

Louis Blériot Biography

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Contents

Louis Blériot Biography.....	1
Contents.....	2
Biography.....	3

Biography

Born in Cambrai, France, Blériot was a successful manufacturer of automobile accessories, including head lamps, foot warmers for car passengers, and luminous license plates. He spent much of his money on aviation research, but he was considered a terrible pilot; uncoordinated, impatient and a faulty designer. Out of thirteen different aircraft configurations he built or tested, more than half either would not fly or crashed with him at the controls.

In 1909, the London *Daily Mail* offered a prize of \$5,000 for the first flight across the English channel by a heavier-than-air machine. Blériot entered enthusiastically, but his plane appeared terribly inadequate. It was small, underpowered, with only 150 square feet (45.75 sq. m) of wing area. The fuselage was only partly covered (the rest was a trellis design), and the pilot sat on a wooden seat with only a leather strap for a back rest and had no instruments to help guide him. The craft's engine was a crude, three-cylinder with holes punched in the bottoms of the cylinders to let hot gases escape. It could run for approximately a half hour, enough time, Blériot thought, to fly across the channel.

On Sunday, July 25, 1909, Blériot beat his competition into the air. His engine ran relatively smoothly and a light rain kept it from overheating. Winds drove him past his intended landing place in Dover, England, but a French newsman, who had been assigned to cover Blériot's arrival, waved him to a safe landing, using a French flag. Blériot won the competition, completing the twenty-two mile (35 m) trip in thirty-seven minutes.

Blériot eventually formed an aircraft company that produced several well-known fighters in World War I, including the famous S.P. a.d. fighter which German pilot Eddie Rickenbacker used for many of his aerial victories. Blériot remained active in flight research until his death in 1936.