

Emil Strasser Photographs from the 1934 National Air Races



Courtesy of Gerald Liang

John A. Worthen in the Wedell-Williams Model 45 should have won the 1934 Bendix Race but flew past Cleveland and had to double back and came in second. The Model 45 was a revolutionary racer for 1934 with retractable landing gear and a full cantilever wing with no external wire bracing. It was a shame that Jimmy Wedell did not live to see it through its development.

The 1934 National Air Races (NAR) were back in Cleveland, Ohio, following the practice of alternating with the west coast where the 1933 NAR had been held in Los Angeles, Calif.

Commemorating the 25th anniversary of the first air race in Reims, France, the 1934 NAR were held August 31 to September 3. This event had been shortened to a four-day weekend from the 10 day extravaganzas that had been the previous venue. The country was in the heart of the Depression, which had shrunk the purses, but did not prevent a sell-out crowd estimated at 100,000 showing up for the Labor Day "big race" for the Thompson Trophy.

A new race was added to the 1934 NAR for aircraft powered by restricted displacement engines. Sponsored by the Cleveland Pneumatic Tool Co., manufacturers of aircraft landing gear components, the race was named in honor of its president, Louis Greve. The race was actually flown in three heats with the winner being decided by the total number of points accumulated.

All the closed course races were flown on a race course that had been shortened to an 8.33 mile triangular shape in order to make the planes more visible to the grandstand spectators. Racer Doug Davis complained to the organizers that the course was too short, forcing pilots to make low-altitude high-speed turns that could have disastrous potential.



Doug Davis with Walter Beech accepting the first Thompson Cup in September 1929 after winning the Thompson race in the Travel Air "Mystery Ship." (United Press International photo from the AAHS collection, AAHS_P001011)



Roscoe Turner won the 1934 Thompson Trophy in his Wedell-Williams racer with a 1,000-hp P&W Hornet engine installed for the 1934 NAR. This was the most power carried by a racer up to that time. Turner had a new sponsor in 1934 and wore race no. 57 for the H.J. Heinz Co. and their 57 varieties of food. Turner's winning speed was 248.129 mph.

The Lawrence Brown designed B-2 "Miss Los Angeles" flown by Roy Minor was second in the Thompson Trophy Race with a speed of 214.929 mph. The B-2 was powered by a Menasco C-6S, 544 cu. in., 300-hp in-line engine.



Wedell-Williams no. 92, NR536V, flown by John A. Worthen was the third place finisher in the 1934 Thompson Trophy Race. His speed was 208.376 mph. The engine was a 550-hp P&W Wasp Jr.

Brown, Miles and Atwood Special, race no. 6, NR225Y, won the Greve Trophy Race on a point system. Lee Miles flew the ship and won with a speed of 206.241 mph. The engine was a Menasco C-4.



This proved to be a prophetic statement, as Davis would be killed while leading the Thompson Trophy Race on the eighth lap of a 10 lap event when he circled a cut pylon

1934 was also a sad year for the air racing world when three of the top air racer builders and pilots were killed in air-plane crashes. In addition to Doug Davis, Jimmy Wedell was killed in June while giving a flying lesson in a de Havilland *Gypsy Moth* and Z.T. Granville, head man at Granville Brothers (GeeBee) was killed in a landing accident at Spartanberg, S.C.

Bendix Trophy

The 1934 NAR were kicked off with the Bendix Trophy Race from Los Angeles, Calif., to Cleveland, Ohio. Six aircraft were entered in the event with only two completing the race before the time deadline. The race was won by Doug Davis flying the Wedell-Williams no. 44, with John Worthon finishing second in the Wedell-Williams no. 45. Lee Gehlbach in the Granville Bros. QED finished after the 6:00 p.m. deadline. Worthon would have actually won the race had he not made a navigational error and flew past Cleveland. The added time to backtrack ended up costing him the race win. Roscoe Turner had to scratch due to fuel leaks but would set a new cross-country record the next day.

Place	Pilot	Race No.	Aircraft	Time
1	Doug Davis	44	Wedell Williams	9:26.41
2	John Worthon	45	Wedell Williams	10:03.00
3	Lee Gehlbach	77	Granville QED	(1)
—	Jackie Cochran	—	Northrop Gamma	(2)
—	Wiley Post	—	Winnie Mae	(2)
—	Roscoe Turner	—	Wedell Williams	(3)
1- DQ on time		2 - DNF	3 - Scratched	



The wreckage of Doug Davis' no. 44 on September 3, 1934, a tragic day. (United Press International photo from the AAHS collection, AAHS_P001012)

Greve Trophy

The results of the Greve Trophy Race with Lee Miles at the top of the pack flying a Miles & Attwood Special, race no. 6.

Place	Pilot	Race No.	Aircraft
1	Lee Miles	6	Miles & Atwood
2 (tie)	Roger Don Rae	131	Keith-Rider R-1
2 (tie)	Art Chester	15	Chester Special
3	H. Neumann	39	Howard "Ike"
4	Roy Minor	33	Brown B-2



The wreckage of the de Havilland Gypsy Moth biplane that killed Jimmy Wedell. (United Press International photo from the AAHS collection, AAHS_P001014)



Another 1934 tragedy was the death of Jimmy Wedell, one of the premier race pilots and race plane builders of the "Golden Age." Wedell was killed while giving a flying lesson near his home field in Patterson, La., in June 1934. (United Press International photo from the AAHS collection, AAHS_P001013)

Thompson Trophy

Seven aircraft would take the starter's flag for the Thompson Trophy. These included Doug Davis in the Wedell-Williams, race no. 44, which had won the Bendix Trophy, Roscoe Turner in a P&W Hornet-powered Wedell-Williams racer, and five of the racers from the Greve Trophy races. Davis would crash while leading by a good margin when he attempted to re-circle a cut pylon that was out of sight of the grandstands. Turner would go on to capture his first Thompson Trophy win.

Place	Pilot	Race No.	Aircraft	Speed
1	Roscoe Turner	57	Wedell-Williams	248.129
2	Roy Minor	33	Brown-B-2	214.929
3	J. A. Worthen	92	Wedell-Williams	208.376
4	H. Neumann	39	Howard "Ike"	209.103
5	Roger Don Rae	131	Keith Rider R-1	205.358
6	Art Chester	15	Chester Special	191.597

We hope this trip back down memories runway will be of interest to our readers.

References

Aircraft of Air Racing's Golden Age, Robert Hirsch, 8439 Dale Street, Buena Park, CA 90620, 2004.

Aerofiles.com

Society of Air Race Historians, "1934 National Air Races,"

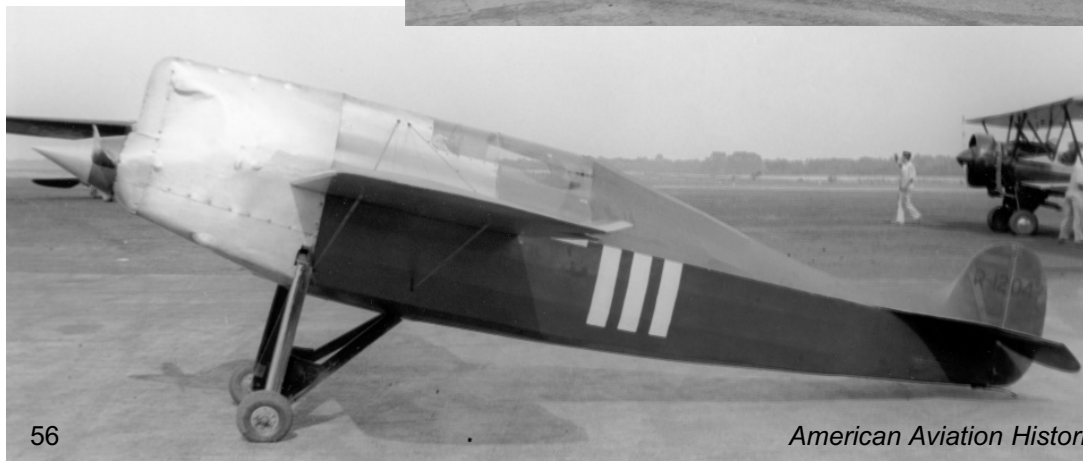
Web page <http://www.airrace.com/1934NAR.htm>

Cleveland Air Show Web site, "History of the Cleveland National Air Races." http://www.clevelandairshow.com/press_room/natlairraces.htm



Roger Don Rae flew this Keith-Rider R-1 "San Francisco I," NR51Y, race no. 131, to fifth place in the Thompson Trophy Race. His speed was 205.358 mph, and powered by a 250-hp Menasco C-6 544 cu. in. engine.

Earl Ortman raced this Keith-Rider R-2 "San Francisco II," NR52Y, race no. 1, but did not place in the 1934 National Air Races.

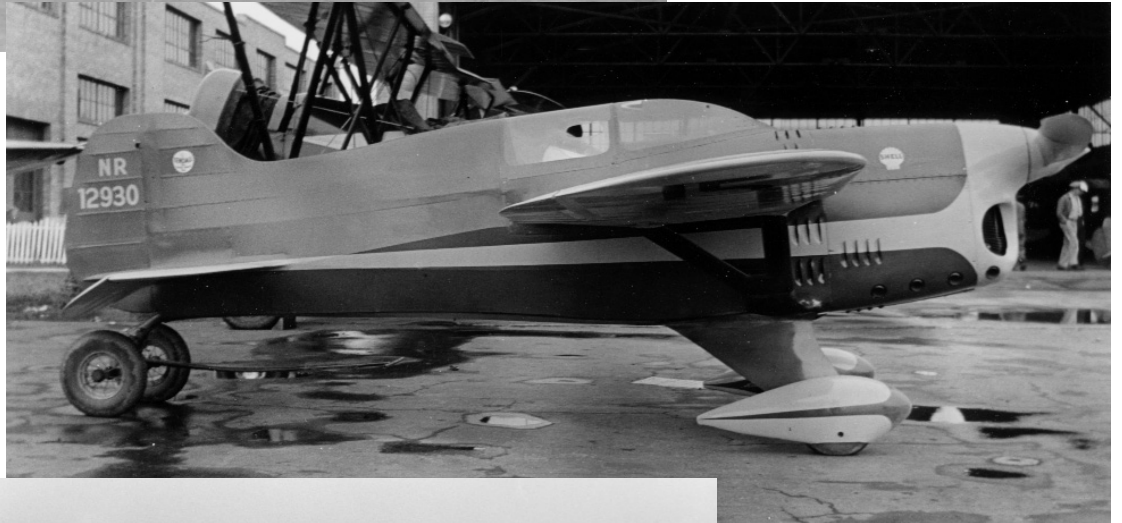


Steve Wittman's "Chief Oshkosh," NR12047, race no. 111, used a Cirrus Hermes, 115-hp, 349 cu.in. engine. Wittman picked up two third place, two fourths and two fifth place finishes. His racer, "Chief Oshkosh," was just beginning a fabulous career.



The Wedell-Williams no. 44, NR278V, carried race pilot Doug Davis to victory in the Bendix cross-country race in 1934. Tragically, Davis would die in no. 44 during the eighth lap of the Thompson Trophy Race. Davis had just cut inside a pylon about three miles behind the grandstand. He suddenly swerved to the left as if to circle back around the pylon. His plane, traveling about 250 mph, high-speed stalled out of control, twisted crazily and plunged its nose into the ground.

The Art Chester "Jeep," NR12930, was sixth in the 1934 Thompson Trophy Race with a speed of 191.597 mph using a Menasco C-4S engine, with 363 cu. in. and 225 hp.



The Tilbury-Fundy "Flash," NR12931, race no. 71, competed in the small engine races at the 1934 National Air Races. The ship was flown by Clarence McArthur and was powered by a 4-cylinder, 45-hp Church 200 cu. in. engine.

The Rasmussen "Skippy" racer, NR13518, race no. 10, was powered by a 5-cylinder 190 cu. in., 65-hp engine. The plane, flown by Willis Kysor, won a second and a third place in the 200 cu.in. events.

