



The Gardner Trophy Air Races – May 1929

Part 1: Preliminaries

By Terry L. Bowden

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Charles W. "Speed" Holman emerging from the cockpit of his Laird LCR-200, speaks with mechanic 'Doc' Kincaid.
Photo: Parks College Archives, J. Wecker Collection



First conceived as a promotional event to bolster the enterprises of Parks Air Lines, Inc., the Gardner Trophy Race became one of the major aerial events of 1929. Sanctioned by the National Aeronautic Association, the race had just one restriction; engine sizes were to be held under 800 cubic inches displacement. It was an "all-out" speed dash, with no handicaps. Prize offerings of over ten-thousand dollars attracted pilots from all

across the across the United States. What resulted was a most unique air race featuring some of the biggest names in the business and a wide variety of airplanes.



Cessna AF: Pilot - Robert S. LeRoy
Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry



Rearwin Ken-Royce 2000C: Pilot - George E. Halsey
Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry



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The Gardner Trophy Air Race actually consisted of two separate phases. The first phase was a preliminary qualifying event consisting of five races of approximately 700 miles. The first and second places in each of these five heats would qualify to compete in the second phase, a final event of 468 miles. The winner of this final was to receive the Gardner Trophy Cup and \$5,500 in prize money.



*Envelope with commemorative post-mark
Courtesy of Richard Kamm*

CONCEPT:

The Gardner Races were created to promote Parks Air College, dubbed the "World's Largest Flying School", and Parks Aircraft Company, a newly formed aircraft manufacturer in East Saint Louis, Illinois. With the introduction of a line of four new airplanes for the spring of 1929, Parks Aircraft was looking to stir the interest of the flying public. The Parks people, masters at the game of publicity, felt they could showcase their school and airplane factory by inviting the public to

Parks Airfield to see and participate in aviation for themselves.

It was decided to hold an Air Race on a date which coincided with the Memorial Day holiday and with two major aviation events already scheduled for the

host city of Saint Louis.

Memorial Day was to fall on May 30th on a Thursday. Many

aviation notables would be in town

that week for the 1st Annual St.

Louis

Aviation

Exhibition

and for the

3rd National

Meeting of the

American Society of

Mechanical Engineers. It would

be a great opportunity to associate some of the biggest names in aviation with the Parks event.

The event was inspired by Oliver L. Parks and by Russell and Fred Gardner. Parks had become well known for creating the college, the airfield, and the aircraft manufacturing plant, all of which were under Parks Air Lines, Inc. The "Gardner Bros.", as they were known, were owners of the Gardner Motor Car Company in Saint Louis. The brothers had good reason to become involved in a promotional air event. They were, after all, the financial backers of Parks Aircraft Company.

Plans for the race were officially announced in late December of 1928, along with the promise of \$10,000 in prize money from the two brothers. A race committee, including some of the area's top bankers and businessmen, was



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formed. This committee, chaired by Maj. Albert Bond Lambert, was an assembly of Saint Louis' "elite" aviation socialites. This type of foundation practically guaranteed success for the event from it's start. It was typical of the shrewd business schemes that made Oliver Parks famous.

A race format and rules were agreed upon, as follows: The race would be open to commercially built planes with engines not to exceed 800 cubic inches displacement. Any experimental modifications or special equipment would be allowed so long as the plane carried the proper registration certification. Any necessary stops would be allowed without penalty beyond the delay incurred.

Five preliminary races from five separate points in the U.S., ending at Parks Airfield (E. St. Louis, IL), would be held on May 28, 1929. The 1st and 2nd place contestants in each heat would qualify for the finals to be held on May 30, 1929. Prizes would be \$750 for first places and \$250 for second places. Starting points for the preliminaries would be cities situated approximately 700 miles from Parks Airfield. The final event was planned to coincide with the Memorial Day automobile race at Indianapolis, Indiana. Ten entries, leaving Parks Airfield at one minute intervals, would be timed over a course directly to a pair of pylons, situated near the Indianapolis racetrack, and back to a finish line in the middle of Parks Airfield. The contestant with the fastest time would be awarded with the beautiful silver Gardner Trophy Cup and a purse of \$5,000. The second place

prize was \$400. And \$200 would be awarded to the third place contestant.

Race plans had begun to materialize by the end of April, as entries came from all over the U.S. Some national exposure was gained as several aviation magazines had begun to keep track of the early entries. In addition, local papers had piqued the interest of St. Louisans as the race drew nearer. All regional aviation businesses were invited to attend the events. This included local aircraft manufacturers; such as the Curtiss-Robertson company who built the popular Curtiss Robin, The Saint Louis Car Company who built the Saint Louis Cardinal, and the Mahoney-Ryan Company who built the Ryan Brougham series of monoplanes. Additional sponsorship pledges were being offered by some local and regional companies in the form of free fuel and oil to race contestants. It was looking as though the Parks organization was going to realize it's plan to create a big event.

Race organizers were at work planning for other attractions to offer on race-day. Several stunt flyers had been lined up. The U.S. Army Air Corps, from nearby Scott Field, had agreed to provide an exhibition of Military Aircraft. Also, D.S. Barney Zimmerly, of the Nicholas-Beasley company, and Phoebe Fairfax Omlie were each planning separate altitude record attempts to coincide with race activities.



All post-mark images used throughout this article were taken from Gardner Race commemorative postage provided by Mr. Richard Kamm. Digital enhancement by the author.



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THE HOST PARKS ORGANIZATION AND THEIR AIRFIELD :

Parks Airfield was already known locally as a very active place. Weekends at Parks were busy as school instructors gave airplane rides for a penny-a-pound. Passing motorcars frequently paused at Parks to see afternoon shows of exhibition flying and parachute jumps, not all of which were to the approval of Mr. Parks. Army aircraft from nearby Scott Field were often seen in the area, and were known to give spontaneous exhibitions at Parks. These activities were in addition to the already rigorous flying schedule of the Air College and of the airplane factory.

"Something was always happening over there!", exclaims "Chub" Wheeler, who lived nearby and who "hung around" the airport in his youth.

Parks Airfield had a meager reputation, nationally, as well. It had begun to be known by pilots across the country as an excellent stop-over point when traveling through the midwest. Its location, just across the Mississippi River from downtown St. Louis, was quite convenient for doing business in town. The St. Louis "suburban south" trolley tracks literally cut across the western edge of the Parks grounds, providing visitors with direct access to downtown.

Parks Airfield was Saint Louis' best equipped airport, providing the area its first night landing port. Also, complete mechanical services were offered at the college which was a certified repair depot. Fine service and hospitality, along with great food had become the trademark of Parks Airfield. The site would

certainly have been a good location for any air related gathering. And, it did provide a fine scene for the Gardner Air Races.

THE PRELIMINARY RACES :

The five preliminary races proved to be very competitive. To many, they were even more exciting than the final. These qualifying heats brought together a unique field of personalities, flying a variety of airplanes. Some of the entrants were merely in it for the "sport" of it all. But most were serious competitors who were trying to fine-tune their planes for the National Air Races coming at the end of the summer. Factors were generally good on May 28, 1929 for the preliminaries, although the Buffalo heat was influenced by poor weather conditions. Race committee officials were present at each of the five start points for a 5 a.m. start. Racers were flagged at timed intervals. The official start times were communicated by wire to the race referee, T. Preston Sultan at the finish, who managed the elapsed time counts as the racers arrived at Parks Airfield.

The contestants began to arrive in E. St. Louis at 9:05 a.m., when Marvin T. O'Dell sailed over the finish line from Buffalo in his red and white Cessna, nicknamed "The Night Hawk". He had averaged 132 m.p.h. and had less than a gallon of fuel remaining as he shut down his engine. Just three minutes later, Arthur J. Davis arrived from Buffalo in his Taperwing Waco. Starving for fuel, Davis' engine quit as he zoomed across the finish line. The skillful E. Lansing, MI pilot brought his plane around for a smooth "dead-stick" landing.





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*Waco Taperwing (Note streamline NACA-type cowling and racing gear)
Pilot: Arthur J. "Art" Davis - Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry*

The Gardner preliminaries had begun with much anticipation, and the competitors were already delivering excitement. Few spectators, except for students and employees of the Parks company, were on the field at the beginning of the day. But as the morning progressed, a steady stream of automobiles appeared until field workers were having difficulty in keeping the field clear of spectators. Visiting aircraft were streaming in as well, adding to the excitement. The racers arrived, plane-by-plane, until late in the afternoon. As soon as they were shut down, race planes were towed away to hangars by a team of workers.

Sydnor Hall, of St. Louis, was next to arrive in his Travel Air Speedwing, dubbed "The White Cow", at 9:22 a.m. With a N.A.C.A.-type cowling and crudely fashioned wheel fairings, his airplane averaged 143 m.p.h. for 1st place in a non-stop flight from Jacksonville, Fla. Hall, the local boy who was a mail pilot for Robertson Flying Service was well received by the crowd.



Pilot Sydnor Hall - Photo: Parks College Archives, J. Wecker Collection

Dale G. "Red" Jackson, also of St. Louis, arrived at 10:06 a.m. in a Curtiss Robin, also from Jacksonville. Jackson was a company pilot for the Robin's manufacturer Curtiss-Robertson. The orange airplane was fitted with N.A.C.A.-type cowling and smooth



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fairings over its 28" X 4" wheels. He qualified for the final, taking 2nd place. His modified Robin averaged 130 m.p.h., even though its Curtiss "Challenger" engine had begun missing badly upon reaching the field. His flight was sponsored by the Curtiss-Robertson company in Saint Louis.



*Curtiss Robin C-1 (Modifications of note - wheel fairings and NACA-type cowling)
Pilot: Dale G. "Red" Jackson
Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry*

At 10:39a.m., Willard Van Buren King arrived from Buffalo to claim 3rd place in his heat. A college student and sport pilot from Convent, New Jersey, King averaged 100 m.p.h. in his beautiful Travel Air D-4000. The Gardner was King's first air racing effort.

Edwin Hedeem, pilot for Johnson's Wax company in Racine, Wisconsin, arrived just 8 minutes behind King to claim 4th place from Buffalo. Hedeem averaged 98 m.p.h. in his unmodified Taperwing Waco. 5th place from Buffalo was claimed at 11:52 a.m. by W. Parker Runyon, Jr. This college student from Perth Amboy, New Jersey averaged 84 m.p.h. in his Travel Air, despite many problems. He had been forced down by storms and fog at Muncie, Indiana where he hit a barbed wire fence, tearing one wing. He repaired the damage and flew on to Indianapolis, where he refueled before continuing.



*Waco Taperwing ATO "Waxbird" unmodified
Pilot: Edwin Hedeem
Photo: S.C. Johnson's Wax Company archives*

C.W. "Speed" Holman and John P. Wood provided the day's most exciting finish. Leaving Fargo, North Dakota together at 9:15 a.m., Wood in his "clipped" Taperwing Waco battled nip-and-tuck with Holman in his Laird for the full distance. Holman spurted ahead just a half mile from the finish as the racers crossed the Mississippi River.



*Pilot John P. Wood from the business office of his highly modified Taperwing Waco.
Photo: Parks College Archives*

Holman zoomed across the finish line and came around for a "victory roll" as Wood crossed the finish just 90 seconds after. They averaged 152 m.p.h. and 150 m.p.h., arriving at 12:28 p.m. and 12:30 p.m., respectively.



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*Laird LCR-200, Pilot: C.W. Holman
Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry*



*Cessna AW (modified) "The Night Hawk"
Pilot: Marvin T. Odell
Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry*



*Cessna DC-6 experimental, Pilot: Stanley T. Stanton
Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry*

Stanley T. Stanton was next to arrive at 12:40 p.m. in an all-white Cessna DC-6. This airplane was a Cessna 'company-owned' prototype of this model. Stanton, had recently taken up competitive flying after retiring from teaching at the University of Michigan. He averaged 118 m.p.h. in the Curtiss "Challenger" powered Cessna, claiming 1st place in the Denver preliminary. Stanton's participation was sponsored by the Cessna company.

George E. Halsey arrived at 12:49 p.m. in a Rearwin Ken-Royce 2000. He was first thought to have claimed 2nd place from Denver as he arrived just ahead of

D.C. Warren. But his official elapsed time showed that he had left Denver one minute ahead of Warren. Halsey who was sales promoter for Rearwin Airplanes, Inc. had landed in Kansas City to repair a broken Exhaust stack on the Curtiss "Challenger" engine.

Douglas C. Warren arrived from Denver in his "Hisso" powered Travel Air at 12:49:30 p.m. He had made a 20 minute fuel stop in Salina, Kansas and was so short of gasoline when he reached the Parks field that he approached with one wing lowered to allow the last drops of fuel to be used. He was out of gasoline when he crossed the line. With a dead engine, he swung around in a flat turn



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and made a down wind landing just thirty seconds after Halsey. His elapsed time bested Halsey's by 30 seconds for a second place finish and qualified him for a final position.



Travel Air 3000 (modified)

Pilot: Douglas.C. Warren

Photo: Jim Peterson via Arthur Berry

Arriving at 1:16 p.m. was George Lea Lambert, another St. Louis pilot and the son of Major Albert Bond Lambert. Lambert had been chosen just a few days before the start by Curtiss Robertson, Inc. to fly a new model C-1 Curtiss Robin. Claiming 3rd place from Denver, he made the trip non-stop in just over 7 hours, averaging 108 m.p.h. Lambert, a Princeton University graduate stepped from his plane wearing a clean blue business suit as though he had driven up in a fine automobile.

Next to land was Robert S. LeRoy from Fargo. He had averaged 118 m.p.h. in a Cessna AF which was powered by a 150 h.p. Floco (Axelson Machine Co.) engine. Race officials gave LeRoy the opportunity to petition for qualification in the final because of rules violations made by his competitors. LeRoy had arrived on time for the 5 a.m. start, but his competitors (Wood and Holman) did not show for the start until 9 a.m. LeRoy declined to protest the rules infractions which would have disqualified Wood and Holman. He settled for the 3rd place finish.

Earl W. Rowland arrived as the only contestant from San Antonio at 3:25 p.m., flying the highly acclaimed Cessna CM-1. Both of his competitors had dropped out prior to the start of the race for unknown reasons. He told reporters "I took it easy. They flagged me out at 5 a.m., but I slept a couple of hours until the rain stopped and then I took an hour for lunch at Springfield, Missouri". His elapsed time over the 770 mile trip was 7 hours and 51 minutes, resulting in an average speed of 98 m.p.h.



Earl W. Rowland emerging from the cockpit of the Cessna CM-1 flown for Cessna Aircraft Co.

Photo: Parks College Archives

Floyd Clymer was the last competitor to arrive to close out the preliminaries at 4 p.m. He was in good spirits, despite having had long day in his effort of 9 hours and 51 minutes from Denver. Clymer had landed his Swallow four times in Kansas, once for fuel and three times with radiator leaks.



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Two entrants were not as lucky as Clymer in their efforts. Emil M. "Matty" Laird, competing in the Buffalo heat, was forced down early in the day at Erie,



Pennsylvania with a burned out engine. He was reportedly flying a Laird model

LC-R, though the registration number and serial number of his entry remain unconfirmed. Neil R. McCray, also in the Buffalo preliminary, was forced to land at Westfield, New York by thunderstorms. He was flying a Waco 10. An unconfirmed entrant, Lloyd F. Layne, was listed by an article in Aviation magazine (25 May 1929) to have entered a Laird LC-R in the Buffalo preliminary. A Laird biplane (NC391) was recorded in the Parks Airport register on May 29, but no pilot name was included. Layne's participation has not been linked to this plane.

Two entrants in the San Antonio heat did not start for unknown reasons. They were: James J. Mattern, with a Cessna; and Ellsworth Rogers, with a Travel Air. Two others who may have been Gardner participants are: George W. Haldeman, flying a Bellanca, and W. Gentry Shelton, with a Travel Air. They had been listed as entrants in the Jacksonville leg, but this is unconfirmed. Another unconfirmed entry, Alexis B. McMullen, was thought to have finished 3rd in the Jacksonville preliminary. A Travel Air (NC5241) is recorded in the Parks Airport register on May 29 along with the other race participants, but a signature is lacking. This could possibly

have been his plane. But his participation has not been positively documented.

SUMMARY OF QUALIFYING EVENTS :

By the end of the day's events, nine competitors had qualified to compete in the Memorial Day final. From the Buffalo leg, were M.T. O'Dell and Art Davis. Finalists from Denver were Stanley Stanton and D.C. Warren. "Speed" Holman and John Wood qualified from the Fargo leg. The lone San Antonio qualifier was Earl Rowland. And from the Jacksonville heat came Sydnor Hall and "Red" Jackson. Three competitors had emerged as favorites to win the final. Holman, Wood, and Hall had turned in speeds of 152 m.p.h., 150 m.p.h., and 143 m.p.h. respectively, setting them apart from the rest of the field. Other strong competitors made for an interesting event. Davis, Warren, and Jackson were experienced pilots with capable ships who would surely make a strong bid for the trophy. But the Cessna pilots, Rowland, O'Dell, and Stanton were strong contenders who felt they could win with their sleek planes. Each Gardner finalist had a viable shot at bringing home big money.

Fortunately so far, there had not been major equipment problems for any of the racers. And all had a day to rig, tune, and prepare their planes for the showdown. No entrant would be discounted as all knew the racing game too well. The Gardner Trophy Final event was set to provide a most competitive race to kick off the 1929 racing season.

-- END OF PART 1 --



The Gardner Trophy Air Race – Results Preliminaries May 28, 1929

Heat 1: Buffalo, NY to East Saint Louis, IL – 660 mi.

1st place: Marvin T. O'Dell - Cessna AW - 132 mph		
Pilot's hometown:	Cincinnati, OH	
Race No.:	#13	
Aircraft / Nickname:	Cessna AW (modified) / "The Night Hawk"	
Serial No.:	126	
Registration No.:	NR5579	
Engine / h.p.:	Warner "Scarab" / 110	
Non standard modifications:	Bumped NACA type cowling Wheel Fairings	
Official time / Speed:	5:04 / 132 mph	
2nd place: Arthur J. Davis - Waco Taperwing - 129 mph		
Pilot's hometown:	E. Lansing, MI	
Race No.:	#03	
Aircraft / Nickname:	Waco Taperwing 220 (modified)	
Serial No.:	A-47	
Registration No.:	NR9577	
Engine / h.p.:	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications:	NACA type cowling / Extra Fuel Tank In Fuselage / Waco Racing Gear / Front Cockpit enclosed	
Official time / Speed:	5:07 / 129 mph	
3rd place: Willard Van Buren King - Travel Air "Speed wing" - 100 mph		Picture not available
Pilot's hometown:	Convent, NJ	
Race No.:	#11	
Aircraft / Nickname:	Travel Air D-4000 "Speed wing"	
Serial No.:	751	
Registration No.:	NR6405	
Engine / h.p.:	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications:	unknown	
Official time / Speed:	6:38 / 100 mph	
4th place: Edward Hedeem - Waco Taperwing - 98 mph		
Pilot's hometown:	Racine, WI	
Sponsored by:	Johnson's Wax Company	
Race No.:	#12	
Aircraft / Nickname:	Waco Taperwing 10-T / "Waxbird"	
Serial No.:	A-98	
Registration No.:	NC8584	
Engine / h.p.:	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications:	Unmodified - Highly polished/waxed finish	
Official time / Speed:	6:46 / 98 mph	
5th place: W. Parker Runyon, Jr - Travel Air - 84 mph		Picture not available
Pilot's hometown:	W. Parker Runyon, Jr. / Perth Amboy, NJ	
Race No.:	02	
Aircraft / Nickname:	Travel Air B-4000	
Serial No.:	1061	
Registration No.:	NC9837	
Engine / h.p.:	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications:	unknown	
Official time / Speed:	7:51 / 84 mph	
Dnf (did not finish) : Emil M. Matty Laird / Chicago, IL - Laird (model unknown), #20		
Dnf (did not finish) : Neil R. McCray / Fairview, PA - Waco 10, #06		



The Gardner Trophy Air Race - Results Preliminaries May 28, 1929

Heat 2: Denver, CO to East Saint Louis, IL - 770 mi.

1st place: Stanley T. Stanton - Cessna DC-6 - 118 mph		
Pilot's hometown:	Wichita, KS	
Aircraft owned by:	Cessna Aircraft Company	
Race No.:	09	
Aircraft:	Cessna DC-6	
Serial No:	# 157	
Registration No:	NR8142	
Engine / h.p:	Curtiss R600 Challenger / 185	
Non standard modification:	unknown	
Official time / Speed:	6:31 / 118 mph	
2nd place: D.C. Warren - Travel Air - 116 mph		
Pilot's hometown:	San Francisco, CA	
Race No.:	# 07	
Aircraft:	Travel Air 3000 (modified)	
Serial No:	515	
Registration No:	NC5426	
Engine / h.p:	Hispano-Suiza "Hisso" / 150	
Non standard modification:	Factory "Speed wings" / Front mounted radiator Streamlined wheel coverings / Front Cockpit enclosed	
Official time / Speed:	6:38 / 116 mph	
3rd place: George E. Halsey - Rearwin Ken-Royce 2000 - 116 mph		
Pilot's hometown:	Salina, KS	
Aircraft owned by:	Rearwin Aircraft Company	
Race No.:	# 08	
Aircraft:	Rearwin Ken-Royce 2000	
Serial No:	101	
Registration No:	NX44E	
Engine / h.p:	Curtiss R600 Challenger / 185	
Non standard modification:	Unknown	
Official time / Speed:	6:39 / 116 mph	
4th place: George Lea Lambert - Curtiss Robin C-1 - 108 mph		Picture not available
Pilot's hometown:	Saint Louis, MO	
Aircraft owned by:	Curtiss Robertson Aircraft	
Race No.:		
Aircraft:	Curtiss Robin C-1	
Serial No:		
Registration No:		
Engine / h.p:	Curtiss R600 Challenger / 185	
Non standard modification:	unknown	
Official time / Speed:	7:07 / 108 mph	
5th place: Floyd Clymer - Swallow - 78 mph		Picture not available
Pilot's hometown:		
Race No.:		
Aircraft:	Swallow	
Serial No:		
Registration No:		
Engine / h.p:	Hispano-Suiza "Hisso" / 150	
Non standard modification:	unknown	
Official time / Speed:	9:51 / 78 mph	



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Heat 3: Fargo, ND to East Saint Louis, IL - 790 mi.

1st place: C.W. "Speed" Holman - Laird LC-RJ200 "Speed wing" - 152 mph		
Pilot's hometown	St. Paul, MN	
Aircraft owned by:	Northwest Airways, Inc.	
Race No.	21	
Aircraft	Laird LC-RJ200	
Serial No.	167	
Registration No.	NR7087	
Engine / h.p.	Wright J-4B "Whirlwind" / 200	
Non standard modifications	NACA type cowling / Front Cockpit enclosed Streamlined Wheel Farrings	
Official time / Speed	5:11 / 152 mph	
2nd place: John P. Wood - Waco ATO "Clipped wing" / 150 mph		
Pilot's hometown	Milwaukee, WI	
Race No.	04	
Aircraft	Waco ATO (modified)	
Serial No.	A-104	
Registration No.	NR736E	
Engine / h.p.	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications	Factory Racing Gear / Exhaust stacks removed Custom-built upper wing, span to match lower wing Additional Fuel / Front cockpit enclosed	
Official time / Speed	5:15 / 150 mph	
3rd place: Robert S. LeRoy - Cessna AF - 118 mph		
Pilot's hometown	Los Angeles, CA	
Sponsored by:	Axelson Floco Motor Company	
Race No.	14	
Aircraft	Cessna AF	
Serial No.	141	
Registration No.	NX7462	
Engine / h.p.	Axelson-Floco / 150	
Non standard modifications	Unknown	
Official time / Speed	6:40 / 118 mph	



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Heat 4: Jacksonville, FL to E. Saint Louis, IL - 790 mi.

1st place: Sydnor Hall - Travel Air D-4000 (modified) - 143 mph		
Pilot's hometown	Sydnor Hall / St. Louis, MO	
Race No.	# 05	
Aircraft / Nickname	Travel Air D-4000 "Speedwing" / "The White Cow"	
Serial No.	129	
Registration No.	NR6239	
Engine / h.p.	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications	NACA type cowling / Upper wing area increased Front Cockpit enclosed / Streamlined Wheel Farings	
Official time / Speed	5:32 / 143 mph	
2nd place : Dale "Red" Jackson - Curtiss Robin C-1 / 130 mph		
Pilot's hometown	St. Louis, MO	
Aircraft owned by	Curtiss-Robertson Aircraft	
Race No.	# 15	
Aircraft	Curtiss Robin C-1 (modified)	
Serial No.	362	
Registration No.	NR9291	
Engine / h.p.	Curtiss R600 Challenger / 185	
Non standard modifications	NACA type Cowling / Streamlined Wheel Farings	
Official time / Speed	6:06 / 130 mph	
3rd place: Alexis B. McMullen - Cessna AF - 118 mph		Picture not available
Pilot's hometown	unknown	
Race No.		
Aircraft	Travel Air 4000	
Serial No.	481	
Registration No.	NC5241	
Engine / h.p.	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications	Unknown	
Official time / Speed	Unknown	

Heat 5: San Antonio, TX to E. Saint Louis, IL - 770 mi

1st place: Earl Rowland - Cessna CM-1 - 98 mph		
Pilot / hometown	Earl W. Rowland / Wichita, KS	
Aircraft owned by	Cessna Aircraft Company	
Race No.	99	
Aircraft	Cessna CM-1 "Mid-wing"	
Serial No.	195	
Registration No.	NR9860	
Engine / h.p.	Wright J-5 "Whirlwind" / 220	
Non standard modifications	This was a one-of-a-kind aircraft	
Official time / Speed	7:51 / 98 mph	
dns (did not start) - James J Mattern, Oklahoma City, OK - Cessna		
dns (did not start) - Ellsworth Rogers, Travel Air		
Other reported entrants [may have entered Jacksonville or Buffalo Heats]		
W. Gentry Shelton, Travel Air Lloyd F. Lane, Laird George W. Haldeman, Bellanca		

THE GARDNER TROPHY AIR RACES



MAY 28-30, 1929

by: Terry L. Bowden, copyright 1994

PART II – THE FINAL

First conceived as a promotional event to bolster the enterprises of Parks Air Lines, Inc., the Gardner Trophy Race became one of the major aerial events of 1929. Sanctioned by the National Aeronautic Association, the race had just one restriction; engine sizes were to be held under 800 cubic inches displacement. It was an "all-out" speed dash, with no handicaps. Prize offerings of over ten-thousand dollars attracted pilots from all over the United States. What resulted was a most unique air race featuring some of the biggest names in the business and a wide variety of airplanes.

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THE GARDNER TROPHY AIR RACES

MAY 28-30, 1929



PART II – THE FINAL

More than 10,000 spectators reportedly gathered at Parks Airfield to witness the Gardner Trophy Race final on May 30, 1929. The nine finalists had lined their multi-colored planes across the southern border of the field to await the ten o'clock start. As in the preliminaries, the race was for all-out speed, with no handicaps. The first to round a pylon at the Indianapolis "500" races and return to the Parks field would take home the silver Gardner Cup.

No account of this unique event would be complete without some discussion of the race pilots and of the design features of the nine race planes. Each of the qualifying pilots had brought to the race their own flavor of experience, charisma, and technical abilities. Some had already achieved a meager level of notariety among their flying colleagues. While others had yet to make their mark in aviation. Some were merely in it for the sport. Yet to others, it was strictly business. This unique blend of talent and enthusiasm made the Gardner field of participants a true sense of competitive flare. Each of the nine qualifying airplanes were advanced in some way. The race rules had been set up to require the aircraft to be of a certified type. However experimental modifications were allowed, as long as the plane carried proper registration papers. This allowed the pilots to utilize the latest technological designs, whether previously proven or not.

By 1929, civilian air racing had begun to realize benefits from recently published N.A.C.A. reports on the subject of aerodynamic drag reduction. The most significant of these reports was of the result of tests on a new cowling shape. This cowling would allow for improved cooling airflow across the cylinders of a radial engined airplane, while trimming the overall aerodynamic drag of the airplane. The so-called "N.A.C.A.cowling" was already being used by the military and by some transport-plane manufacturers. Recognizing the obvious advantages of this new cowling, race-plane designers and pilots had begun to build N.A.C.A. type cowlings of their own (sometimes crude) designs. Many of the Gardner racers followed this trend, and most were quite successful in their efforts. Many of them also made other efforts at drag reduction which included shortened wings, special landing gear designs, wheel fairings, and others. Most of the planes qualifying for the Gardner final sported one (or more) of these modifications.

CESSNA RACERS

Cessna airplanes had made a strong showing in the Gardner preliminary races. Four of the five separate heats had Cessna entries. Three of them qualified for the finals by capturing first place in their respective field. Much of the success of these Cessna planes can be attributed to their



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clean aerodynamic designs. Though most of these monoplanes lacked the raw power employed by other Gardner competitors. Cessna's use of semi-symmetric airfoils and cantilever wing bracing made up for the lack of horsepower with significant reductions in drag.

Marvin T. O'Dell won the Buffalo leg in his Warner powered Cessna model AW. He maintained an incredible average speed of 132 m.p.h. on just 110 horsepower. This airplane had been modified with a N.A.C.A type "bumped" cowling, a propeller spinner, and wheel fairings. The red and white racer was nicknamed "The Night Hawk" and carried the number 13.

Stanley T. Stanton flew a Cessna factory entry. This 175 h.p. Cessna DC-6 prototype took first place in the Denver leg with a speed of 118 m.p.h. This airplane was un-modified from its original configuration. Lacking the modern N.A.C.A.cowling, the success of the DC-6 and other Curtiss "Challenger" powered planes may have been due in part to the inherent low frontal area of the engine. The six-cylinder twin-row radial engine had a rather wide cylinder spacing of 60 degrees which lent itself to a clean installation and relatively low drag.

Earl W. Rowland piloted a newly designed Cessna model CM-1 in an uncontested flight from San Antonio. This was also a Cessna factory sponsored entrant. Having won the previous year's transcontinental race, flying an A model Cessna, Rowland was expected to be a top contender for the Gardner cup. The Cessna pilot had come to town with the company's latest creation, which had been described by Eldon Cessna as a real "race job". It's preliminary race performance fell short of expectations, but Rowland qualified for the final, nonetheless.

Worthy of further note, here, are some details about the rare Cessna CM-1 "Midwing". Its participation in the Gardner events was likely the only time this aircraft entered competitive racing. Edward H.Phillips explains the following in his book Cessna - A Master's Expression: "Built by Cessna as a racer, the CM-1 used an "A" series landing gear and empennage but featured a clipped wing and plywood-covered fuselage. Powered by a 225 hp Wright J-5 under a N.A.C.A. type cowling. Earl Rowland flew the ship in the May, 1929 Gardner race....Registered X9860 (c/n 195), the CM-1 had a maximum speed of around 160-170 mph, but was plagued with engine fuel problems throughout the event, finishing fifth...."

Some historians have suggested, further, that the "CM" in the model designation stood for "Cessna Mail" and that the fuselage of this airplane was designed to accommodate up to 800 pounds of cargo. A later designation, known as the MW-1, was also given to this plane. The "MW" is



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presumed to stand for "mail wing". It is doubtful that this plane was ever put to service as a mailplane.

The Cessna company's claims of the CM-1's high speed were not realized in the Gardner preliminaries. Claiming that he took his time in the qualifying round, Rowland managed only 98 m.p.h. By subtracting the three hours he claimed to have been on the ground, a non-stop trip might have resulted in an average speed of 158+ m.p.h. Much was now expected of Rowland for the final event.

Robert S. LeRoy entered the fourth Cessna, a model AF. This airplane was, in most respects, a stock model A. But it was powered with a 150 h.p. "Floco" engine made by the Axelson Machine Co., (Thus the "F" in the model designation). LeRoy had initially qualified as a finalist on rules infractions made by his competitors in the Fargo heat. Although his 118 m.p.h. effort was quite respectable, LeRoy's Cessna was no match for the 150+ m.p.h. speeds of Wood and Holman in their higher powered biplanes. In a gesture of fine sportsmanship, he declined the opportunity to protest the violations, and passed up a spot in the finals.

WACO RACERS

Three new Waco "Taperwing" airplanes were flown in the Gardner Race. An extension of Waco's successful model Ten design, the Taperwing model ATO came from the factory equipped with a Wright J-5 engine of 220 horsepower. Though most Taperwings were fitted with a split-axle type "oleo" landing gear, Waco did offer a special custom racing gear for reduced drag. Also known as the "Sport Waco", the Taperwing was well liked for its maneuverability and speed.

Ed Hedeem entered a slightly modified ATO with a Wright J-5A engine. Two additional 15 gallon fuel tanks had been installed in the upper wing center section for racing. It had the standard "oleo" style landing gear and no drag-reducing modifications. But Hedeem, a contract pilot for the Johnson's Wax Polish company, had his own ideas for achieving optimum speed. He felt that the wax finished surfaces of his plane would give him the needed edge over the competition. The Johnson's Wax company tests had shown that a surface treated with their product would have a reduced skin friction of up to ten percent. They had hoped that this would translate into significant drag reduction and a competitive speed. But Hedeem and his "Waxbird", as his Waco became known, failed to qualify for the final.



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Arthur J. Davis raced in a Waco Taperwing which had several modifications. Records show that Davis, who took delivery of his new plane in late February of 1929, had some difficulty in getting his modifications approved in time for the race. In addition to its factory "racing" gear, Davis equipped his Waco with a N.A.C.A. cowling which was approved, only ten days prior to racing. He installed an extra thirty gallon fuel tank mounted on the floor of the front cockpit. The installation included a hand wobble pump for transfer to the main tanks. Approval for this change, along with provisions to enclose the front cockpit opening and a 30-day "Restricted" license, was issued by the Department of Commerce on May 25th, just three days before the preliminaries. These changes enabled Davis to qualify for the final with a speed of 129 mph. It is interesting to note that his fuel supply had dwindled to nothing upon reaching the finish in the preliminary run. Without the added fuel, Davis would surely not have qualified for the final.

John P. Wood, a Waco distributor from Wassau, Wisconsin (Northern Airways), entered the race in a custom-built Taperwing Waco that was just days out of the factory. This ATO "special" had its upper wings clipped to match the span of its lower wings. This resulted in a total wingspan of 25 ft.11 in. (a difference of 4 ft.5 in. from a standard ATO). Wood's Taperwing was also equipped with the Waco "racing" gear. Other modifications included extra fuel, removed exhaust stacks, and an enclosure over the front cockpit. Wood posted the 2nd overall fastest speed in the preliminaries, averaging 150 mph.

TRAVEL AIR RACERS

Like the Waco company, Travel Air offered various models in their line of biplanes that were more suitable for racing due to the design of the wings. Two of these "Speedwing" models entered the Gardner preliminaries, and both qualified for the final.

D.C. Warren, a well known Travel Air dealer from Oakland, California, entered his Travel Air model 3000 which was powered with a Hispano-Suiza (Hisso) liquid-cooled engine of 180 horsepower. This plane originally came equipped with the Travel Air standard "elephant-ear" wings, but Warren had installed a set of factory-built "Speedwings" which he used for racing. Warren's race modifications also included streamlined wheel coverings, a front cockpit enclosure, and the relocation of the radiator from underneath the fuselage to the nose with a neatly faired installation. He averaged 116 mph in the qualifying run from Denver to earn a spot in the final. A photo of this plane in its Gardner configuration, along with details of its modifications, appears in the Peter Bowers article, "The Travel Air



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Biplanes, 1925-1930- Part III", A.A.H.S. Journal, Vol.33, Number 3 on page 220.

Sydnor Hall posted the third fastest qualifying speed at 143 mph in his Travel Air D-4000. "The White Cow" as his plane was nicknamed had the factory "speedwings" which Hall had modified by filling in the center-section cutout. Other modifications to this plane included a front cockpit enclosure, a N.A.C.A.- type cowling, and a pair of crudely fashioned wheel fairings. Hall, a Saint Louis pilot was a favorite of the local crowd.

OTHER RACERS

Another local pilot who qualified for the final was Dale "Red" Jackson. He was flying a Curtiss Robin C-1 built in Saint Louis by the Curtiss-Robertson company. Though the Robin design was not well known for its speed, Jackson and his factory sponsored team of mechanics proved that the Curtiss "Challenger" powered design could be cleaned up for racing. Jackson qualified for the final with a speed of 130 mph. Modifications included wheel fairings, and a N.A.C.A. cowling.

The overall fastest qualifying time was turned in by Charles W. "Speed" Holman flying a Laird "Speedwing". He posted a 152 mph run in the preliminaries to become the top contender for the Gardner Cup. The following is a closer look at "Speed" and his Laird.

Holman was chief pilot for Northwest Airways, Inc., an Air Mail and passenger service company of St.Paul, Minnesota. Entering the Laird in many flying events over the two years prior to the Gardner Race, Holman had established a name for himself, for Laird, and for Northwest Airways. By 1929, Holman had acquired keen racing abilities, sharp aerobatic skills, and the respect of his colleagues.

To say that Holman's Laird had been modified would be an understatement. Holman's plane had been altered many times from its original 1926 Laird model LC-B (reg.no. C240) configuration. It was originally powered by a Wright J-4B engine of 200 horsepower. In August of 1928, Holman took the Laird back to "Matty" Laird's Chicago-based factory to be equipped to meet the specifications for Laird's new LC"Speedwing" version. This would change the plane's model designation (from LC-B "Commercial" to LC-RJ200 "Speedwing"). Modifications were as follows: The original fuselage was reworked to match that of current production models. The original J-4B engine was retained, but installations of new tail surfaces, of a new landing gear, and of the "speedwings" were required. This necessitated a change in the serial number (from 150 to 167). Also, a new registration



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number (NR7087) was assigned. The new "Speedwing" Laird had an M-6 airfoil with "I" shaped interplane struts. The front cockpit was enclosed and all new sheet-metal was fitted to the front of the fuselage.

Sometime prior to entering the Gardner, "Speed" had also fitted the plane with a set of wheel fairings and a N.A.C.A type cowling. In this configuration, Holman had seized the preliminaries to become the top contender for the Gardner Cup. To win it he knew it would require a full-throttle run. He recruited the notable mechanic, "Doc" Kincaid, to tune his engine. Kincaid was well-known as having tuned the engines of many record-setting planes, including the famed "Spirit of St.Louis" of Charles Lindbergh.

The Gardner Race may have been the last time Holman raced the plane in its LC-RJ200 configuration. For in July, he took the plane back to the Chicago based Laird factory to be modified, yet again. This time an installation of a Wright J-6-9 engine of 300 horsepower made for a re-designation of the plane as a model LC-R300.

RACE TIME

C.W. Holman was the first to be flagged out by race referee, Sultan, to start the event at exactly 10:30 a.m. The remaining fliers were signaled individually at one minute intervals. Each was required to circle the field before heading on to Indianapolis.

It would be a two hour wait for the racers to return. During this interim, the anxious crowd was entertained by stunt fliers. Freddie Lund, chief test pilot for the Waco Airplane Company, thrilled everyone by performing tailspins, loops, and other aerial acts in his Taperwing Waco. Ed Hedeem, flying the "Waxbird" Taperwing, demonstrated his abilities as World Barrel Rolling Record holder. Also Phil Love, former Air Mail Pilot and contemporary of Charles Lindbergh, performed balloon bursting feats. (Coincidentally, these three pilots joined together later in the summer as the "Waco Team" and placed first in the 1929 Cleveland Air Races' aerobatics team competition.) The spectators also enjoyed demonstrations by U.S.Army Air Corps aircraft from nearby Scott Field. Precision Exhibition Flying was performed by Lieutenant Jimmie Doolittle. Formation flying squadrons also filled the skies as a dirigible constantly droned overhead.

Notable guests were paraded around the infield in an automobile as they were introduced to the crowd by the race announcer. These guests



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included: Clyde Cessna and Igor Sikorsky, notable airplane designers; Arthur Goebel, winner of the 1927 Dole race from San Francisco to Honolulu; D.S."Barney" Zimmerly, who had established the World's Altitude Record for light planes just the day before at the Parks Field; and James Kelley and Reginald Robbins, who had recently established the World's Record for refueled endurance flying. (They had come to St.Louis to receive delivery of a brand new Mahoney-Ryan Brougham airplane as part of the winnings associated with their record.)

Not one racer managed to catch Holman as he rounded the pylons at Indianapolis. "I passed over the speedway at 500 feet and turned back for Saint Louis. Then I met Davis who was approaching the turn. I threw her wide-open, and kept it there all the way," recalled Holman later that day. He had crossed the finish line at 1:28 p.m., then whipped his plane into a towering zoom which thrilled the crowd. He was met with cheers as he shut down, but the crowd was reminded of the "staggered" start meaning Holman couldn't be named as winner for another eight minutes. Meanwhile, it was announced that M.T. O'Dell had been forced down at Ireland, Indiana with torn fabric on the fuselage of his Cessna.

With no other contestant in sight, Holman was declared the Gardner Cup Trophy winner at 1:26 p.m. His speed of 157 mph was 5 mph better than his qualifying time. It was another 17 minutes before a black speck appeared on the horizon. This turned out to be Sydnor Hall, who had been the last to depart. Hall's elapsed time netted him a speed of 144 mph in his second place effort. Five minutes behind Hall, Art Davis arrived to claim third prize. He posted a speed of 140 mph. Fourth and fifth places were claimed by John P.Wood and Earl Rowland with speeds of 139 mph and 137 mph, respectively. Stanley T.Stanton finished sixth, while "Red" Jackson came in seventh.

Though no surprises came from the Gardener Finals, Saint Louis aviation fans were thrilled to be a part of such an event. The enthusiasts had witnessed a truly grand show. Some of the most innovative aircraft, their talented designers, and flamboyant pilots had gathered for a Midwest event that would never be duplicated. As it turned out, The Gardener Trophy Races had been the beginning of one of the most exciting air racing seasons in U.S.history.

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