkerts was above water and the engine was buried in two feet of mud, Gotch was killed instantly.

The accident was variously blamed on a high speed stall, control failure or the pilot hitting the flap lever by accident when retracting the gear. The consensus of the race pilots, however, was that the canvas pilot seat failed due to the high "G" factor, forcing Gotch's body down into the fuselage and, at the same time, forcing him to pull back on the stick causing a violent snap upward, followed by a dive into the water.

The race continued. After his unconventional gear retraction procedure, Tony LeVier passed the rest of the field and resumed his duel of the day before with Steve Wittman. After several exchanges of the lead, Wittman suddenly ran out of horses when his crankshaft failed.

He pointed the "Chief's" nose at an open field, scooted under a set of high tension lines and right into a set of telephone wires which flipped him upside down. Wittman stepped out unhurt but the "Chief" was badly bent. On the last lap a clogged gas line caused the little B-4 Menasco in the nose of the "Chambermaid" to quit and Russ Chambers set his plane down in the same field, where Wittman had thoughtfully removed the wires, and wiped out his gear.

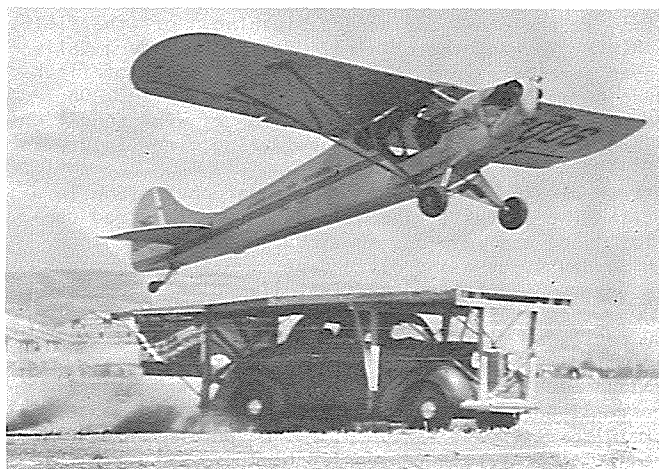
Even with the pressure off, Tony LeVier, crouched in the cramped seat of the "Firecracker", kept the throttle forward and picked up the first place chips by pushing his speed up to a 251.01 mph average. Art Chester and "Jeep" took second at 223.853 mph. Marion McKeen in his Brown Special was third and Chambers placed fourth. Wittman and Gotch were awarded fifth and sixth places and the prize money that went with them.

Because of the damage suffered by "Chief Oshkosh" Steve Wittman retired the "Chief"--temporarily. In post war years it reappeared as the now famous, "Buster". In 24 years of racing competition, in addition to its numerous minor modifications, the plane has had four different wings, and four different engines of varying horsepower. Each engine change created new problems because of both horsepower and weight changes. The substitution of the Menasco for the Cirrus meant a drastic thrust line change. Wittman, in recent correspondence, brushed aside the problems saying: "The slight difference in weight could easily be taken care of by fore and aft positioning, the thrust line change was not enough to present any problem that a slight engine tilt would not correct".

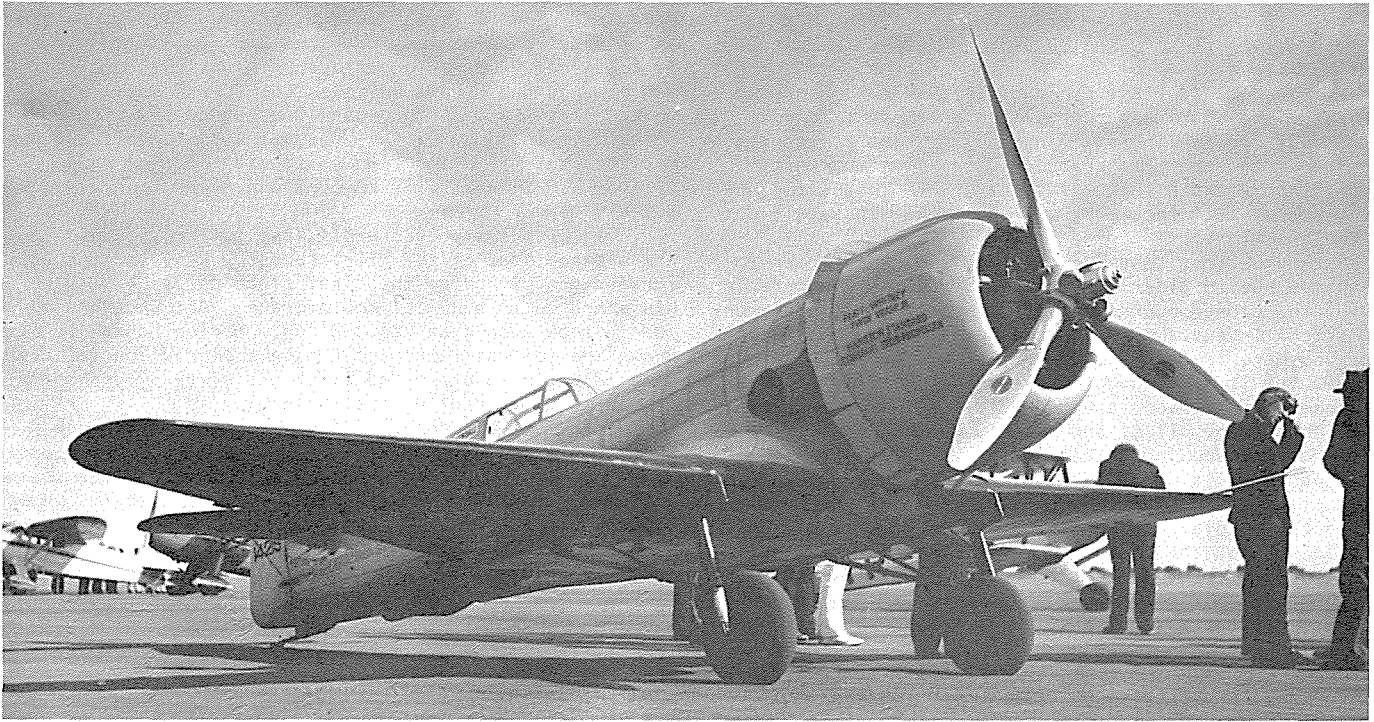
Wittman did say that "Chief" required major surgery for the 85 hp Continental: "New wings were built and moved aft one bay on the fuselage and the front bay cut off, in other words the firewall was moved aft one bay." Wittman's designs were never acclaimed as the most beautiful in the air. One competitor remarked, "It looks like he's flying the box it came in". But a fertile engineering mind found extra mph in imaginative design details and simplicity of structure. The predecessor of the now famous "Cessna Gear" first appeared on "Chief Oshkosh" in 1936.

During the program Jim Ewing, the Managing Director, made a trip to the other end of the field and inadvertently left his official's badge at the race office. When he returned to the entrance he was refused admittance and had to cough up the general admission price to get back inside.

A daily crowd pleaser was "Kokomo" Mike Murphy making takeoffs and landings with his Cub from the "World's Smallest Aircraft Carrier", a Plymouth Coupe (with a wooden platform built on top) that cruised up and down the field in front of the grandstand. The platform had



"Kokomo" Mike Murphy taking off from his Plymouth coupe "aircraft carrier" in Cub. (Photo - Oakland Tribune)



Winner of the Unlimited Golden Gate International Exposition Trophy Race was Earl Ortman in his Marcoux-Bromberg, number 4. For full details of this aircraft see JOURNAL, Vol 7, No 2, Summer 1962. (Photo - William T. Larkins)

a 2 x 4 rail on either side and holes in the platform just inside the rails to catch the wheels. Murphy would touch-down on the aft end of the platform and the rails would keep the plane from drifting off the side. The Cub would roll forward until the wheels dropped into the holes, the weight of the plane resting on the inner axles and then Murphy would bring the tail down. This method kept him from rolling off the front of the platform during the landing. On takeoff he would blast the tail up with the throttle, and the combined forward speed of the car plus the thrust of the prop would be enough to lift the wheels out of the holes and Murphy would hoist the Cub into the air.

On Sunday, in full view of the crowd, Murphy made a spectacular landing. He hit the deck and was jockeying for the wheel holes when a gust of wind got under the right wing. The wing lifted and the plane swung to the left, went off the side of the platform and came to rest on its nose, while the Plymouth "carrier" steamed majestically down the field. Mike Murphy climbed out, bowed stiffly to the crowd and strode blushing off the field.

Mickey Morgan, the original "Bat Man", made a daily delayed parachute jump from 10,000 feet, a bag of flour tucked under his arm trailing a stream of white. On Sunday he made a slight miscalculation of wind conditions and landed in the parking lot, suffering minor injury in a collision with a parked car.

Each day there was to be a mass parachute jump in a spot-landing contest. The wind on Saturday forced cancellation of the jump and the \$200 purse was combined with Sunday's purse and divided between the 15 jumpers with top money going to the first five places and \$15 each to the other ten contestants. On the last day the \$200 purse was divided equally, each jumper getting the total of \$13.33. This meant that 10 of the jumpers wound up with the grand total of \$28.33 for making two jumps. Since many of the jumpers had come from out of state with attendant expenses, it was apparent that they weren't in the parachute-jumping business to get rich.

Evelyn Judson, holder of the World Endurance Record for light planes, daily demonstrated her refueling technique by hoisting five gallon cans of gasoline from a

speeding car.

On Memorial Day, Monday, May 30th, there was the event that everyone was waiting for, the Unlimited Golden Gate International Exposition Trophy Race--18 laps, 150 miles--for a total purse of \$11,650. Early expectations had been for the renewal of the duel between Earl Ortman and Rudy Kling, who had a photo-finish in the 1937 Thompson Trophy Race. Kling unfortunately had been killed in the 1938 Miami Air Races. Still, there were enough big names and hot planes to gladden the heart of the racing buff.

Seven planes lined up for a racehorse start, the favorites were Ortman, Turner and Wittman. These three had both the power and maneuverability for the tight turns necessary on the short eight and one-third mile course.

Ray Moore, piloting Frank Fuller's Seversky, was given an outside chance if one or more of the leaders had any mechanical problems. The Seversky had the horses but it was not designed to pull the tight pylon turns necessary to keep it in front of the pack. Art Chester and Marion McKeen, both flying planes with less than half the horsepower of the big bore jobs, were considered to be in the race for place money. In spite of the showing of previously unknown Tony LeVier in the "Firecracker," he was not considered as a threat to the leaders.

With 150 long miles to go, the crew of the "Firecracker" filled the 55 gallon fuselage tank to capacity. The tank started to leak and there was no time to repair it before the race. The leak was slight but in a place where the fuel would drip on LeVier's leg. Since the fuel was 100 Octane, hopped up with Anilol (a poisonous agent) rags were stuffed around the tank to absorb the fuel. The rags did keep the gas from eating away at the LeVier leg, but during the race the fumes in the cockpit were so bad that he was worried about passing out.

When the flag dropped, seven throttles went forward and seven planes jumped into the air. Once in the air LeVier pulled up the nose of the "Firecracker" and cranked up the gear while the rest of the field streaked by him. The big yellow and black Marcoux-Bromberg grabbed the lead at the first pylon with Wittman in second spot. Just before the takeoff Schoenfeld had instructed LeVier



Dueling Ortman all the way at Oakland was Col. Roscoe Turner in his Turner-Laird Special, P & W Wasp Sr. powered and finished in silver with black letters. Plane now hangs in Turner's hangar at Indianapolis. (Wm. T. Larkins)

to hold back during the first part of the race to let the big boys fight it out. Marion McKeen, hopelessly out-classed in the aging Brown Special, dropped out after the first lap. Wittman was right behind Earl Ortman but on the sixth lap he dropped out. It was reported that oil temperature for the big D-12 engine climbed into the red and Wittman decided to pull out and save his engine for the Nationals. In answer to a recent query Wittman said, "I do not remember the reason for dropping out of the race, but I do know that it wasn't because the oil temperature was in the red. If that was the reason, I would have dropped out of many more races."

Turner had climbed high at the start of the race and was in fifth place; he worked his way through the pack and in the sixth lap, when Wittman dropped out, he moved into second spot. At the pilot's meeting, just before the race, it had been agreed that each pilot would keep a sharp lookout to his left. Roscoe Turner, a master strategist, placed himself on the right of Ortman and slightly above and behind him where he could not be seen.

Meanwhile, Tony LeVier, following owner Bill Schoenfeld's instructions, flew at reduced power for a few laps and the leaders got quite a bit ahead of him. He then added power and in one lap managed to close quite a bit of the gap. He felt he could pass them easily before the end of the race, but then the oil temperature rose sharply and the oil pressure dropped to almost zero. To keep from losing the engine altogether, he throttled back and coasted in to an easy third.

During the twelfth lap with only one-third of the race left to go, Earl Ortman finally caught a glimpse of Turner's big silver "Meteor" close by. Realizing that Turner had been tailing him and probably deliberately waiting until the last couple of laps to pass him, Ortman squeezed the last bit of power out of the big Wasp and kept the Marcoux-Bromberg right on the deck so Turner would have no opportunity to dive under him as Rudy Kling had done at the last Nationals. The Turner-Laird Special was quite a bit higher than Ortman and the foxy Turner took advantage of his extra altitude by bleeding it off bit by bit in shallow dives along the straighta-

ways, this increased his speed with no additional power and allowed him to catch Ortman.

They battled it out wing to wing, and in the seventeenth lap, a tangle almost resulted when Turner, Ortman and Ray Moore in the big silver Seversky, all arrived at the same pylon at the same time. Roscoe Turner took the advantage by grabbing some altitude while Ortman swung wide to miss the tangle. In trying to get back in the groove, he took the next pylon so low that the pylon judge thought his wing had brushed the ground. Now on the last lap Turner poured on the power and put the nose down to take advantage of his altitude. In that short lap the lead changed three times. Bending tightly and almost wing to wing around the last pylon, the issue was still in doubt. Both planes streaked for the finish line and Earl Ortman's yellow and black bird flashed across the line a scant 100 feet ahead of Turner.

Only 63 hundredths of a second separated the two planes at the finish line. Both Earl Ortman and Roscoe Turner had exceeded the world's closed course speed record of 264.261 set by Frenchman, Michel Detroyat, in the 1936 Thompson Trophy Race. Ortman had succeeded in returning the record to the United States with a speed of 265.539 mph. Turner's speed was only 82 hundredths of a mile an hour less, at 265.457 mph. Tony LeVier, whose overheating and oil pressure problems knocked out any chance he might have had to catch the leaders, came in third and set a new record for the 549 cu. in. class in 100 kilometers at 260.762 mph. (Earl Ortman now had the distinction of being a participant in the two closest finishes in air race history--in the 1937 Thompson Trophy Race Rudy Kling beat him out at the finish line by a scant 52 hundredths of a mile an hour.)

After the race the scene at the pits was hectic. H. W. Marcoux, standing on the wing of the Marcoux-Bromberg, was forcibly removed by an airport attendant before he had a chance to identify himself.

Earl Ortman was hustled to the announcer's stand and Mary Burgoyne, Theme Girl of the Golden Gate Exposition, made a lengthy speech in presentation of the trophy. Ortman, deaf as a post from the roar of his engines, stood smiling and finally said, "I didn't hear a thing

you said but I know what you meant". The Trophy, unfortunately, had to be presented in two pieces. During the excitement of the race someone in the announcer's stand had accidentally knocked it over.

Ortman continued his racing career as part of the Marcoux-Bromberg team with some success through the 1939 Nationals. In 1946 he appeared again at the National Air Races and took a third in the Thompson Trophy in a P-51. In 1948 he flew a Goodyear Midget in the Miami Air Manuevers and took a fourth place. He passed away of a heart attack in 1953 at the age of 41.

Although the races were now ended, the financial worries of the parent corporation were far from over. Because of the foresight of providing the unknown counting room at the airport hotel, they were able to pay off the contestants daily from this source, supplemented with money from an unattached bank account. This account had been established for the sole purpose of assuring that the contestants would be paid.

...and get paid they did. While participants and officials celebrated at a party given by Frank Fuller, Earle Wright, the Executive Secretary, went to the hotel counting room, loaded an orange crate with bags of silver and bundles of currency. He asked for and got an escort of two policemen from the cooperative Oakland Police Department, loaded the heavy crate into the trunk of his car and drove nervously to his real estate office in downtown Oakland, where the money was to be kept over night in the office safe. In his nervousness he could not remember the combination to the safe. While the police escort looked on in amazement, Wright pulled out a drawer of his desk, turned it upside down and read the combination off the bottom of the drawer.

After a worried and sleepless night Wright returned to the office Tuesday morning and the pilots began drifting in to pick up their winnings or, in the case of the stunt pilots, their contract pay. The money coming from ticket sales at the field was in small denominations, and most of the morning had been spent in counting it out in various bundles for the pilots. Tex Rankin came in and when given his bundle said he would like to count it. He and Wright went into an adjoining office, and on their knees, counted out the money in piles on the floor.

Echoes of the roar of racing engines had long since faded from their ears when the disheartened officers met to hear the sad, sad news. The news was, as expected, that there was not enough money to go around. The Board of Trade took over, called in the creditors and "divided" up the remaining funds. The hopes of an annual international air race sank into the ooze of the bankruptcy court.

The hard-working and unpaid visionaries who had--in every way but financially--put on a successful and exciting show returned to their neglected businesses and families, nursing their bruised and battered egos and swearing mighty oaths that never again would they get mixed up in that crazy air race business.

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CORRESPONDENTS

A. W. Le Vier, Burbank, California.
 Birch J. Matthews, A.A.H.S., Fountain Valley, California.
 Rudy Profant, A.A.H.S., Cleveland, Ohio.
 Roscoe Turner, Indianapolis, Indiana.
 S. J. Wittman, A.A.H.S., Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: In 1938 Jay Wright and another young man, Bill Larkins, were attending high school together and sharing a mutual aviation interest. Graduation separated them and only a few years ago did they meet again. In comparing aviation notes they came to the subject of this article and it was born, with Bill supplying the photos and Jay researching and writing the text, partly from scrap books long-saved. Today, Jay Wright is married, the father of a son now attending college and a self-employed Insurance Adjuster. Also a private pilot he flies 50 to 75 hours a year for business and pleasure. Address: 1015 Contra Costa Dr., El Cerrito, California.

Specialists

In the last issue of the JOURNAL, the naming of Aircraft Specialists was announced and the first three were listed. Since then, a number of Members have offered their services and those so far assigned are listed below. Beginning next year, all Specialists will be listed in the Spring JOURNAL and only newly assigned Specialists will be noted in subsequent issues that year.

The Specialist will gather all pertinent data on each aircraft of the type in which he specializes and keep tab on each serial number or c/n by a ledger or a file card system--to note all license or military numbers carried on a plane, names, paint finishes and owners by date. Concurrently, a photo file attempting to show every individual plane of the type will be developed. Compilation of all material is the responsibility of the Specialist, but it is hoped every Member will assist with any details or photos available. The Specialist will advise the JOURNAL on all matters related to his type, and will attempt to answer all responsible requests for information from others as his time allows.

Present Aircraft Specialists are: Beechcraft 17--Robert T. Smith, 209 Highland Ave., Smyrna, Georgia; Boeing P-26--Walter M. Jefferies, Jr., 3825 Fredonia Dr., Hollywood, California; Consolidated B-24--Allan G. Blue, 6515 Marywood Rd., Bethesda, Maryland; Martin B-26--Bernard Mallon, 518 Runyon Ave., Piscataway, New Jersey; Boeing B-29--Kenn C. Rust, P.O. Box 3692, Glendale, California; Boeing B-47--Capt. William T. Y'Blood, 20 N. Duke Dr., Topeka, Kansas; North American F-100--S/Sgt. David Menard, 835 S. Main St., Lombard, Illinois.