

# THE WOMEN'S AIR DERBY



THE WINNER OF THE WOMEN'S AIR DERBY (AT THE LEFT) AND SOME OF THE OTHER ENTRANTS

Mrs. Louise McPhetridge Thaden, of Pittsburgh, wife of a former Army flyer, at the extreme left, won the women's race from Santa Monica to Cleveland in the heavier planes class, in 20 hours, 19 minutes. Mrs. Phoebe Omie, of Memphis (not in the picture) came in first in the lighter planes event; her time for the 2,350 miles was 24 hours, 12 minutes. Miss Marvel Crosson, who leapt from her plane near Wellton, Arizona, and was killed when her parachute failed to open, is the fourth from the left. Ten of the entrants are shown above. From left to right, they are: Mrs. Thaden, Bobby Trout, Patty Willis, Marvel Crosson, Blanche W. Noyes, Vera Walker, Amelia Earhart, Marjorie Crawford, Ruth Elder, and Florence Barnes.

**I**F ANYTHING MORE WAS NEEDED to startle those old-fashioned people who still think that young women have to be helped across street crossings, the Santa Monica-Cleveland air derby, in which a handful of daring airwomen were the participants, should be enough, thinks the Albany *Knickerbocker Press*. Of nineteen contestants, sixteen finished the entire course of 2,350 miles, over the Rockies, across the deserts of the Southwest, and above the waving wheat-fields of Kansas, to the scene of the National Air Races for 1929. One participant is a native of Australia; another of Germany. A motion-picture actress, a transport pilot, a Junior League member, and the first woman to fly the Atlantic lined up at the start with the holder of the altitude record for women, a mother of two children, the wife of a famous gem expert, and the holder of the women's speed record. In the first cross-country contest of its kind, "the women flyers," says Brigadier-General Foulois, of the Army Air Corps, "acquitted themselves as well as the men who entered the transcontinental derby last year."

On the other hand, a number of editorial observers point out, the tragic death of Miss Marvel Crosson, holder of the women's altitude record, early in the contest, brings up the question of the participation of women in the flying game. "Ironically enough," says the *Washington News*, "Miss Crosson was perhaps the best flyer of the nineteen who left the California city on August 18. She had been in aviation since 1922. She flew with her brother in Alaska, and passed her tests there. She understood flying." To the *Knoxville Journal*, "youth and charm like hers seems a sacrifice too great for any honors or prizes that could be gained."

Miss Crosson, says a United Press dispatch from Wellton, Arizona, apparently tried to save her life by jumping just before the plane crashed, but this desperate expedient failed. The finding of her body near the Gila River, in southern Arizona, covered by a parachute not fully opened, recalls to the editor of the *Jersey City Journal* the fatal results of the Pacific (Dole) Air Derby, which was also marked by the death of a girl flyer. "These two fatalities in themselves are enough to put an end to any more such contests," maintains the New Jersey paper. "The



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trouble with such ventures is the tendency to take chances," points out the *Troy Record*.

Until some safeguards are available, the *New York American* and other widely read dailies are of the opinion that "this should be the last contest of its kind." Continues this Hearst paper:

"It was appalling to learn of the tragic death of Miss Crosson. A fine young woman, who by her skill as well as courage seemed destined to many honors as a pioneer woman pilot, has been called as a sacrifice on the altar of a premature competition.

"The air is becoming safer every day, but it is not yet safe for competitive group racing, by either men or women. Furthermore, public confidence in aviation is undermined when human life is needlessly sacrificed in such ill-advised contests."

The *New York Telegram*, however, is convinced that "Miss Crosson would not want her death to influence public opinion against trained women flyers." As the *Tulsa Tribune* explains:

"Miss Crosson's participation in the air derby was strictly a matching of her flying skill with the proficiency of other capable women flyers. It was a legitimate contest, such as men have engaged in, in one line or another, for many centuries. She knew the game she was playing, and she asked no odds.

"Miss Crosson's plane failed, as any pilot's plane developing mechanical defects might have failed. Her parachute also failed, as parachutes do, perhaps, one time out of a million. But she went to her death doing exactly what any veteran of the Caterpillar Club would have done. She played the game as it should have been played. She played it bravely."

In the opinion of the *Savannah News*, "Miss Crosson's death does not prove that women have no place at the controls of airplanes. Women will not be denied whatever fame and fortune may be found in doing the hazardous things men do. They will keep right on taking chances, just as men will."

The Georgia daily also reminds us that the other contestants in the women's air derby, with the exception of one who voluntarily dropt out of the race, believing that her plane had been tampered with; and another who contracted typhoid fever during the contest, finished the course. Charges of sabotage, which flew thick and fast during the first few days of the derby, are said in Los Angeles dispatches to have been without foundation.