



Cliff Henderson and R.L.R. Atcherley as Prof. Smythe and the "washing" visible behind Henderson.

## Richard L.R. Atcherley at the 1932 National Air Races

by Ritchie Thomas

**T**HE AERONAUTICAL SPECTACULAR held at Cleveland, Ohio's Municipal Airport from August 27 through September 5, 1932, deserves a special place in the annals of the National Air Races. More planes and pilots participated, more new racing designs appeared and more new records were set than at any time during the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1932 races, there were seven cross-country events which included the Bendix Trophy Race from Burbank, California, to Cleveland, Ohio, and 21 closed-course races and two speed dashes. Interest was centered on seven races limited to aircraft which had engines of various displacements and two races for aircraft with engines of unlimited displacement. The unlimited

races were the Thompson Trophy Race for men and the Aerol Trophy Race for women. Besides the various air races, there was a precision landing contest, parachute jumping contests, an altitude competition, various stunt and aerobatic demonstrations, and events involving Army, Navy and Marine Corps aircraft.

Clifford W. Henderson, after his success at Los Angeles with the National Air Races of 1928, was asked to be Managing Director of the 1929 races in Cleveland. The next year, 1930, the races were held in Chicago. In 1931 they returned to Cleveland and continued there. Cliff Henderson went to Europe to enlist foreign aviators to be on the international aerobatic team for the

1932 races. Previously, 1930 and 1931, Al Williams had gone to Europe to make the selection.

The National Air Races owed something to Captain Alford J. Williams of the Marine Corps Reserve for this international feature of the air races. For two years Al toured Europe to bring the foreign fliers here. He arranged their program, acted as diplomat in many situations that required tact and at the same time had put on a show himself that always thrilled and astonished both those who had never seen him fly before and those who had watched him many times.<sup>2</sup>

In 1932 Cliff Henderson went to Europe to gather the foreigners. Jean Assolant, the transatlantic pilot, represented France, and in addition to a plane for aerobatics, he had another ship built for speed to fly in the 100-mile Thompson Trophy Race. Poland was to send Colonel George Kossowski, who flew a gull-winged Polish pursuit monoplane. Germany sent Emil Kropf, war veteran, and Portugal was represented for the first time with Lieutenant Abreu, acrobatics champion of his country.<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant Andrea Zotti representing Italy was also in Cleveland for the races. Assolant was unable to bring an aircraft for the Thompson Trophy Race because he had cracked it up just before it was to be loaded for shipment to the United States. Jean Assolant brought a Morane Saulnier 250, Colonel Kossowski a P.Z.L. P.11, Emil Kropf, a Klemm monoplane, and Placido d'Abreu a Junkers A.50. Andrea Zotti brought a Breda 19.

Flight Lieutenant Richard L.R. Atcherley, representing Great Britain, had been a member of the victorious British Schneider Cup Team of 1929; however, he was disqualified for turning inside a marker on his first circuit. "Batchy" Atcherley did have the satisfaction of capturing the World's Closed-Course Speed Records in a Supermarine S-6; over 50 kilometers and 100 kilometers distance at 332.49 and 331.75 mph re-

spectively on his sixth and seventh laps.<sup>4</sup>

The *Cleveland Press* reported for July 29, 1932—"Officials of the National Air Races today announced Flight Lieutenant R.L.R. Atcherley of England, who thrilled air race crowds with his 'crazy flying' here last year, again will be a member of the International Stunt Team that will perform at the event Aug. 27 to Sept. 5.

"The stunter includes in his 'crazy flying' steep climbing turns on the take-off, side-slips, and skids, dragging the tail or a wing on the ground, stalling at 20 feet from the ground, and allowing his plane to 'pancake' to the ground."

On August 29, 1932—"Flight Commander R.L.R. Atcherley, English stunt flyer, narrowly escaped death at the National Air Races this afternoon, when he tore off the left side of his landing gear while performing his comic low altitude ground-looping stunt. He landed safely without further injury to his plane."<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant Atcherley was flying a Curtiss Fledgling.

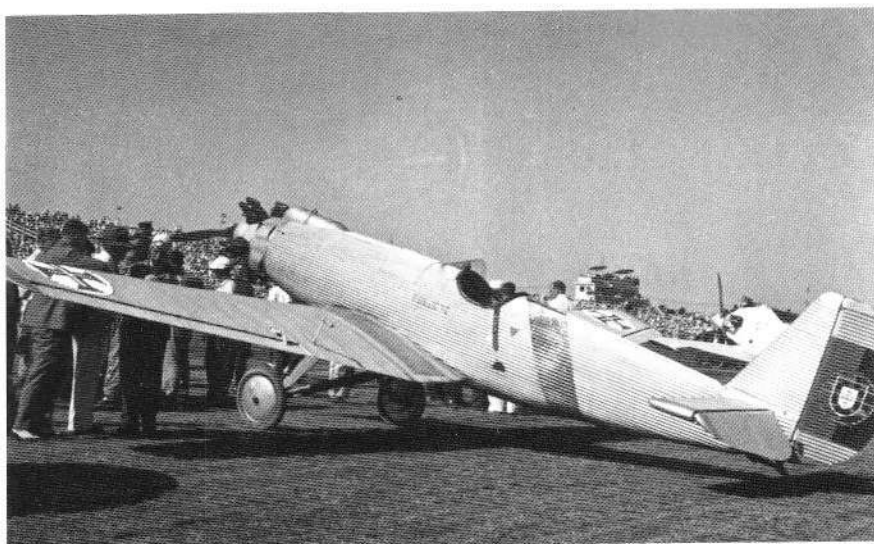
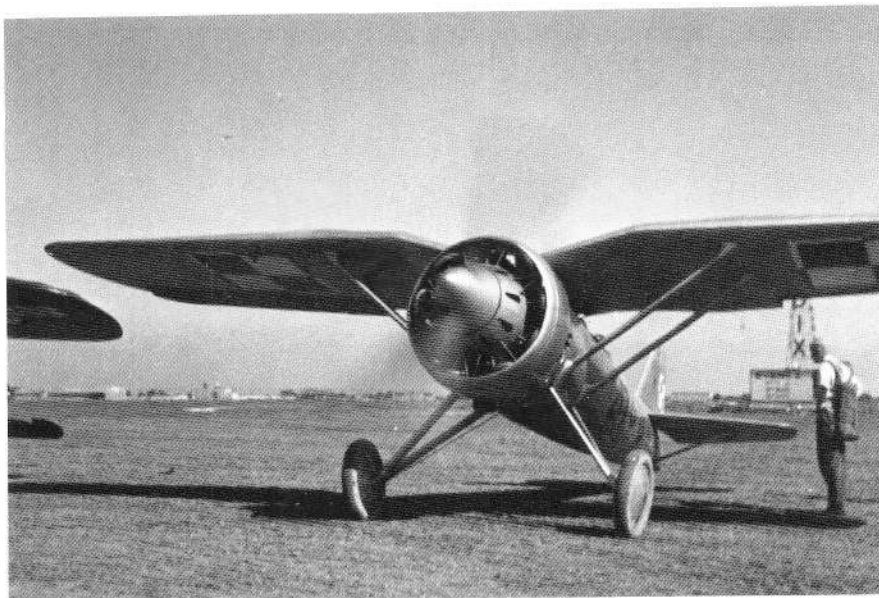
The next day, August 30, 1932—"Atcherley appeared in the stands dressed as a farmer. His plane was offered for sale at auction and he bid it in for \$200. Al Wilson gave him one lesson in flying around the field and the 'farmer' then said he could fly it himself. He started his usual stunt flying with one wing and one wheel touching the ground, when the wheel gave way and the plane lurched to a sudden stop. Atcherley made it a good show by jumping out of the ship and running off the field. He acted so well, in fact, that most of the spectators thought the accident was part of the show.

On September 1, 1932—"Lieutenant R.L.R. Atcherley varied his act . . . by appearing in a tail coat, gray trousers and silk hat. His evolutions, mostly carried on with one wheel and a wing tip dragging, convulsed the crowd. He ended his flying by climbing down the out-

George Kossowski's P.Z.L P.11.

Placido d'Abreu's Junkers A.50.

Andrea Zotti's Breda 19.



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R.L.R. Atcherley as Prof. Beardsford Smythe, P.Z.L. P.11 and Morane Saulnier 250 in the background.

R.L.R. Atcherley as Prof. Beardsford Smythe and his Curtiss *Fledgling*.

side of the fuselage while the plane was still rolling along the airport at 30 miles an hour and dropping over the tail surfaces before it came to a stop.

"He was introduced as Professor [Beardsford] Smythe, aeronautical expert, of Cambridge. He flew following instructions in a book he had written and which he carried in his hand and afterward broadcast a lecture on the value of learning in aeronautics."<sup>7</sup>

Roelif Loveland in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* described Atcherley's performance in the issue of September 3, 1932.

"When Richard Llewelyn Roger Atcherley became a flyer, the stage was deprived of a star, and the running track likewise. For two days now the British flight commander has been convulsing air race crowds. His first appearance here this year wasn't very hot from the musical comedy angle. A lot of people thought Atcherley had gone stale. He appeared in normal clothing, and did nothing on the field except to cut up with his plane.

"Then Lieut. Atcherley staged a comeback. First he essayed a new role. He appeared as a very rustic looking farmer and drove his plane through its crazy antics in that garb. Thursday he appeared in his more familiar role of Prof. Smythe, with a flying instruction book in his pocket, his umbrella streaming behind a strut, and a very seedy plug hat tied upon his head.

"Yesterday he had added to his repertoire. He appeared in the afternoon show with a washing strung across his plane. It dropped off as per schedule, no doubt, and Lieut. Atcherley slowed down his ship, clambered out of the cockpit, dashed across the field, his long legs flying like nobody's business, retrieved his laundry, returned to the plane, tied the laundry back on, and went on with his program which really was screamingly funny for anyone, and completely mad for any staid Britisher.



Cliff Henderson, R.L.R. Atcherley as Prof. Smythe and the Curtiss *Fledgling* hung with "washing."

R.L.R. Atcherley as the farmer in the cockpit of his Curtiss *Fledgling*.

Jean Assolant's Morane Saulnier 250.

"His umbrella dropped off, and his chief concern on landing was to inquire whether anybody had seen it drop.

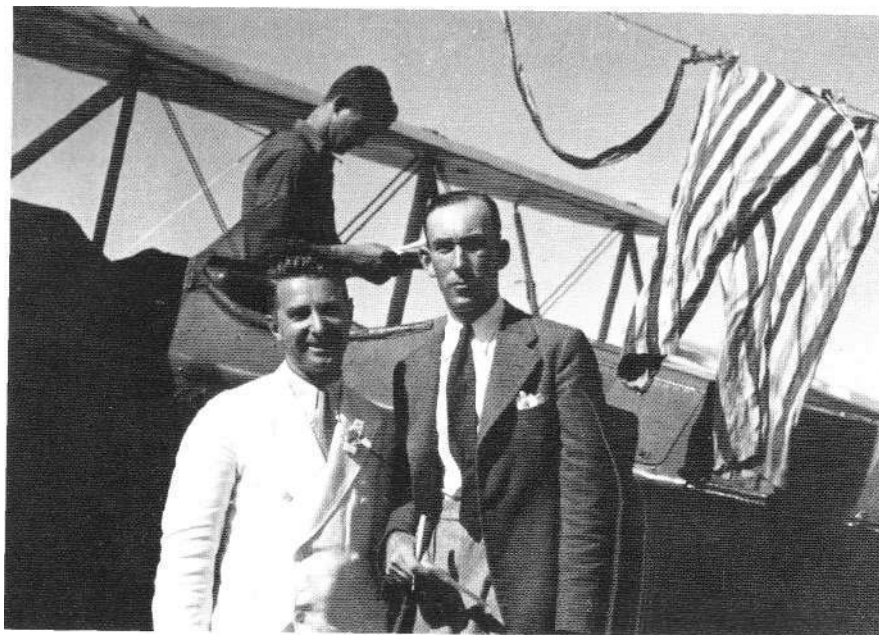
Somebody told him its approximate location.

'I'll get it,' said Atcherley, and he started out the gate. But some of the officials caught him and told him they'd pick it up.

"I'd not like to lose it,' said Atcherley."<sup>8</sup>

Lauren D. Lyman reporting in the *New York Times* on Atcherley's performance of September 3, 1932, noted that "In his show he landed and dropped from his rolling plane a small flock of ducks which he used as markers for his turns for the remainder of his period in the air."<sup>9</sup>

Upon his retirement, Air Marshal Sir Richard Llewellyn Roger Atcherley had served in various capacities in the Royal Air Force. He had been an experimental and test pilot, Royal Aircraft Establishment, and commanded various operational units of the R. A.F. during World War II. At the conclusion of the war, 1945, he was commandant of the Central Fighter Establishment. From 1949 to 1950 he was Commander in Chief of the Royal Pakistan Air Force. At the time of his retirement, 1958, he was Commanding Officer of the Flying Training Command.<sup>10</sup>



#### REFERENCES

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