

## WORLD'S GREATEST AIR RACE – the 1934 MacRobertson.

Over those years since 1934, much has been written about the air race from Mildenhall, England to Melbourne, Australia and its prominent participants.

The race is having its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this coming October, and, to commemorate the occasion, our newsletter for this month and for the months of September and October will each feature a story of one of the unsuccessful race entries which may or may not be known to you.

### Story No. 1. The Harkness and Hillier Monoplane

... features racing entry number 43, which was nominated by the Air Race Australian Entry Ltd, Sydney, Australia. The aircraft being entered was a local project, to be designed and built by the combined efforts of T.D. Leech, a civil engineering and aeronautics lecturer at Sydney University, L.J.R. Jones, lecturer in aircraft construction at Sydney Technical College, and a former RAF pilot, D.T. Saville, who was to fly the aircraft in the race.

All three gave their time and knowledge freely to the project which was to be financed by public subscription, and remember our country was still economically in depression at this time when the Sydney basic wage was 67 shillings – 6 dollars 70 cents – per week. As well, all three project leaders worked on its design and construction, with an anticipated completion date of mid-March, 1934.....providing finance was available.

The proposed aircraft was basically a flying wing with twin booms, retractable undercarriage and a flared nacelle for the crew of two sitting side by side with access allowing for in-flight servicing, should it be required, to the two 150 h.p. Harkness Hornet engines mounted on their sides inside its wing. Due to delays with the Harkness engines, Cirrus Hermes engines were substituted.

Work commenced in late December 1933 in a shop basement in Ryde, Sydney, where Jones was responsible for its essentially all-metal construction assisted by university and technical college students. May Bradford, a well respected licenced commercial pilot and ground engineer, also worked on its construction. According to one report, she was to be Saville's co-pilot and engineer for the flight to and from England.

However, the mid-March completion date soon proved to be over-optimistic. Then, on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1934, "Aircraft" magazine reported that "Following a hitch in the plans to finance the entry of the all-Australian plane, 'Sunny New South Wales',..... several well known flying people have gone into print to support the venture. These included "Smithy" as well as the President of the NSW Aero Club and the Hon. Secretary of the Australian Branch of the Royal Aeronautical Society. As further support for the project, experts agreed the aircraft, sometimes called "Speedjob", would have a reasonable chance of winning the race, which some felt it would complete in three days.

Finance was always going to be a problem. It had been reported that between £4000 and £5000 (\$8000 to \$10000) had already been spent, but another £2500

(S5000) was needed.

On 9<sup>th</sup> May, the project was transferred to Grace Bros store in Broadway, Sydney, where the aircraft was to be completed publicly in the hope of receiving more subscriptions.

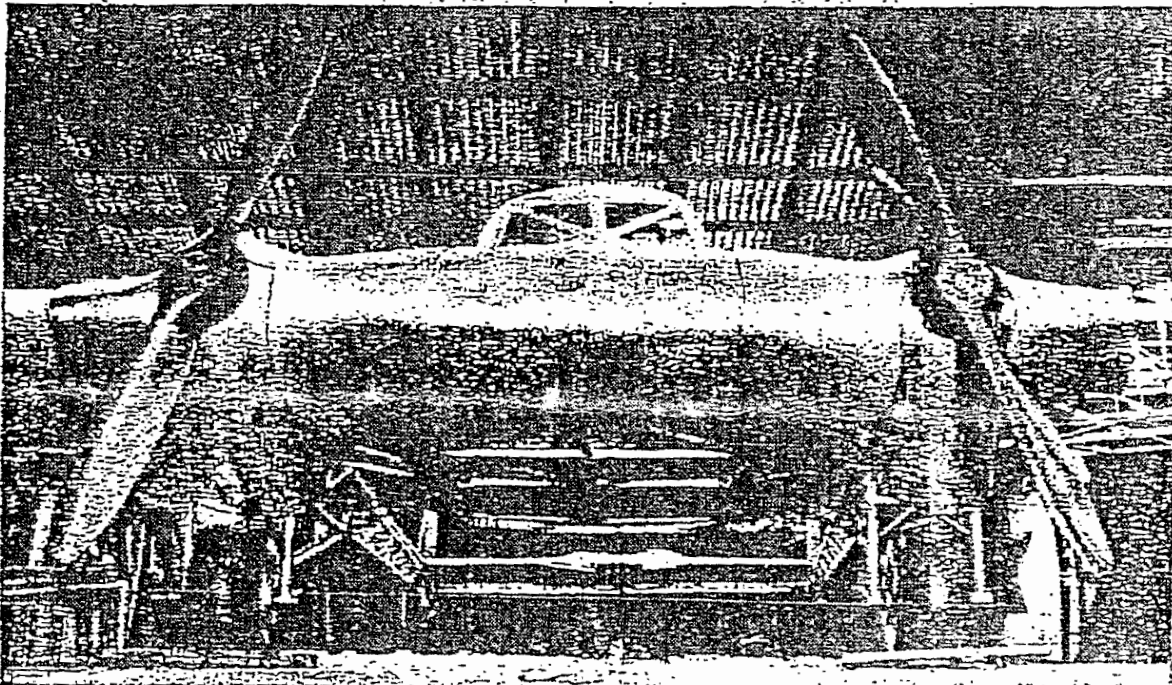
Technical problems slowed progress with its construction during June and July. Time was running out, and, following arrangements with the Tugan Aircraft Company, the project was moved to Mascot on 16<sup>th</sup> August for the expected completion under the supervision of Leech.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September, when the starboard wing failed a load test, it was realised that the aircraft would not be ready in time to fly to England for the race start on 20<sup>th</sup> October. Its entry was withdrawn and it was removed from Tugan and placed in storage to be completed later. However, when the race was over, the project was abandoned due to lack of interest and finance.

This result was most disappointing both to the dedicated people involved with the project and the broader view of our aviation industry generally.

Its two engines were returned to the makers, and the airframe was moved to a local engineering workshop, where, over time, it has been reduced to a small number of welded tubular structures. It is hoped that these pieces will be available for an appropriate display in the coming months.

Next month's newsletter will feature: racing entry number 46, Jacqueline Cochran's Granville Brothers R6H aircraft, with its 675 h.p. engine.



ALL AUSTRALIAN : The Harkness & Hiller monoplane shown here under construction at Mascot Aerodrome, Sydney. It seems improbable that this machine will race.