

A Tribute to Speed Holman

IF YOU will just think back a few months you'll remember that a chap by the name of Speed Holman won the 1930 Thompson Trophy race, twenty laps of a five-mile course, averaging 201.91 miles per hour for the one hundred mile stretch. The race carries with it, besides the valuable trophy, \$5,000 in cash. Holman won the race, but he didn't collect the five thousand.

Speed piloted a plane in that race just for the fun of flying, it being stipulated before the race that if he should win, the \$5,000 would not be his. Imagine being so much in love with flying that one is willing to cut corners in a new and heretofore untried plane at more than 200 miles an hour just for the adventure of it! Holman did and that's the index to Speed Holman of Minneapolis.

Let's go back to the air race.

E. M. Laird, builder of the famous Laird planes, tells us that a tire company placed an order with him for one of his special speed wing planes three weeks before the race. Although handicapped by the short time in which to compete against the nation's fastest, the Laird organization worked day and night to complete the craft. At 3:30 p. m. of the day of the Thompson Trophy race the plane was wheeled out of the factory. The engine was started on a field near the factory and Speed Holman, who was in the pilot's cockpit behind the 300-horsepower motor nodded, the chocks were pulled and into the air went the plane on its first test flight.

Ten minutes after flying the speedy craft, Holman set her down, and with the comment, "She's fast," he gave orders for a few minor adjustments. The tanks were to be filled and there was just about time enough to hop over the field for the big race.

If you could have stood beside Holman you would have realized how anxious he was to fly that plane in the race. It had been planned to let another nationally known pilot fly the craft. Some of Speed's friends got this pilot off in a corner and a hurried consultation took place. They urged upon this pilot to let Holman fly the craft. They pointed out that Holman had been around this course in other races of the week; they told how Holman's fastest plane was a Laird and how many of them he had flown. Holman had won many a race in the Laird planes of other years. His personal ship is a Laird craft. After much persuasion the pilot assented and when he was told, Holman acted like a school boy. He jumped and pranced around the craft and hurried the mechanics. He hopped over to the Curtiss-Reynolds airport and thirty minutes later he was piloting the craft to victory, establish-

An intimate biographical sketch of a famous pilot and flying executive whose name was a by-word wherever races were held.

by GEORGE SMEDAL



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CHARLES W. HOLMAN
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One of the foremost figures in the ranks of America's distinguished pilots, Holman's tragic death at the Omaha races came as a shock to the entire world of aviation.

The accompanying article was prepared some time prior to the fatal accident and is being published without change as perhaps the finest tribute we can pay to a man who will live long in the memories of flyers.

ing a new closed course record for commercial ships.

During that race Holman was twice on the verge of losing consciousness. Exhaust gas, driven into the cockpit of the tiny racer, threatened to put him out. Cutting the corners at more than 200 miles an hour drove the blood from his head, leaving him weak and dizzy.

After the race he disclosed that once he came to just in time to see a big tree looming in front of him. He jerked back on the stick, instinctively, and got over the obstacle. At another point in the race he nearly ran into a railroad block signal. Again, instinct saved him.

The tension of the race showed plainly as Speed tumbled out of the craft. He dropped to the ground on his hands and knees. He was sick. An ordinary flier might never have come out of that cockpit alive. But then Holman is no ordinary man or flier.

FUNNY as it may seem Speed Holman did not gain his nickname as an airplane pilot. His full and business name is Charles W. Holman. It was in 1917 that he owned his first motorcycle. He liked speed so he raced at the Minnesota state fair grounds. It was there that his old nickname of "Slim" was replaced by "Speed" and today Speed Holman is known nationally as one of the most expert, fastest and safest airplane pilots.

It was in 1917 that Speed tried to get into the aviation service of the United States. But he failed. There was something the matter, not a serious defect but enough to have the recruiting officers turn him down. They considered him too young.

Holman has always loved motors. He is perhaps the most expert engine mechanic in aviation. That's why he wanted to get into the army aviation. It gave him the opportunity of being with airplanes and motors and it would also give him a chance to learn to pilot an airplane. But the air service said no, and Speed was terribly disappointed.

It was about a year later that Holman got his opportunity. Walter Bullock, one of the pioneer aviators in Minnesota, now a pilot with Northwest Airways, bought a biplane of the pusher type. Holman didn't know Bullock but watched one of his exhibition flights. That night Holman wrote Bullock a letter explaining that he wanted to learn to fly and was willing to work as a mechanic in exchange for the chance to learn flying. Then followed an introduction and the result was that Holman got a job with Bullock. He met other fliers, learned the rudiments of flying.

Then Holman decided he needed some more money. Parachute jumping was quite the fad then so Speed decided it was a quick way to earn the necessary funds. So he started wing walking acrobatics and all kinds of stunts.

In the meantime Holman's father learned of these tricks. He was plainly worried. He offered to get his son a plane if he would just stop parachute jumping and all those other crazy tricks.

Of course Speed was agreeable so in the fall of 1920 Holman had his ship.

Soon afterwards, a student pilot was in the cockpit while Holman was starting the motor outside. The student decided he knew something about flying so he tried to take off in Speed's plane. He piloted it into a nice mess of wreckage and that was the end of Speed Holman's airplane. A more heartbroken youth never lived.

But the next spring Holman was again flying. He carried passengers in order to pay his father back for the airplane. During the next two



Matty Laird, designer, and Speed Holman (right), formed a racing team that was hard to beat.

years the youthful flier served as chief pilot for an aircraft company and a school of aviation.

In 1924 Speed had his first taste of cross-country flying winning second place in the "On-to-Dayton" race from Minot, N. D.

Then followed two years of exhibition flying and it was during this time that Holman began to distinguish himself as a stunter. But always he was the skilled pilot, competent and trustworthy.

In 1926 he took to flying the air mail and also continued his exhibition flying. He spent hours in the air perfecting his stunts and learning what a plane would safely do and would not do.

In 1927 he won the Class A National Air Derby from New York to Spokane and soon afterward came in first in the Spokane to Portland, Oregon, classic. In the fall of that year he became operations manager of the Northwest Airways, which position he still holds. But Holman did not quit flying. He has never flown more than since he got his present position.

I REMEMBER that in 1928 looping-the-loop was just as much of a rage as endurance flying was last summer. One Sunday afternoon I watched Holman looping out at Wold-Chamberlain airport near Minneapolis. When he landed he had made 1,093 loops, a new record. A few days later we heard that a French flier had broken Speed's record. He immediately climbed into

his craft and when he landed he had made 1,433 loops which is still the record.

Speed likes cross-country racing. In 1928 a forced landing in a fog set him down near Pittsburgh on the New York to Los Angeles race. Somebody erred in starting the fliers. They hit fog a short distance out of New York. Holman repaired his plane, flew to Los Angeles and the day after his arrival won the race to Cincinnati.

Remember Memorial day, 1929? Holman, at an average speed of 157 miles an hour, won the race over the St. Louis to Indianapolis course. He got the Gardner trophy cup and \$6,250 first prize money. Holman is also credited with making the first outside loop in a commercial plane at Wold-Chamberlain field, April 10, 1929.

If you attended the national air races in Cleveland two years ago you remember seeing a sixteen passenger tri-motored plane flying up side down. It was the first time that this had been done and if you had been sitting beside me I could have told you that Speed Holman was the pilot.

Do you wonder what Holman thinks of stunt flying? He frankly admits the risks he takes in stunting a plane but he resents the intimation that he is more reckless than the average pilot. He never puts a plane through more than it can stand. And stunting, he explains, is valuable both as training for a pilot and in locating the weak points in airplane construction.

Ask him about this and he'll reply: "The stunt flier has had his plane in every position that it can get into in case of accident. The pilot who knows how to take his plane out of a stunt spin or drop, knows what to do in case of real emergency."

A little more than a year ago Speed Holman joined the caterpillar club. He was testing a new ship over Wold-Chamberlain field. It failed to respond to the controls and after sticking with it as long as he dared Holman took to his chute. His recommendations as to construction changes resulted in this plane later winning a certificate from the U. S. Department of Commerce.

Everybody likes Speed Holman. He is very modest, almost bashful. He is six feet, five and one-half inches tall

and this frame is covered with 215 pounds of muscle. There isn't an ounce of fat on his tall lean body. He's as trim as the planes he flies. He moves fast and the only thing he'll talk about is flying.

Flying is safe, Speed says.

"It's like any other form of transportation. You have a good machine, knowledge of the conditions you are to travel under and the ability to handle the craft."

Before citing just a few of Speed Holman's records let me explain that he is still setting them. Recently he flew into Chicago from Minneapolis, Minn., in 100 minutes! If you don't think that fast, it means that he traveled 360 miles in one hour and forty minutes. His previous record was eight minutes slower.

So next time you hear or read about a record breaking flier just think of these, just a few of Speed Holman's records:

1923—Won stunt flying contest at Pulitzer race in St. Louis.

1924—Took second place in "On-to-Dayton" race, Minot, N. D. to Dayton, Ohio.

1927—Won National Air Derby, New York to Spokane, 19 hours and 42 minutes.

1927—Won Spokane to Portland race by 27 seconds over second prize winner.

1928—Established world's record of 1,433 consecutive loops in five hours. This is still the record.

1928—Won Los Angeles to Cincinnati air race.

1929—Established air mail speed record for commercial planes over Minneapolis to Chicago route, 360 miles in one hour, 48 minutes.

1929—Piloted first commercial plane ever to make outside loop. Did it ten times.

1929—Won first annual Gardner trophy race, Memorial Day, St. Louis to Indianapolis and return at average of 157 miles an hour.

1929—Won 800 cubic inch closed course race at Cleveland races.

1930—Won the Thompson trophy race at Chicago, setting record for speed.

1930—Set new speed record from Minneapolis to Chicago, one hour, 40 minutes.

Holman set a new closed course record of 201.91 m.p.h. in winning the 1930 Thompson Trophy Race with the Laird Speedwing "Solution" shown here.

