



Alan Cobham's Flying Circus

The Milton Keynes Branch of Air-Britain
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The larger joy-riding aircraft



Airspeed Ferry



A wooden airframe Handley Page Hyderabad from which the all metal airframe Clive airliner was derived.



The Union Flag that was flown on Cobham's de Havilland D.H.50J biplane while on his Cape Town flight.



Westland Wessex (model!)

SIR ALAN COBHAM'S FLYING CIRCUS

*Credit: Intro - a rather drafty summary in Wikipedia. See also a documentary film on the 80th anniversary (in 2014) of Cobham Aviation Services – **well worth a look**: <http://www.cobhamaviationservices.com/about/history/>*

Sir Alan Cobham was a pioneering long distance aviator and technical innovator who became famous for his exploits in the inter-war years by making aviation accessible and popular throughout the world. He also organised a series of flying tours of the United Kingdom, Ireland and South Africa which became affectionately known as 'Sir Alan Cobham's Flying Circus'. These tours promoted aviation to the public and were a source of inspiration for countless pilots in the Second World War.

A pilot in the Royal Flying Corps in World War I Cobham went on to become a test pilot for the de Havilland aircraft company: he was the first pilot for the newly formed de Havilland Aeroplane Hire Service. In 1921 he made a 5,000 mile air tour of Europe, visiting 17 cities in 3 weeks.

Cobham became the first person to fly from London to Cape Town and back in 1926, for which he received the Air Force Cross. In the same year he was the first person to fly from London to Australia and back, for which he was knighted by King George V.

On 30 June 1926, he set off on his flight from Britain (from the River Medway) to Australia, where 60,000 people swarmed across the grassy fields of Essendon Airport at Melbourne when he landed his de Havilland DH.50 floatplane (it had been converted to a wheeled undercarriage earlier, at Darwin).

During the flight to Australia, Sir Alan J. Cobham's engineer of the D.H.50 aircraft, Mr. Arthur B. Elliot, was shot and killed after they left Baghdad on 5 July 1926. The return flight was undertaken over the same route. He was knighted the same year.

On 25 November 1926, Cobham attempted but failed to be the first person to deliver mail to New York City by air from the east, planning to fly mail from the White Star ocean liner RMS *Homeric* in a de Havilland DH.60 Moth floatplane when the ship was about 12 hours from New York harbour on a westbound crossing from Southampton. After the Moth was lowered from the ship, however, Cobham was unable to take off owing to rough water and had to be towed into port by the ship. The same year Cobham was awarded the Gold Medal by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale.

In 1927 Cobham starred as himself in the 1927 British war film *The Flight Commander* directed by Maurice Elvey. In 1928 he flew a Short Singapore flying boat around the continent of Africa landing only in British territory. Cobham wrote his own contemporary accounts of his flights, and recalls them in his biography. The films 'With Cobham to the Cape' (1926), 'Round Africa with Cobham' (1928) and 'With Cobham to Kivu' (1932) contain valuable footage of the flights

In 1932 he started the National Aviation Day displays – a combination of barnstorming and joyriding. This consisted of a team of up to fourteen aircraft, ranging from single-seaters to modern airliners, and many skilled pilots. It toured the country calling at hundreds of sites, some of them regular airfields and some just fields cleared for the occasion.

Generally known as "Cobham's Flying Circus" it was hugely popular, giving thousands of people their first experience of flying, and bringing "air-mindedness" to the population. These continued until the end of the 1935 season. In the British winter of 1932–33, Cobham took his aerial circus to South Africa (with the mistaken view that it would be the first of its kind there).

Cobham was also one of the founding directors of Airspeed Limited, the aircraft manufacturing company, started by Nevil Shute Norway (perhaps better known as the famous novelist, Nevil Shute), together with the talented and notable designer Hessel Tiltman. Tiltman was made redundant when Airship Guarantee Company (a subsidiary of Vickers) had to abandon the more successful R100 airship after the R101 disaster.

Cobham was an early and enthusiastic recruit: indeed, it was thanks to Sir Alan – who placed early orders for two "Off Plan" aircraft (the three-engined ten seater Airspeed Ferry) for his National Aviation Day Limited company that Airspeed managed to commence manufacturing at all.

In 1935 he founded a small airline, Cobham Air Routes Ltd, that flew from London Croydon Airport to the Channel Islands. Months later, after a crash that killed one of his pilots he sold it to Olley Air Service Ltd and turned to the development of in-flight refuelling. Cobham's early experiments were based on a specially adapted Airspeed Courier. This craft was eventually modified by Airspeed to Cobham's specification for a non-stop flight from London to India, using in-flight refuelling to extend the aeroplane's flight duration.

Trials stopped at the outbreak of World War II until interest was successfully revived by the RAF and United States Army Air Forces in the last year of the war.

He once remarked: "It's a full time job being Alan Cobham!" He retired to the British Virgin Islands, but returned to England where he died in 1973. The company he formed is still active in the aviation industry as Cobham plc.

Working in the Flying Circus.

A fascinating insight into life in "Cobham's Flying Circus" was written by Fred Lindsley in 1994 and in August 2010 was posted on www.flickr.com by his son (but I cannot find them there). Parts of this account, which are given below, were transcribed in 2015 by Terry Mace and posted on his splendidly encyclopaedic website of inter-war flying: <http://afleetingpeace.org/> . Terry was unable to contact Lindsley's son; if this is read by him we hope he will see it as a tribute to his father's place in this part of aviation history.

Editor

Part 1: Down to Earth behind the scenes

In the so-called golden age of aviation, the 1930s, when entirely new aircraft appeared in rapid succession, there was no general public awareness of a major war looming not too many years in the future and touring air displays were a popular spectacle.

Far and away the largest of the European enterprises was Sir Alan Cobham's Air Display which, under its initial title of National Aviation Day, commenced its first tour of Great Britain in 1932. I joined the organisation at the beginning of 1935, when the aircraft were undergoing their winter overhaul at Ford in Sussex.

The following year, 1936, the name was changed to C.W.A. Scott's Air Display, although most of the aircraft and personnel remained unchanged. The business name of the organisation was actually Trafalgar Advertising Ltd (and it was indeed a business) with its headquarters in a small and far from lavish office near Trafalgar Square in the heart of London.

The programmes the public got were very good, varied and slickly produced air displays twice each day in the afternoon and evening. With British Summer Time it was light until after 10pm, and later still in the northern latitudes. I can remember being able to read a newspaper at midnight, near Thurso at the northern tip of Scotland. The shows were also seven days per week. 'The Show Goes On' really meant something, because the name of the game was selling joy-riding.

The opening mass formation flight over the local town did not see an engine start up until every available seat for the flight had been sold - excepting the complimentary seat for the local Lord Mayor, beamingly oblivious that the pilot of the 'Giant Airliner' would cheerfully strangle the Mayor with his own heavy gold chain of Office.

Tickets were sold in different colours at different prices, the Ringmaster M.C. at the microphone being singularly adept at gauging the optimum starting price for any locality. There were times when the Avro 504s were down to three shillings and sixpence. Towards the conclusion of the evening shows it was customary to reduce prices, the fundamental function of the display being to produce the maximum revenue before the public departed the flying field.

The aircraft loaders retained the public's tickets as pilots were paid on a retainer plus ticket commission. At the end of the day any sounds of disharmony could usually be traced to the balancing of money receipts with ticket returns.

Part 2: Putting the Show on the Road

Behind these magnificent men in their flying machines, and notwithstanding the rather unimpressive office which kept tabs on activities (and was the post box for our mail) the whole enterprise was large and complex.

Months ahead there was a reconnaissance party which dealt with local authorities, advance publicity, and farmers. The utilisation of likely fields might be dependent on crops, hay - or the local annual Morris-Dancers festival. This sort of thing could see us flying up to 200 miles between displays, and was hell on earth for the road transport people. They had to pack, travel overnight and set up well in advance of the first show.

The store truck was always having a problem which, on short transits, usually delayed its morning departure. No matter how many likely spare gaskets we had in our tool-boxes there was often a last-minute something that only the stores truck could supply.

Just prior to Display Day there was the advance party, led by a genial glad-hander named Jerry Hancock, who arranged hotels for the pilots and promised the farmer that he would make a fortune when he sold his paddock as a future airport (which at the time lacked the imposing grandeur of 'International'). Jerry also organised publicity posters, slides at cinemas and supplied photo blocks plus press handouts to local newspapers. Of which there were hundreds.

One of my tedious chores (until discovering the art of delegation by flattery) was pasting the names of newspapers on each side of the Wolf sailplane's plywood fuselage, and unsticking these 10 feet long posters every evening. For their own posters, no newspaper ever had any type less than 12 inches high.

On the display day there first arrived the screeners (a party of four, sometimes plus local casual labour). They put up the steel stanchions and incredible lengths of canvas which prevented people from getting a free look from adjacent roads or public land. We also had two 'policemen', retired cops of immense solidity, who discouraged kids from tunnelling through hedges. These two rapidly established a rapport with the local Constabulary to ensure that motorists did not get free views by standing on the roofs of parked cars.

The 'loudspeaker van' was the centrepiece of the show, parked just inside the barrier wire by the ticket tent. The driver of this van was one of the hardest worked people on the show. He looked after the loudspeakers, constantly misbehaving microphones, the amplifier, the gramophone records and the charging of a massive array of batteries supplying public address power.

The Business Command Post was the 'Gate Van', almost impregnable and thief-proof because that is where the money was kept. A staff of four gentlemen could be kept extremely busy on a good day, selling entry tickets for people and cars.

Then there was the refuelling wagon with a team of two. In both 1935 and 1936 this was a huge Leyland six-wheel tanker supplied by National Benzol. All engines, vehicle or aircraft, as was frequently mentioned on the loudspeakers, ran on National Benzol - free, of course. I have the recollection that some of the engines, the Jupiters and the Armstrong Siddeleys I think, had the carburettors jetted for 80-20 petrol benzol mix. Wings and wheels, on the same gratis basis, were lubricated by Castrol in various grades.

To minimise the quantity of reserve oil carried by the stores truck Castrol, in 4 gallon drums, was delivered to each display site in vast quantities by the local depot, who also collected unused drums the next morning. These drums were stacked in pyramids, Castrol label to the fore, at the car promotions and at strategic places on the flight line. The public could actually see the superb unction being poured into aircraft in which they soon intended to fly. The Castrol Sales promotion team's confidence in their marketing technique was well justified.

There were also the franchisers, who were many and varied. They paid a fee and were free to make their own profits, transporting and erecting their own tents in their own transport. The major one was the canteen marquee which, by arrangement, had prices for staff more reasonable than the sliding scale applied to the public.

Other franchisers came and went, some only operating in a restricted locality, but the steadies were a museum of scale models, programme sellers and vendors of display souvenirs, like brochures.

With the exception of the fuel tanker all transport in 1935 was supplied by Ford, and in 1936 by Vauxhall/Bedford. In each case those companies, with their local agencies, had an all-model motor show and sales promotion at every show.

Part 3: Keeping Them Flying



From time to time, other itinerant joy riders would join our display, usually in particular areas like the British South Coast in the holiday season. If they ran into maintenance problems we might get a better acquaintance with Monospars, Short Scions, Klemms, the Handley Page W8B "Prince Henry" with two Rolls-Royce Eagle engines, and even a three-engined Armstrong-Whitworth Argosy amongst other types.

Relying on memory the aircraft in 1935 were: the Handley Page Clive (two 550hp Bristol Jupiters), Airspeed Ferry (two Gipsy II and an inverted Gipsy III on top), two Westland Wessex (three Armstrong Siddeley 5-cylinder Genet Majors), three 3-seater Avro Cadets (A/S 7-cylinder Genet Major), Tiger Moth (Gipsy Major), Avro Tutor (A/S Lynx) one Avro 504N (A/S Mongose), BAC 'Drone', *below*, with



Douglas Sprite converted motorcycle engine) and (Left) Schemp-Hirth 'Wolf' sailplane. This glider, aerotowed by one of the 504s, did quite vigorous aerobatic displays every day for two seasons, which is close to 700 aerobatic



sessions for a wooden glider designed to the German strength requirements of 60 years ago.

However, a bigger draw card than the glider was the first appearance of the 'wingless wonder', (*Right*) the Type C30P Cervia Autogiro (7-cylinder Genet Major) flown by 'Crasher' Ashley. An underserved nickname, but he was a 'new boy', who had just gained his commercial licence.

In 1936 the organisation and about 90 per cent of the personnel was not much different to the previous year. The Clive had been retired after carrying 120,000 happy fare-paying passengers, and a not so happy me on one memorable occasion. Both the Wessexes and the Drone also rested from the rigours of touring. We got another Airspeed Ferry and the 1935 Ferry had its two outboard Gipsy IIs replaced with Gipsy Majors salvaged from a DH84 Dragon, which had ditched in the English Channel.



We also got the 1936 star turn, a Flying Flea with a liquid cooled Ford 10 engine conversion, and, very briefly, before it set out for South Africa, a Hillson Praga. This Czech aircraft (*Left*) built under licence was unspinnable, and is worthy of some reconsideration today. [*Advertised then at £385, and offering 33 mpg*]. However the Praga engine, made under licence by Jowett Cars, was not very satisfactory.

Inside the wire, and sheltering from the sun or wind at one end or other of the flight line, was a most important person in the operations: the Time-Keeper. Most usually a young aviation enthusiast of some means, who could spare a few

weeks before going to Uni or joining one of the aviation firms. For back-up there was 'Atlas' - of whom more anon. The time-keeper logged to the minute the take-off and landing times of all aircraft; a task demanding intense concentration on busy days. The purpose was serious. Pilots needed the time for their logbooks, and we needed times for the maintenance logbooks.

The display ringmaster or MC, the man at the mike, was the golden-voiced Roy Arthur, the stage name of a theatrical pro who had trod the boards and made the big-time at the 'Little Twittering Colosseum'.

Whenever even Roy's eloquence failed to move people in the direction of the ticket tent his place would be taken by the Display Manager - who knew how to persuade Mrs. Bloggs to purchase a right of entry to the Giant Airliner. Whereupon, three other ladies would say to their husbands, "If that Sadie Bloggs flies in an aeroplane we will never hear the last of it". With the sluice gate satisfactorily open, Roy would again take over the mike.

The Display Manager could charm lobsters into joy-flights. He was never known to set foot in an aeroplane, his previous service in World War I as a kite balloon observer having apparently exhausted his capacity for enjoyment of airborne aviation.

Then there were the pilots, nearly all ex RFC or ex RAF short-service commission. Extremely competent, as some of the paddocks used in Scotland and Ireland very nearly required a miniature railway to put them in perspective. There were mishaps, but in two years no fare-paying passenger was even scratched.

Operations were intensive; by the end of the season the two Ferries had logged well over 10,000 flights with up to ten passengers at a time. While the flights were probably less than five minutes, it is a lot of full-power take-offs and landings on fields which frequently left a lot to be desired.

In 1935 there were two parachutists, Ivor Price and Naomi Heron-Maxwell, who did pull-off releases from two platforms at the rear outer inter-plane struts of the Clive. In 1936 Al Harris, who had done some of the jumps in 1935, did the parachuting from an Avro Cadet. He also did joy-riding in the Cadet too.

The engineering staff featured ex-RAF members, but also included engineers who were on loan from Bristols and Armstrong Siddeley and who were really excellent. They had all started on the bench, gone through manufacturing, the view room, the test beds and overseas service. Their ability to inform was superb, describing aspects of super-charging with a beer-soaked finger on a table top is a fine art.



Backing up the maintenance staff were the loader/ cleaners, one per aircraft. The Avro 504s required ladders for passenger access. One of the important functions for a loader was to grab the wingtip of an incoming brakeless aircraft and turn it so that its tail was towards the crowd.

The loader had to be particularly alert that excited disembarking passengers, mad keen to join their admiring friends, did not run into rotating propellers. One woman ran unscathed through the prop of a Short Scion at Weston-super-Mare, which proves that there was something to be said for the reduction gear on a Pobjoy engine.

Maybe, about twice a season, we would get an aircraft into a hangar. There is a vague memory of Joe King doing a solo flight to Blackpool on two engines so that we could change the upper engine on a Ferry. Otherwise maintenance was distinctly an open-air affair, rain or shine. Engines and undercarriages had a hard life. The Avro 504N wheels had plain bushes requiring greasing more than once on a busy day, and the stores truck carried a fair weight of spare bushes.

Most major spares were held back at base, Ford Airfield in Sussex. Also there were some hibernating aircraft, such as the Blackburn Lincock, with an empty weight suggesting it was made of solid metal; stub winged C19 autogiros, out of favour due to their notorious ground resonance 'dance of death', and a DH9 with a Siddeley Puma engine which had been used in flight refuelling experiments. All in the care of a faithful elderly retainer.

From a remote outpost of the corporate empire there was sent a telegram asking the faithful retainer to ensure the first available passenger train carried northwards a spare tailskid for the Handley Page Clive - a large lump of ironmongery terminating with a heavy steel disc about the size of a very large soup plate.

Repeated journeys to the nearest railway station revealed no Passenger, Fish or Freight trains in any danger of exceeding their axle loading limits with what we needed. Expediency overcame protocol, and the aged retainer was phoned a message of some urgency. "Aah", he said, "so them things we have is tailskids, are they? Oi calls them draggers".

A typical Cobham airshow programme, subject to changes as required of course, was as follows:

- FLYPAST - the loud-speaking equipment assisting by explaining the aircraft;
- FORMATION FLIGHT led by the Airspeed "Ferry" with passengers on board;
- AEROBATICS - a "Tiger Moth" being used for this purpose which has been fitted for inverted flying;
- CRAZY FLYING;
- DANCING IN THE AIR - the pilot in this case will endeavour to fly in a "syncopated" fashion to music broadcast from the radio van, his Comper "Swift" being fitted with receiving apparatus;
- TOWED GLIDING;
- An AIR RACE around pylons something on the lines of dirt-track racing;
- PARACHUTE DESCENT;
- INVERTED FLYING in the "Tiger Moth";
- CONTINUOUS ROLLING in the "Martlet";
- A SURPRISE ITEM;
- WIRELESS CONTROL - spectators will be invited to tell the pilot of the Comper "Swift," by means of wireless, what manoeuvre they wish him to do;
- AEROBATICS IN FORMATION;
- And a race between the "Autogiro" and a dirt-track rider"

Part 5: "The Giant Airliner"

'Giant Size' was a phrase much used by advertisers in the years before 'King Size' became a more vogue term to encourage the selling of marketing articles.

Thus, it came about in the 1930s that any aircraft with windows in the sides, like a Fox Moth, became an airliner, and if it had a fair few windows it was a 'Giant Airliner'. So the residents of any small township like Much Babbling-in-the-Bog would be eager to see, and perhaps equally eager to sample, the visitation of a large aeroplane which clearly was intended to prove that their parish was a likely hub for all future air transportation within the British Isles.

The one and only Mark I Handley Page Clive (*centre right*), with its ability to get into and out of small but smooth



paddocks, ideally lived up to the advance publicity. Built in 1928 as a troop-carrier conversion of the Hinaidi bomber, with a higher fuselage, it had commenced its civilian career in 1932 giving joy-rides with Sir Alan Cobham's National Air Day air displays. It was also used as a tanker aircraft in Sir Alan's flight refuelling experiments.

My acquaintance with the Clive started in January 1935. It was undergoing C of A overhaul together with the Airspeed Ferry, my previous construction experience on the latter having led an earlier foreman into persuading me to join him on the air display staff. The Clive had sixteen passenger seats, in the best vintage wickerwork. Although they had safety belts it is very doubtful if those seats, and their floor attachments, would come near modern airworthiness strength requirements.



Nevertheless the Clive in four joyriding seasons carried 120,000 passengers without a scratch. Even if it carried a full load each time, which is far from correct, it works out to about 11 take-offs and landings per operating day on that curious landing gear. The Clive was withdrawn from service at the end of the 1935 season.

Part 6: "The Wingless Wonder"



Previous displays had operated the earlier C-19 model (left) with a four-bladed rotor, twin fins and a low wing with upturned tips. The C-19 has a susceptibility to ground resonance, the so-called 'Dance of Death', causing a number of incidents resulting in major damage, but otherwise harmless to occupants. *[I have found only one other reference to this problem. Queenstown Flying Club Facebook refers to this as a 'rotor malfunction' during the Circus tour of South Africa– Editor]*

The C-30 (right) was different. It had a three-bladed rotor, no wing, a more powerful 140hp engine with a rotor run-up clutch, a robust undercarriage and an entirely different control system. The above wording was the official air display name for the Cierva C30 Autogyro, spelt with an 'i' by the company that developed them. Autogyro, with a 'y', appears to be the generic name for that type of aircraft. Among the predominantly male display staff it was frequently referred to as the 'whirling spray'.

At Phoenix Park in Dublin the autogyro made more than 100 joy rides on the same day (at a premium ticket price too), the



Display Manager going not so quietly mad every time that the aircraft stopped for a blade drag check.

On one occasion at, I think, Cannock Chase in Staffordshire, Captain Ashley was giving his usual solo demonstration of the wingless wonder: tailwheel on the ground, wheels nearly two feet off the ground, the aircraft rolled along the flight line looking like a praying mantis with its antennae in a spin. The area was prone to mining subsidence; at the end of the line the right wheel struck a vertical wall of local landscape, concealed by long grass. The gear was broken off and the autogiro fell on its right side as it came to a sudden stop. As the still spinning rotor went round, the landscape repetitively sheared off the blades - about a yard at a time, the bits flying in all directions.

The Show went on. We had a replacement autogiro the next day, on hire while the other departed for major remedial surgery; which didn't take long either. Display Management being somewhat sensitive to any sort of cost. Particularly hire costs.

Part 6: The Funny Side

The 1935 display split into two divisions in July and after its tour of Ireland. One with the Clive plus a Grunau Baby glider flown by Eric Collins, and the other tour with the Airspeed Ferry G-ABSI. In less than six months of the summer season 244 locations were visited, only sixteen of which were established airfields. A few places were two-day events which meant four shows. There was just one day off, presumably due to weather.

So, roughly speaking, I participated in around 340 displays during the first year. There were few towns that didn't get a display within walking distance, car ownership being sparse in a recovery period after a severe economic depression. The places visited ranged from Thurso in the north of Scotland to Penzance near Land's End in the south, and from Lowestoft in the east coast to Tralee in western Eire.

There was one break from circus tradition. The overture music on the public address system was not the standard 'Entry of the Gladiators'. It was a then equally popular march 'With Sword and Lance'. There was however a very firm adherence to long-standing circus tradition. We had comedy items, about five different routines which varied slightly.



There were never more than two in the same show. Their timing would be altered as necessary, sometimes to divert the audiences at short notice from some lapse of expertise like a taxiing mishap. Or the charming lady who flew the Wolf sailplane, Joan Meakin, taking advantage of thermals to cruise around without an engine. This drove the Manager into a state of near berserk rage. Nobody was going to purchase a flight in an aeroplane when they continued to witness a near miracle performed by a flying machine without an engine. Bring on the clowns, quick!

The comedy routines were masterminded by Martin Hearn who had done the wing walking in earlier years until the Air Ministry had prohibited it. He continued to Oshkosh videos today. Martin also ferried the Tiger

do it in Eire and it was every bit as impressive as may be seen on between locations since Geoff Tyson had to ferry the Avro Tutor.

Aiding and abetting Martin (apart from contributing pilots) were a droll Cornishman called Charly Craig, and a thick-set middle-aged dwarf from a theatrical casting agency who insisted on being known by his stage name 'Atlas'. To strangers he preferred to be introduced as Mr. Atlas.

The fourth comedy conspirator had been played the previous year by an engineer named Roy Bonner, who contrived that I should take over his part on the promise that he would explain to me the intricacies of master and articulated con-rods. So, twice a day, I became a drag queen, nearly half a century before coming out of the closet became prurient entertainment on TV.

Martin Hearn said I was well suited because this absolute star part highlight of the display required agility, and the possibility of



developing humour combined with the dim-witted misguided idealism of wanting to be an aircraft engineer. Routines are hard to explain in words. One of them was 'The Wedding'. The major prop was an open four seater bullnose Morris Cowley, very dilapidated. When Charly drove it from place to place he was often stopped by the police.

The Morris would emerge from the end of the field, driverless, because Charly was lying on the floor getting steering directions from the happy bridal couple sitting up on the folded hood at the rear. Martin in the top hat and me in the bridal gown playfully bashing Martin with the bouquet should his advances be too amorous.

The vehicle stopped well outboard of the speaker van, with its starboard side towards the crowd and the man on the mike remonstrated about obstructions on a famous or future famous aerodrome. Charly would slide out of the left front seat, to appear as a grotesquely dressed yokel wanting the car and the bridal couple off his land. The man on the mike called for serious action and Geoff Tyson took off in the red and white chequered Tiger Moth.

There was much funny business and Charly pulled a revolver (loaded with blanks). His second shot was fired at point blank range into a large steel tray on the starboard running board filled with petrol-soaked rags. This produced a most impressive blaze with flames about six foot high and lots of smoke. I ran around to put it out by waving my skirt, exposing bright scarlet knickers, always good for a laugh, and from the speaker van ran Atlas wearing a policeman's hat and bearing a Pyrene fire extinguisher. With a few pumps of Pyrene, well publicised on the speakers, Atlas put the fire out in seconds.

Extinguishing the fire was the signal for Geoff Tyson to start his flour bomb attacks, french chalk in paper bags; a twice-a-day demonstration of low flying with the public never in the slightest danger. The bombing was combined with more funny business, running and cartwheeling over one another until the Tiger gave a quick blip on the throttle meaning bombs exhausted. Atlas got the gun and, with Charly at the wheel, chased the discomforted bridal couple off the end of the flight line. Clutching the gown around my waist, and air-cooling those scarlet bloomers, I could in those days do a forward running somersault every time the gun fired. It sounds a bit backwoods hick today but the crowds loved it and it was, of course, a magnificent advertisement for Pyrene fire extinguishers.

Geoff Tyson, who recently (1994) died at the age of eighty, attained some fame after WWII as the last pilot on the 10 engined 'Princess' flying boat. We had occasional visits from N.S. Norway who, together with Hessel Titman, had designed the Airspeed Ferry. In addition to seeing how the Ferries continued to stand up in service, Mr Norway was interested in all display activities. Some years later he became more famous with his first best-selling book 'The Pied Piper'. As a writer he used his initial name, Neville Shute. He also wrote 'Round the Bend', which features the air circuses and the comedy items in the opening chapters.

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