

H. F. KING



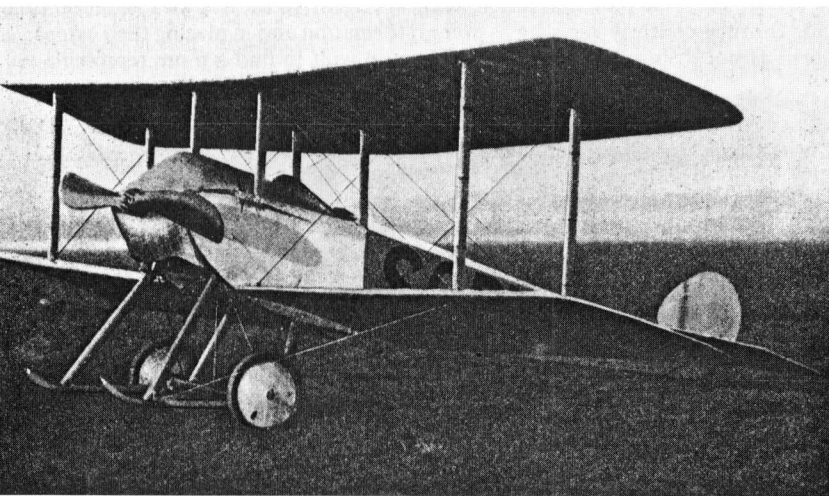
Sopwith  
Aircraft  
1912-1920

# Tabloid

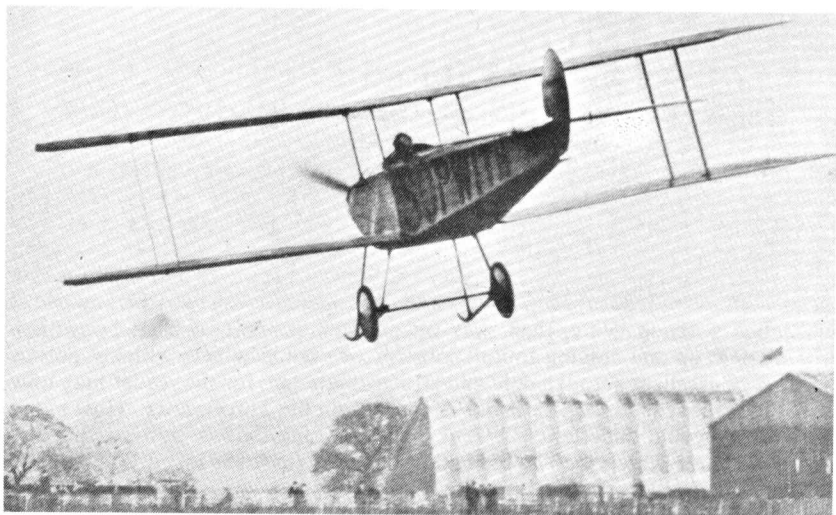
This tiny biplane was Sopwith's historic essay in building an aeroplane primarily for high performance (especially respecting speed) both for sporting and military-scouting work. In its first—two seat—form it appeared in November 1913; and when officially tested at Farnborough late in that month (the actual date quoted by Sopwith being the 29th, on which day also Hawker 'buzzed' a crowded Hendon meeting) showed a speed range of 36.9—92 mph (59—148 km/h) and an initial rate of climb of 1,200 ft (336 m) per minute—and this when carrying two men and petrol for 2½ hours' flying. Here, then, was yet another example of what Sopwith—Britain's new, up-and-coming aircraft constructor—could achieve with low power, by virtue of excellent aerodynamic and structural design; for the reader may now recall the earlier rhetoric of *Aeronautics* concerning the Three-seater: 'How many constructors would undertake . . . ' etc.—and stressing the low power required.

Like the Three-seater, the Tabloid had a Gnome engine of 80 hp only; and one of the few criticisms that could be made of the little newcomer was that the two occupants, seated side by side, with the pilot to port, had a poor field of view—especially upwards, for the cockpit was under the centre section, and the wings, though short in span, were deep in chord, and initially had no trailing-edge cutout. The depth in chord was due in part to the use of warping for lateral control; and another notable feature of the controlling surfaces was the absence of a fin ahead of the aerodynamically balanced rudder.

Although construction was conventional in the conventional sense (wooden, wire-braced, fabric-covered) it was sufficiently ingenious in detail to be lengthily



Engine cowlings on Tabloids were modified according to period and operating conditions. On this, the first of the type, the engine was almost totally enclosed, though with an exhaust outlet at the bottom of the cowling. Note the metal windshield—a feature later developed as the Camel's 'hump'.



Rear view of the first Tabloid. Note, among other features, the absence of a trailing-edge cut-out.

described in two consecutive articles in *Flight* during February 1914. These articles were not only partly written, but illustrated also, by the present writer's one-time editor C. M. Poulsen; and though no specific reference could be made at the time to the Tabloid as such, 'C.M.P.' assured me once that what he had to say and show in those early efforts was essentially applicable.

'We are indebted', the first article acknowledged, 'to the Sopwith Aviation Co., Ltd., for their courtesy in giving us every information and in placing their extensive works at our disposal. It would have been difficult to find a more representative



Harry Hawker himself demonstrates, on a single-seat Tabloid, how the trailing-edge cut-out could prove serviceable to a photographer as well as to a pilot.

firm' (the declared topic of the articles being 'An Aeroplane in the Making') 'for at their works at Kingston, where the Sopwith Aviation Co. employ some 150 workmen, in addition to a large staff of draughtsmen, all the most up-to-date machinery and latest labour-saving methods are employed, whilst the workmanship of their machines has already established for them an enviable reputation, equalled only by the excellence of their design.' Poulsen then went on to say a great deal about woodwork, which was always his particular interest (one remembers him talking of his days in American forests); but perhaps the most relevant paragraph in his first instalment—especially in view of the many stories told (with picturesque variations) about Sopwith aeroplanes being 'chalked out on the floor' was this:

'The method of constructing the fuselage is similar to that employed in building up the wings. The longerons, struts and cross-members are all cut to shape on the spindle machines, and, this being done, they are taken to the erecting shop, on the floor of which are secured some thin strips of wood bent to the shape which it is desired to give the fuselage. The longerons are placed on the floor, and kept to the desired shape by wood blocks pressing them against the strips on the floor. The struts with their respective sockets are then put in place, and the two sides of the fuselage made rigid by means of diagonal cross-bracing. Each of the bracing wires has incorporated in it a wire strainer in order to allow of each bay being tuned up separately. When the two sides are thus finished they are raised up on edge and connected by the cross-members and by diagonal bracing, and the whole structure is then adjusted, or, as it is called, "tuned up". The next job to be done is that of putting the engine bearers, tank supports, pilot's and passenger's seats, controls &c., into place, and when this is accomplished the fuselage is ready to be covered with fabric. In the Sopwith machines, this is done by cutting the fabric to shape and, passing it around the fuselage, lacing it along one longeron. The fabric is then doped similarly to the wings, and the fuselage is ready for the wings.'

Here, I think, we have a singularly interesting study in philology (apart from one's deliberate suppression of italics for the words fuselage and longeron); for the expression 'tuning up' was to endure only in respect of engines, whereas the early wire-braced airframes were quite literally tuned-up like musical instruments (flying, in any case, then being more of an art than a science). Further respecting terminology and nomenclature, one is here constrained to quote a more famous editor than C. M. Poulsen, in the person of C. G. Grey, who declared of the Sopwith aeroplane which now concerns us: 'It was nicknamed the Tabloid, and those universal benefactors Burroughs Wellcome & Co. objected to the use of their registered trade name—thinking that it was poking fun at them. I took much pains to show them that it was a compliment, and we went on using it.'

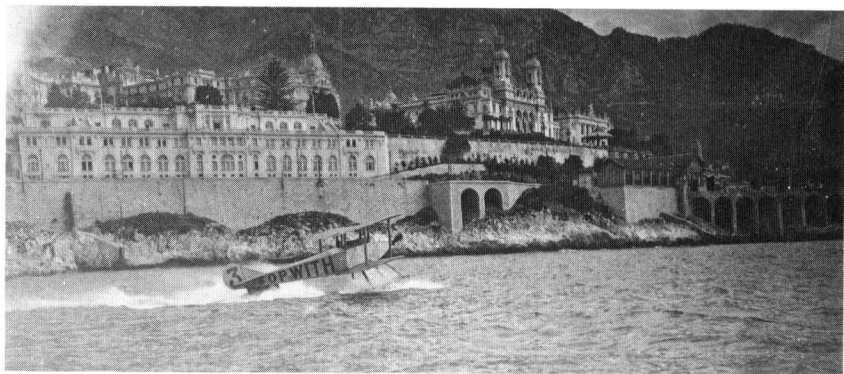
Ironically, in the context of the 1919 Transatlantic attempts, it was the victorious Sir John Alcock and the hapless Harry Hawker who pronounced the 'Tabloid' first-aid kit to be 'the only possible medical equipment for airmen'; and as early as March 1914 Burroughs, Wellcome and Co. had been advertising their 'No.706, or The Aviator's Case' as being no larger than a cigarette case.

Exploitation of the Sopwith Tabloid's military potential as a fast scout dated from April 1914, when the first of a small batch for the RFC was finished. By 26 May the sixth was at Brooklands for test. These Service Tabloids were single-seaters, with a fin and plain rudder and finer nose lines. It was, in fact, these very features that—apart from a float landing gear—had distinguished the specimen to which attention is now directed, and which was to prove the most famous Tabloid of all by winning for Great Britain what came to be regarded as almost the Grail of airmen—



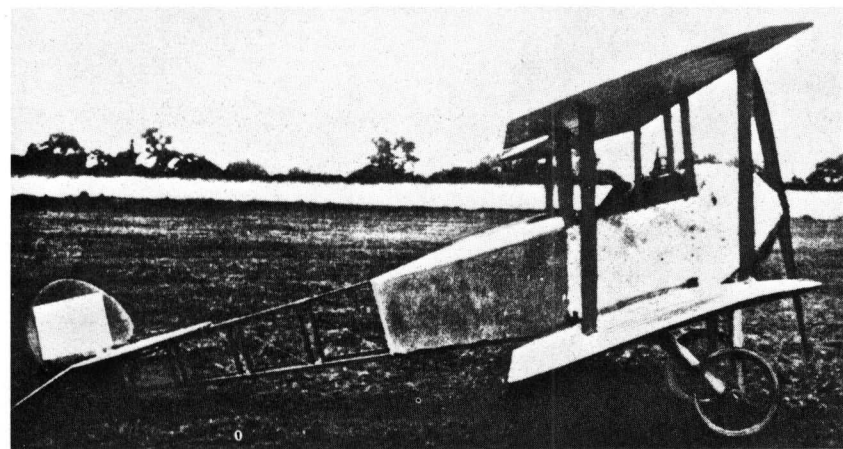
If this evocative picture shows—as it appears to do—Pixton's Monaco Tabloid being tested on the Thames, then it also depicts that historic Schneider Trophy winner with a strut-mounted tail float.

the Schneider Trophy. With this achievement the name of the pilot concerned—C. Howard Pixton, or 'Pickie' to Tom Sopwith—has become so closely identified (and rightly so) that the essential contribution made by Harry Hawker to design, demonstration and development are sometimes overshadowed. This being so, before concentrating once again on Pixton's resounding feat at Monaco, the following facts must have their place: First, the actual design, or basic concept, of the Tabloid owed much to Hawker personally, though Sopwith and Sigrist also had their say; second, it was Hawker who, on the very day that the Tabloid demonstrated its speed range and climb at Farnborough (29 November, 1913) had circuted Hendon before a crowd of 50,000 at 90 mph; third, Hawker himself had taken the first machine to his native Australia (surely the classic instance of 'local



Surely one of the most enticing 'Wish you were here' postcards ever printed (for, like the preceding Tabloid floatplane picture, it was indeed produced in postcard form) this view calls for little remark beyond affirming that the Sopwith caption reads: '43—100 hp Seaplane. Winner of Schneider Cup at Monaco.—April/1914.'

boy makes good') for demonstrations—and by the time of his return on 6 June, 1914, the appearance of the machine had been transformed by the stripping-off of much of the fuselage covering and the fitting of a plain V-type landing gear. Thus, it was during Hawker's absence that the seaplane which won the 1914 Schneider Trophy was built—and that this was one of a batch of twelve that had been ordered as single-seat scouts for the RFC has been affirmed by Sir Thomas Sopwith himself. 'It was decided to modify one to compete', he said, adding: 'In its original form this aeroplane had one central float which was installed too far aft. Three days before we were due to ship the aeroplane to Monte Carlo it had not flown. Howard Pixton was the pilot and on the first attempt to fly, at Hamble, the machine cartwheeled over on to its nose and sank. At daylight next morning we salvaged the aeroplane, took it to Kingston by road, sawed the single float into two, built two new sides and installed a twin-float chassis. We then took the aeroplane to Teddington and without permission flew it off, this time successfully. From the time it was at the bottom of Hamble river until it was airborne again was less than three days.'



A simple V-type landing gear and stripped rear fuselage gave a distinctive appearance to the modified version of the first Tabloid that Harry Hawker demonstrated in Australia, and seen here after its return.

To the foregoing recollections Sir Thomas added: 'It is interesting that up to the time that I received the first contract for the Tabloids for the army, none of my aeroplanes, and, so far as I know, no one else's, was ever stressed. All of them were built by eye and we had no idea of the factors—except that they were more than one! I have always maintained that if an aeroplane looks right, it generally is right, although at the same time this must not be carried too far.'

Here, unquestionably, we have 'The Skipper' speaking (for as such I have heard his co-directors address him)—the lover, co-designer and steersman of high-speed surface and skimming craft; and in warning that the eye alone could be deceiving he could well have had in mind (for example) the Royal yacht *Victoria and Albert* which, though one of the loveliest-looking vessels of all time, heeled over when being first undocked because of mistakes in calculating weight-distribution. Thus, the first Tabloid seaplane was in Royal company.

Stimulated by his love of yachts and all the best that Monte Carlo means, Tom



-49-

100 HP SEA SCOUT. WINNER OF SCHNEIDER CUP

SOPWITH 100 HP SEA SCOUT.

Whatever doubts may be entertained concerning the photographic authenticity of this picture of Sopwith's 1914 Schneider Trophy winner—or for that matter the elegance and strict authenticity of the lettering—there can be no doubt regarding the tail-float attachment. (The smaller lettering in the Sopwith inscription reads: '49—100 hp Sea Scout—Winner of Schneider Cup.').

Sopwith was to experience, on 20 April, 1914, one of his long life's greatest joys; for on that day—flying a Tabloid having a triangular fin ahead of a plain rudder; two short strut-mounted main floats; a tail float with faired-in attachments (earlier, as a photograph suggests, this float was attached by an unfaired set of struts); a specially tuned 100 hp Gnome Monosoupape engine ('the first 100 hp Mono ever to come to this country' as Sir Thomas once averred); 'SOPWITH' in seemingly huge capitals on its tiny fuselage (conforming with a similar proclamation on the 1913 Circuit Seaplane); and the racing-number 3 on its rudder—C. H. Pixton won the 1914 Schneider Trophy Race at Monaco. At an average speed of 86.78 mph (140 km/h) he covered the 150-nautical mile course in 2 hr 13.4 sec. Then he carried on for two extra laps—making thirty in all—at 92 mph (148 km/h) to establish a new world speed record for seaplanes.

Invited by Jacques Schneider himself to celebrate on the best the Principality could offer, he wondered if he might have a bottle of Bass.



With Pixton perched on the port float, and propped against the wing, this view of the Tabloid on floats at Monaco is more familiar than those earlier reproduced, but is nevertheless valuable for comparison with the Naval Schneider seaplane later illustrated and described.

Except for the French engine it was Britain all the way; and even the French engine had received the British treatment in the matter of installation and cowling, with a neat and sturdy fore-and-aft mounting (or nose-bearing mounting as it was sometimes called by Sopwith) which afforded not only stiffness but a very clean aerodynamic entry. As the engine-makers explained: 'The 100 h.p. Monosoupape engine' (for such was the unit fitted in the Tabloid racing seaplane instead of the standard 80 hp Gnome) 'is supported in the machine by two bearer plates, both upon the long end [*i.e.* rear end] of the crankshaft. That is, the standard practice is to let the engine overhang its bearers. Where it is desirable to have a more rigid

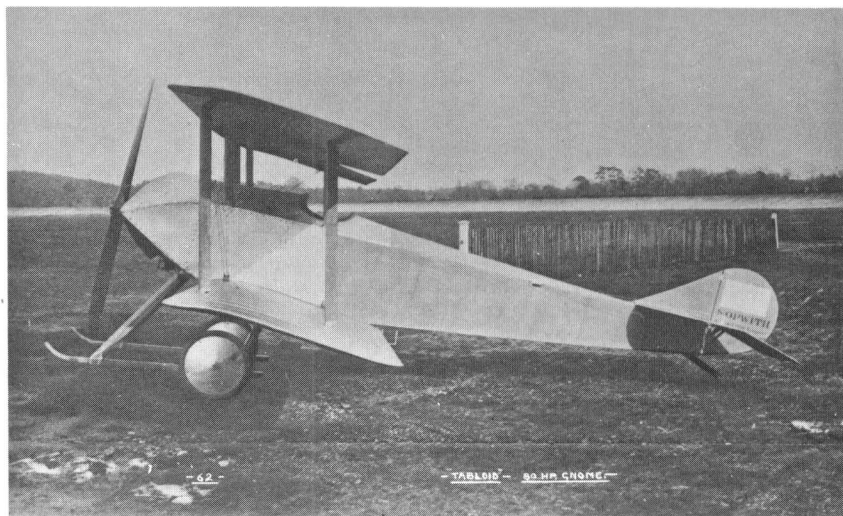
fixing, or fixings spread over a greater length of longitudinals, a third support is added between the propeller and the engine. With such a fixing the standard pattern of short nose has to be replaced with a long or medium nose, and a ball bearing is interposed between the nose and support.'

The 100 hp 'Mono' engine (for so the French power unit was known for short, otherwise as the Monosoupape, or Single-Valve, Gnome) normally whirled round at no more than 1,300 rpm., and after arrival at Monaco it was decided by Victor Mahl that the 1,350 revs allowed by the Lang propeller then fitted were too high, and would lead to overheating. Whereupon an Integral propeller of coarser pitch was substituted.

Although, as earlier noted, the basic concept of the Tabloid was a joint effort, it is worth giving a final note about Pixton's seaplane, written by C. M. Poulsen, whose intimate knowledge of Sopwith design and construction has already been instanced. 'C.M.P.' was writing on the occasion of 'Uncle Fred' Sigrist's retirement in 1940, in the particular context of this seaplane, though probably having in mind the landplane original also. 'It is interesting to record', he said, 'that this machine was designed entirely by Sigrist, and he was in charge of construction.'

After the blue of the Mediterranean—meanwhile, back at the (Brooklands sewage) farm . . .

From the Sopwith Scouts—as the military Tabloids were now sometimes called—R. H. Barnwell of the Bristol Flying School (who is not to be confused with his brother F. S., and who had taken over as temporary test pilot) was getting splendid results. These single-seaters, as already noted, had a tail fin and a plain rudder, and though they retained the skid/wheel landing gear, the skids were longer than those on the original Tabloid and were necessarily supported by longer, and more sharply raked, struts, one specimen at least having three instead of two main struts. Conversely, the nose and other features had been cleaned up, and more than one form of engine mounting had been tried.



Though as yet un-numbered, this Service Tabloid—with Brooklands track behind, proclaims its maker's name below the blank oblong on the rudder. (Sopwith caption reads: '62—"Tabloid"—80 hp Gnome.'

Barnwell's best performance was, perhaps, not a test flight in itself but a delivery flight to Farnborough on 22 April. There a new speed range of 39.6—94.9 mph (63.6—153 km/h) was established. Pixton was quickly home from the racing to carry on the good work on behalf of 'the military'—and fortified not only by a good lunch stood by the Aero Club but by having heard the Marquess of Tullibardine affirm at that lunch that Sopwith was one of the world's foremost aircraft constructors.

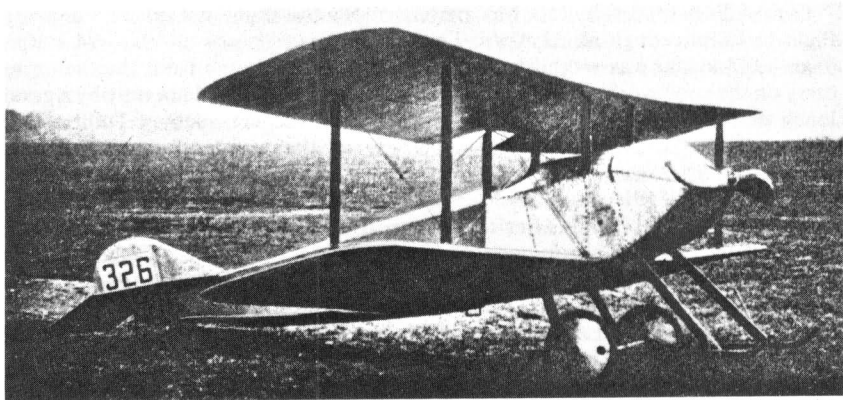
The summer of 1914 saw the delivery of one of the first military Tabloids to No. 7 Squadron, RFC; and thereafter the technical, as distinct from the operational, history of the type became obscured by the fog of war—especially so as the RNAS, as well as the RFC, employed it. Four were shipped in crates to Boulogne as early as 19 August, 1914, and two of these were flown by Lieuts Gordon Bell and Norman Spratt. This last-named officer has achieved an unusual kind of fame for having forced an enemy aircraft to land by manoeuvring in 'an aggressive manner', though he carried with him on that occasion a few steel darts; and he is also remembered for his tentative trailing of a grenade on a cable. A grapnel and a pistol have also been named among Spratt's weapons; but although he has been credited with firing thirty shots from a 'revolver', he must have been as dextrous as he was ingenious to reload about six chambers several times over.

In any case, air fighting was only just beginning in those times, and Tabloid production ended in the spring of 1915. Though the redoubtable 'Sammy' (Cdr C. R. Samson) seems to have approved a top-wing mounting for a Lewis gun, the two most famous Tabloids that came to his squadron at Antwerp—Nos. 167 and 168 (which, with No. 169, made up a brave little trio)—were destined to establish Sopwith and the RNAS in the low-level bombing, or strike, business. The importance of this function was implicit in the following letter received by Sopwith from the Director of the Admiralty Air Department on 28 December, 1914—alluding to some stirring events of the previous October:

'Gentlemen, With reference to the recent attack on the German air [ship] sheds at Cologne and Düsseldorf, carried out by Sqn. Cdr. Spenser D. A. Grey and Fl. Lieut. R. L. G. Marix, you may be interested to learn that the machines used were your Sopwith Tabloid aeroplanes.'

Sad would it be indeed if we were to leave the Tabloid landplane—a classically clean biplane if ever there was one—still hampered by the wheel/skid landing gear that was a feature of early-production specimens. Happily, the facts are otherwise, for when it returned to England from Monaco Pixton's racing seaplane was further modified for sporting use by fitting one of the neatest V-strut gears (two wheels, 'split' half-axes, no skids) that could have been desired. In this form it was intended to participate in the 1914 Aerial Derby—with 100 hp Gnome Monosoupape engine, and with R. H. Barnwell as pilot. A second Tabloid, from the RFC production batch, flown by Pixton and powered by an 80 hp Gnome, was also entered, but fog obliged both Tabloids to retire. Respecting speed one notes with special interest this passage in C. H. Barnes' book *Bristol Aircraft Since 1910* (the 'modified Scout' referred to being, of course, a Bristol product, and the Tabloid's spritely rival). Thus: 'On 14 May, 1914, Busted put the modified Scout through an A.I.D. performance test at Farnborough and recorded a speed range of 97.5 m.p.h. to 40 m.p.h.; he then flew to Brooklands, where he gave a spectacular demonstration and in a handicap race was beaten only by seconds by Harold Barnwell in the 100 h.p. Gnome-engined Sopwith Tabloid.'

Concerning the very neat V-strut landing gear earlier mentioned, it is helpful to have the following description, written in 1915, because this general form of gear,



At first glance, Tabloids Nos. 326 and 394 were seemingly identical; but scrutiny of the wheel/skid landing gear proves otherwise—the latter having extra struts (or a V-type gear plus skids).

utilising steel tubes for the main members, was to become a veritable Sopwith 'trademark', being associated in particular with the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Strutter. Having stressed the quality of simplicity, the 1915 description added: 'The axle is divided in the centre, where it is pivoted between two transverse members joining the apexes of the chassis struts. In order to prevent a downward movement of the centre of these members a single wire is taken from this point to the bottom of the body. Transverse rigidity is established by diagonal cross bracing between the front pair of chassis struts. This undercarriage, it should be pointed out, is not that fitted as standard on the Sopwith scouts. It was, in fact, quickly produced for the last Aerial Derby.'

Quickly though this form of gear may have come (and here, if one is not grossly in error, the hand of Sigrist is once more discerned) long was it to remain. 'Split-axle',

though technically correct in a descriptive sense, is nevertheless misleading (having regard to later usage of the term) and 'stub axles' were the main transverse components.



Fine man, fine aeroplane: Victor Mahl with a Tabloid having the 'racing', or V-type landing gear, fabric-faired wheels and one of several forms of engine cowling tried on the Tabloid. A spinner adds an extra sporting touch.

It was not, in any case, sheer speed which was to distinguish the Sopwith fighters of later years so much as their powers of manoeuvre (Spratt's aggressiveness has already been instanced)—combined, of course, with effective armament. To emphasise the manoeuvrability factor (and remembering what construction T. O. M. Sopwith had placed on the term 'factor', as noted earlier) one could adduce no more convincing or entertaining instance than the following report of Brooklands activities, rendered as early as April 1914:

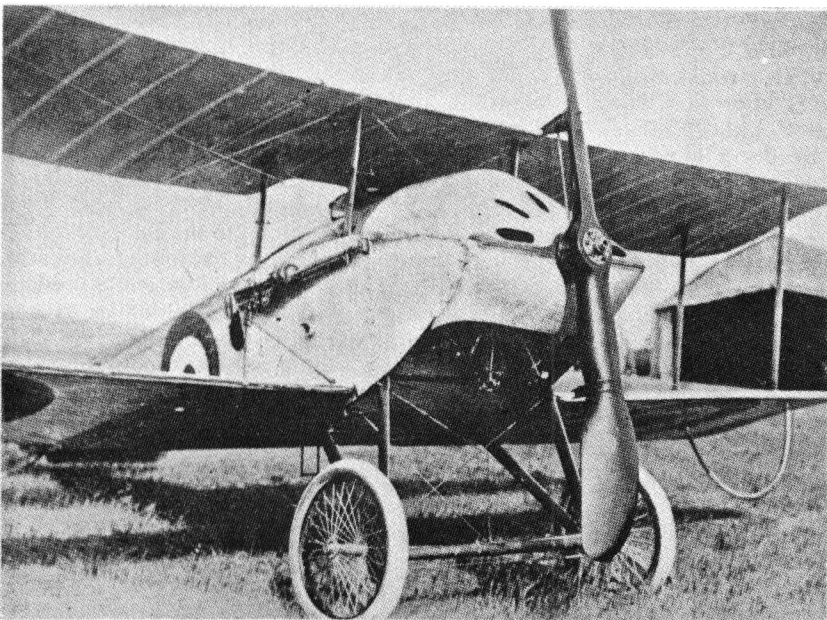
'Mr. Pixton was out on the "tabloid" Sopwith biplane; but *the* flights of the afternoon were by Mr. Barnwell on the Sopwith "tabloid" on which he achieved the distinction of being the first Brooklands airman to "loop the loop", after having quickly climbed to 4,000 ft. In the strong sunshine and at the height the evolution was carried out it was difficult to follow every detail of movement, but to most it seemed that the machine, after turning vertically upwards, fell to one side, and then, turning over, completed the loop prior to planing down. Mr. Tom Sopwith ran out to greet Mr. Barnwell and to ask him exactly what he had done, to which question the aviator called out: "That's just what I've come down to ask you!" His idea of his movements, however, coincided with the above opinion, so, apparently quite satisfied as to what he had to do the next time, he immediately restarted, and at his second attempt made three very good loops at a height of about 3,000 feet. On his return to *terra firma* he had a warm reception by the crowd near the "Blue Bird". It is worthy of note that nobody has previously attempted the feat on a machine approaching the speed of the Sopwith "tabloid". Mr. Barnwell seemed to think nothing of the feat he had accomplished, merely remarking after his second attempt: "I began to wonder where the world had got to that last time!"

That this little effort was indeed 'worthy of note' would not have been disputed by Pup and Camel pilots in the war then drawing near; nor was the rendering 'tabloid Sopwith' unknown in Service circles, for about six months before the war Lieut Col F. H. Sykes—named as a captain in the chapter on 'Other Men's Aeroplanes' was reported as having affirmed: 'Experience places the value of aerial reconnaissance beyond a doubt, not only in calm weather, but practically in all weathers; reconnaissance will however be opposed, and that in the air. Anti-aircraft guns will assist, but probably insufficiently. This fact being granted, there is the obvious necessity for different types of aircraft . . . Does the advanced cavalry require one type? The Headquarters of an Army another? Flanking divisions a third? Will there be a battle squadron? A fast scout flotilla? A squadron to hunt down and destroy airships and to attack aircraft bases? A low-flying armoured destroyer of ammunition parks and supply trains? A heavy transport convoy craft? A breakdown and repair craft?

'For all these duties, slightly different types and qualities are required. Even now, one can hardly imagine the tabloid Sopwith taking the role of a Sikorski argosy.' [sic].

An interesting study, this, not only in the coming needs of air warfare (which Sopwith was to do so much to meet) but in aircraft nomenclature also.

With the quality of manoeuvrability one was careful to associate a little earlier 'effective armament'; and though the full significance of the qualification 'effective' (as distinct from merely 'heavy') will later be emphasised—especially in regard to the 1½ Strutter and Camel—the moment now arrives to proclaim the Tabloid as an initiator of the 'deflector' propeller—one, that is, which had an arrangement of steel plates to protect it from damage from bullets fired straight ahead through the plane of the revolving blades. That this same innovation is sometimes ascribed to the type of aeroplane called the Sopwith Gordon Bennett appears to be amply justified, and



Though sometimes called a 'Sopwith Gordon Bennett' (see separate chapter following) this particular Tabloid variant was acquired by the Admiralty and was distinguished not only by a 'racing' landing gear and liberally ventilated cowling, but by a Lewis gun fixed on the starboard side and firing ahead by virtue of a deflector propeller.

is explained in the 'Gordon Bennett' chapter which follows the present one; but for the present at least this particular armament fitment is associated with the Tabloid. Relevant in any case is a minute written by Winston Churchill in April 1915 calling for a single-seat Naval aircraft 'with a Lewis gun firing through the deflector propeller.' (It is not, however, suggested that the device was in any sense a product of 'Winnie's toy-shop'—as a certain exciting, dangerous and unofficial emporium came to be known one war later).

Whatever its origins (probably French) one deflector scheme had associations with The Integral Propeller Co Ltd of Euston Road, London. A stout bracing-rod for the channel-form bullet-deflector was a prominent feature.

Beyond recording that between October 1914 and June 1915 Tabloid production totalled 36 machines (all Sopwith-built); that the later examples had ailerons instead of wing warping; and that allocated Service numbers included 123, 124, 167—169, 326, 394 and 1201—1213, little remains to be said of this historic little biplane; for though four were sent to the Dardanelles aboard HMS *Ark Royal* (later renamed *Pegasus*) early in 1915, though two were at the Isle of Grain and one or more served at Great Yarmouth, these achieved little operational distinction.

These facts notwithstanding, we must not omit to note that *Ark Royal* was commanded by that pioneer of aircraft armament Cdr R. H. (later Air Marshal Sir Robert) Clark-Hall, who himself reported that the 'four land machines' (the Tabloids) had so small a wing span that they could be hoisted in and out 'with their

wings spread' (meaning fully rigged, for the wings did not fold). These aeroplanes, said Clark-Hall, could be flown off the ship's deck, but could not land back on to it, and they could alight on the sea only with great risk. One wholly fascinating observation by 'Clarkie', was that they could be set ashore, for service from land bases, 'without difficulty in the ship's boats'.

Shades of Sir Francis Drake and company; yet the armament of these particular Tabloids was no mere musketoon, but four or more 20 lb bombs, or quantities of steel spikes weighing 50 lb per thousand.

So, from Kingston-on-Thames and Monaco, it was out to the Dardanelles . . . Yet, later in the war came a reminder—a somewhat poignant one today for lovers of Sopwith 'original' material—of Pixton's historic peacetime victory, on the strength of which some observers steadfastly declared that it 'had proved the biplane to be as fast as the monoplane' (the dubiety of which would have been less in 1914 than now). The reminder just mentioned came after the Sopwith Sports of 1917, concerning which it was announced: 'The gate receipts totalled £52. 7s. 6d., the tickets sold realised £46. 16s. 6d., while the draw for the beautifully made model of the Schneider Cup winner brought in £16. 3s. 6d.'

Where—many readers will join the writer in wondering—is that model today?

#### **Tabloid**

(80 hp Gnome)

Span 25 ft 6 in (7.7 m); length 20 ft 4 in (6.2 m); wing area 241.3 sq ft (22.4 sq m). Empty weight 730 lb (331 kg); maximum weight 1,120 lb (508 kg). Maximum speed 92 mph (148 km/h); endurance 3.5 hr.

## **Gordon Bennett**

There are, one feels, two justifications for this present short chapter—both of them aeroplanes. The first of these machines, as shown in the accompanying photographs, was very distinctive, not only in matters of detail wherein it differed from any known form of the Tabloid, but in palpably basic features also. That this particular aeroplane had a special claim to the name 'Gordon Bennett' or 'Gordon Bennett Racer'; that it was taken over by the Admiralty as No. 1215; and that it had associations—at Hendon—with Lieut Spenser Grey are indisputable facts; but concerning the second aeroplane mentioned some haziness persists, though in having tucked it away under the 'Tabloid' heading one feels relief and confidence in equal measure. Let us then recognise what the photograph showing it fitted with a deflector propeller proclaims it to be—a Tabloid, or a very close derivative. But equally let us admit the possibility of its having been intended (in one form or another) as a standby, or second string, for the 1914 Gordon Bennett Aviation Cup.

On the purely sporting aspects of the matter once again we seek counsel from Peter Lewis, writing of 1914. Thus: 'Racing had been extremely popular for some three years, but relatively few attempts had been made in Great Britain to design small machines exclusively for the purpose.' (Here we shall do well to remember Sir Thomas Sopwith's own assurance that Pixton's victorious Schneider Trophy mount of 1914 was originally a Tabloid from an RFC production batch). But to allow Mr Lewis to finish: 'Among the efforts just before the war began was the Sopwith single-seater derived from the Tabloid with the express intention of competing for the 1914 Gordon Bennett Aviation Cup. It used an 80-hp Gnome equipped with a deep-chord cowling blended into a finely conceived circular fuselage but was never raced and, instead, saw war service at Hendon in the RNAS as 1215.'