

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM

SIGNIFICANT AVIATION EVENTS

THE 1936 SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CENTENARY AIR RACE

The South Australian Colonisation Act was passed by the British Parliament in 1834, and the first settlers arrived in 1836. South Australia was officially proclaimed on 19 February 1836 in England but the reading of the Proclamation in Glenelg by Governor Hindmarsh was on 28 December 1836. This is the date celebrated in South Australia, and was the date around which the Centenary celebrations were planned in 1936.

The South Australian Government convened a State Executive Centenary Committee under the Secretaryship of Victor Herbert Ryan to organise the celebrations. Ryan was well qualified for the task: he had been appointed director of South Australia's Tourist Bureau in 1911 and was responsible for the production of promotional material about the State for settlers and visiting tourists,

and he co-edited the Handbook of South Australia.

The Tourist

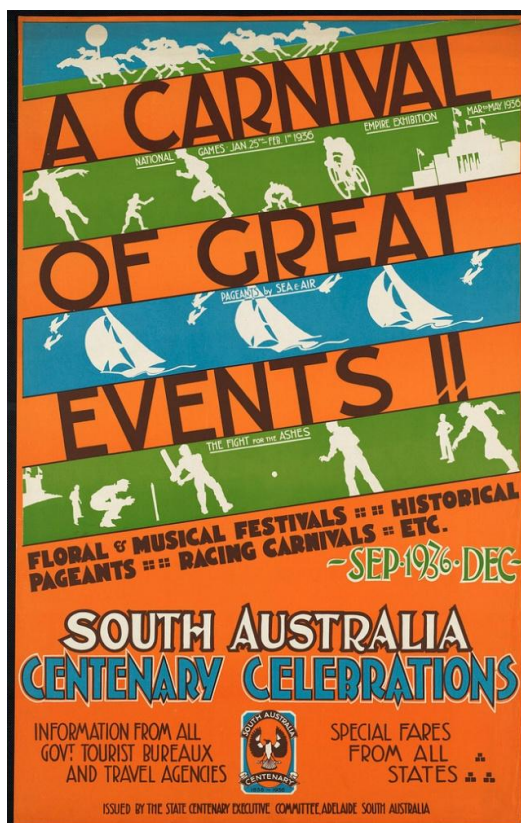
Bureau was responsible for a range of activities with very little connection to tourism including, during the War, immigration, patriotic appeals, recruiting and training and employment for returning servicemen.¹

All sorts of Centenary Celebration events were planned, including the fight for the Ashes, a floral festival, the Empire Exhibition from March to May, sea and air pageants, and a re-enactment of Governor Hindmarsh's landing from *HMS Buffalo*.

The first mention of the Centenary in the minutes was on 15 July 1935, when the committee resolved to advise the State Centenary Committee that the Club wanted to hold an aerial pageant on a date that suited the Centenary program. Bizarrely, the committee also wrote to the Centenary Committee on 13 November 1935 to ask it to consider the establishment of a city aerodrome at Victoria Park. The Centenary Committee predictably replied that such consideration was



Victor Herbert Ryan
Australian National Travel Association
Courtesy State Library of SA



South Australian Centenary promotional poster
Courtesy Boston Public Library

¹ Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 16 P 159, Melbourne University Press 2002 – Ryan, Victor Herbert, (1874-1956) Katherine Gargett

outside its purview.

The proposal to hold a Centenary Air Race, however, was discussed between Club officials and Victor Ryan at Laverton's Aerial Pageant sometime before July 1935. *Wing Tips* reported in its July edition² that various options were considered including an overseas race, a round Australia race and other functions. Mr Ryan reportedly offered his support, and the Club approached the Royal Aero Club in London for details of its organisation of the Mildenhall-Melbourne race the previous year. The Club decided to forego its 1935 annual pageant and to support instead a pageant then being arranged at Bute for 28 September. At this early stage the Club had already more-or-less rejected the possibility of holding a London to Adelaide race because of the short time available to gain the sponsorship support necessary and to organise the event, but Premier Butler was in London in July discussing the possibility of a London race, so the Club could hardly reject the proposal outright. So *Wing Tips* reported that "*the Club is waiting with interest his return*". The Club's preferred option at that stage was a race around Australia, starting and finishing at Parafield, with each Aero Club taking charge of organisation in its State, and a Centenary Air Pageant to be held at Parafield after the event.

Arrangements were finally confirmed in March 1936 when the State Executive Centenary Committee wrote to the Club offering £1,000 sponsorship of an interstate air race to Adelaide, with the intention of appointing a special committee to manage it. The committee (of the Club) then resolved at its meeting on 23 March to submit a proposal to the Centenary Committee for the race route to be from Brisbane to Adelaide via Sydney and Melbourne with speed and handicap sections. The speed race was to start on 18 December and the handicap race on 16 December. The handicap race would be flown over 3 stages, Brisbane-Sydney, Sydney-Melbourne and Melbourne-Adelaide, and the starting times at Sydney and Melbourne were to be adjusted to enable the winner of the handicap section to pass the winning post in Adelaide first. The Pageant would then be held at Parafield on Saturday 19 December.

At the committee's next meeting on 30 March, Dr Harry Nott was appointed Chairman of the Ball Committee, with the ball to be held at the Palais Royal on North Terrace. It resolved to split the £1,000 as prizes consisting of £250 for first prize in the speed race and £50 for second; £500 for first prize in the handicap race, £100 for second and £25 for third; and £25 for the winner of each of the three daily handicap stages. The winners of first and second handicap prizes would not be eligible for the daily sections prizes but would be eligible for the speed prizes. The third place winner in the handicap race would be eligible for the speed prize, but also for not more than two out of the three daily sections prizes. Victor Ryan himself attended the committee's meeting on 1 June 1936 to discuss arrangements and to relay the South Australian Manager of Goodyear Tyre and Rubber Co's offer to the Premier of a trophy for the handicap race winner. The offer was accepted.

Various country centres were also making plans for air pageants and celebratory events during this busy time for the Club. The Renmark Irrigation Trust wrote to the Club on 17 March 1936 to ask it to organise a pageant at Renmark on 23 April, which the committee agreed to do at a fee to be negotiated. The program was agreed and the pageant held on 14 May with RAAF participation. The Back-to-Tatiara Celebrations Committee wrote on 11 May 1936 asking it to organise a pageant at Bordertown on 22 October, to which the committee agreed to commit three aircraft for £60. The District Council of Bute wrote to committee on 22 May 1936 to ask for assistance with a pageant to be held in September or October, which the committee refused because of the need to concentrate on the race and its own pageant in December (and perhaps because it felt it had done enough in assisting Bute with its pageant as recently as September the previous year). The Kooyonga Golf Club wrote on 5 September to ask for Club aircraft to perform over the AIF Cup on 19 September, to

² *Wing Tips*. No 79 July 1935, pp 1-2

which the committee agreed. On 9 September the Blyth Centenary Committee wrote to ask Club aircraft to attend its Centenary Celebrations on 13 February 1937, which seemed to be dragging the Centenary out beyond its boundary, but the committee agreed for 35/- an hour flying time plus accommodation and out of pocket expenses for Club personnel. And in the middle of all this the Club organised its own Empire Day celebration at Parafield on 23 May, when Club DH60s demonstrated formation flying and aerobatics and afternoon tea was served in the Club House.

The closing date for entries was 30 September and by 5 October 48 race entries had been received.³

BRISBANE-ADELAIDE AIR RACE.

LIST OF ENTRIES.

Race Number.	Name of Entrant.	Name of Pilot.	Type of Machine.	Estimated top speed: Miles per hour.	Markings.
BRISBANE.					
18.	ROYAL QUEENSLAND AERO CLUB	N. C. P. Blight	D.H.60 G	98	VH-UIQ
36.	YOUNG, C. H.	C. H. Young	D.H.85 Leopard	137	VH-UVF
15.	YOUNG, T. R.	T. R. Young	D.H.60 G	97	VH-UQH
32.	ROYAL QUEENSLAND AERO CLUB	D. G. Cameron	D.H.87A Hornet	127	VH-UUD
37.	COLLINS, J. W. F.	J. W. F. Collins	D.H.85	137	VH-USM
7.	JACKSON, J. F.	J. F. Jackson	Britt. Klemm "Swallow"	90	VH-UTA
33.	BONNEY, Mrs. D.	Mrs. D. Bonney	Klemm K.L. 32	128	VH-UVE
49.	COLLINS, J. W. F.	J. W. F. Collins	Percival Vega Gull	173	VH-UVG
3.	PIKE, J. E.	W. Pike	Aeronca		
8.	MARSH, J. A.	J. A. Marsh	Westland Widgeon	90	VH-UKP
46.	MOODY, P. H.	P. H. Moody	Stinson "Reliant"	155	VH-UTW
21.	ROYAL QUEENSLAND AERO CLUB	R. W. Hillier	D.H.60 G	106	VH-URL
45.	PEARCE, Miss I.	Miss I. Pearce	Monospar	148	VH-UTK
NEW SOUTH WALES.					
16.	CONNOLLY, J. J.	J. J. Connolly	Klemm "Swallow"	97	VH-UUN
5.	FALKNER, G. B. S.	A. N. Pentland	D.H.60 G	87	VH-UGI
27.	GODSALL, R.	R. Godsall	D.H.80A Puss	120	VH-UPN
38.	Von GOES, A. S.	J. Robins	D.H.85 Leopard	137	VH-UVD
39.	BROADBENT, H. F.	H. F. Broadbent	D.H.85 Leopard	137	VH-AHB
40.	SAWTELL, G. W.	G. W. Sawtell	D.H.85 Leopard	137	VH-UUE
41.	BIRD, Miss N. DeL.	Miss N. deL. Bird	D.H.85 Leopard	137	VH-UUG
19.	BROADBENT, H. F.	H. F. Broadbent	D.H. Tiger "Moth"		VH-UVZ
24.	HALL, O. B.	O. B. Hall	Percival Gull	140	VH-UTC
30.	FALKNER, G. B. S.	G. B. S. Falkner	Waco Model 70C	125	VH-UVW
47.	PALMER, J. R.	J. R. Palmer	Low Wing Monoplane	160	
34.	BRADFORD, Miss M.	Miss M. Bradford	Britt. Klemm Eagle	130	VH-USI
26.	BUTLER, C. A.	C. A. Butler	B.A.T.	118	
17.	HEYDON, Dr. G. A. M.	Dr. G. A. M. Heydon	D.H.60 G	97	VH-UWB
42.	COLLIEBEE, E. V.	E. V. Colliebee	L.J.W.7 Gannet	138	
31.	MOORE-McMAHON, P.	P. Moore-McMahon	Travelair	125	VH-UGY
48.	AIRLINES OF AUSTRALIA LTD.	K. Virtue	Stinson A		VH-UGG
VICTORIA.					
23.	TWEDDLE, A. H.	A. H. Tweddle	Avro Avian	112	VH-UVR
2.	MUELLER, F. B.	F. B. Mueller	D.H. 53	75	VH-UAD
14.	ROYAL VICTORIAN AERO CLUB	Miss F. Thompson	D.H. 60 G	95	VH-UUC
35.	VINCENT, R. T.	C. D. Pratt	Klemm "Eagle"	148	VH-UTG
12.	BARRETT-WOOD, F. W.	C. A. Mulholland	Genairco	90	VH-UUK
25.	ANSETT AIRWAYS LTD.	R. M. Ansett	Porterfield	115	VH-UVK
9.	GRICE, C. S.	C. S. Grice	Avro Avian	70	VH-UKD
10.	MACKENZIE, I. C. K.	I. C. K. Mackenzie	D.H.60	97	VH-UAL
6.	WENDT, V.	J. Bennett	D.H.60M	88	VH-UMU
28.	HUGHES, H.	H. Hughes	De Soutter	120	VH-UPR
WESTERN AUSTRALIA.					
43.	MILLER, H. C.		Bristol Monoplane		VH-UQI
SOUTH AUSTRALIA.					
22.	SKYWAYS LTD.	B. Monk and W. Maddocks	D.H.9	110	VH-UHT
11.	BONDS TOURS	A. G. Bond	D.H.60 G	90	VH-UGV
4.	SCOTT, J. L.	J. L. Scott	D.H.60 X	80	VH-UGM
44.	ROYAL AERO CLUB OF S.A.	H. Plumridge	Miles Hawk	140	VH-UAI
29.	KNAPMAN, P.	P. Knapman	Klemm "Eagle"	122	VH-UTI
1.	THOMAS, C. M.	C. M. Thomas			
20.	GROPLER, R. W.	R. W. Gropler	German Klemm	105	VH-USZ

It was decided that any further entries would only be accepted with the approval of the Centenary Executive Race Committee.

³ Wing Tips No 95 November 1936, page 4

By 26 October, arrangements had been made with the Commissioner of Railways for special trains to Parafield on 18 and 19 December, and for the Railways to sell combination rail and entrance tickets. Quotes were obtained for smoke and explosive bombs and two dozen smoke bombs at 12/6 each and a dozen smoke explosive bombs at 7/6 were ordered. £8.8.9 was paid for an insurance policy of £250 against 10 points of rain between noon and 3pm on 19 December. Car parking rates were set and £30 paid to an adjoining landholder for him to refrain from using his land for parking. A request by the Port Adelaide Celebrations Committee for it to collect for Miss Nautical and Aerial at the Pageant was refused, but offers from Hoyts Theatres Ltd and The Advertiser to donate miniatures of the *Regent Cup* and *The Advertiser Cup* for events at the Pageant gratefully accepted. Amplifiers for the Pageant were confirmed at a cost of 15 guineas. Station 2UW in Sydney offered a £25 prize for the lady pilot covering the course in the shortest time, which the committee accepted on the basis that if the winner was also the winner of either the speed or handicap prize, it would go to the next fastest lady competitor. On 2 November an offer by a James Reece to carry out a parachute jump at the Pageant for £20 plus £15 expenses was accepted. On 23 November the State Centenary Executive Committee's request to admit sailors (but not soldiers or airmen?!) in uniform to the Pageant at no cost was agreed and John Martin and Company's offer to provide dinner for Club members and competitors at its café at 5/6 per head, and to fund a third of the liquid refreshments was accepted.

Perhaps strangely, none of these arrangements included sending committee members to Brisbane or the other race points to oversee arrangements there. The committee reported at its meeting on 23 November that it had received various telegrams from a Mr R. Lamprell, the Centenary Publicity Officer in Melbourne and Sydney, and from the Royal Queensland Aero Club, urging the Club to place an official in Brisbane prior to the race. James Churchill-Smith recommended that while no urgency should be attached to the matter, it "*appeared imperative that someone should visit Brisbane prior to the race*" but it was "*apparent that Mr Lamprell had put the idea of a visit in the minds of the officials of the Queensland Club.*" The matter was closed with a resolution that the State Centenary Executive be approached to pay the necessary fares.⁴

At the committee's next meeting on 30 November, conditions of the race were laid out:

1. At each Aerodrome each pilot after landing will taxi his machine to the Official in Charge for checking, and then taxi his machine to the Aero Park;
2. The race is to finish at Parafield at approximately 3pm on 18 December; and
3. The finishing line at Parafield is to have a white strip between the two white crosses.

The speed section, which was to start on 18 December from Archerfield and finish at Parafield, was to cover about 1,440 miles via Coffs Harbour, Sydney, Cootamundra, Melbourne and Nhill, while the handicap section starting on 16 December would allot a day to each section of the race via the same points. The Royal Queensland Aero Club would control the section from Brisbane to Sydney, the Royal Aero Club of New South Wales the section from Sydney to Cootamundra, The Royal Aero Club of Victoria from Cootamundra to Nhill and the Royal Aero Club of South Australia from Nhill to Parafield. The race was to be a curtain raiser for the Pageant on 19 December, when the race aircraft would be displayed and take part in an Aerial Derby as a Pageant event. The following Tuesday, on 22 December, a Naval, Military and Air Force parade would be held through the streets of Adelaide and arrangements were made for a number of aircraft to overfly the procession.

The handicapping method was described in *Wing Tips*⁵ as being assessed on the estimated speeds obtained by the aircraft when the engine is run at its full international horse power rating. No account was to be taken of winds or the level of skill of the pilot. This was purported to be the basis

⁴ Minutes, Book 5 page 133, November 23, 1936

⁵ *Wing Tips* No 92 August 1936, page 3

on which the King's Cup Air Race was handicapped, "*and is regarded as the fairest possible basis on which to handicap the varying types of machines that will enter in the race.*" Weights to be carried, any structural streamlining and the names of the pilots must be declared on entry. The handicappers were named in the press after the handicapping erupted into controversy as Gordon Berg, Superintendent of Aircraft, and David Ross, Superintendent of Flying, at the Civil Aviation Board; and W.E. Bussett, a consulting engineer.⁶

In the end the field was finalised at 31 contestants and it was decided to start all of them on 16 December at three minute intervals in race number order:⁷

Race Participants and Handicaps							
Race No	Pilot	Aircraft	Reg	SYD	MEL	ADL	Total
4	J.L. Scott	DH60X	UGM	2.27	2.27	2.08	7.02
6	J. Bennett	DH60M	UMU	1.49	1.49	1.35	5.13
7	J.F. Jackson	Klemm Swallow	UTA	1.55	1.55	1.40	5.30
8	J.A. Marsh	Westland Widgeon	UKP	2.31	2.31	2.11	7.13
10	I.C.K. MacKenzie	DH60G	UAL	1.43	1.43	1.29	4.55
11	A.G. Bond	DH60G	UGV	2.05	2.05	1.49	5.59
14	Miss F. Thompson	DH60G	UUC	1.21	1.21	1.10	3.52
16	J.J. Connolly	Klemm Swallow	UUN	2.02	2.02	1.45	5.49
18	N.C.P. Blight	DH60G	UIQ	1.34	1.34	1.22	4.30
19	H.F. Broadbent	DH82	UVZ	1.07	1.07	0.58	3.12
20	R.W. Gropler	Klemm Swallow	USZ	1.49	1.49	1.35	5.13
21	R.W. Hillier	DH60G	URL	1.16	1.16	1.06	3.38
22	B.W. Monk	DH9	UHT	1.00	1.00	0.52	2.52
23	A.H. Tweddle	Avro Avian	UVR	0.53	0.53	0.47	2.33
25	R.M. Ansett	Porterfield	UVK	2.19	2.19	2.01	6.39
27	R. Godsall	DH80A	UPN	0.46	0.46	0.40	2.12
28	H. Hughes	De Soutter	UPR	1.09	1.09	1.00	3.18
29	P. Knapman	Klemm Eagle Major	UTI	1.00	1.00	0.52	2.52
31	P. Moore-McMahon	Travelair	UGY	0.55	0.55	0.49	2.39
32	D.G. Cameron	DH87A	UUD	0.58	0.58	0.51	2.47
33	Mrs D. Bonney	Klemm KL32	UVE	0.53	0.53	0.48	2.34
34	Miss M. Bradford	Brit. Klemm Eagle	USI	1.09	1.09	1.00	3.18
35	C.D. Pratt	Klemm Eagle	UTG	1.13	1.13	1.04	3.30
36	C.H. Young	DH85	UVF	0.50	0.50	0.43	2.23
38	J. Robins	DH85	UVD	0.58	0.58	0.51	2.47
41	Miss N. Bird	DH85	UUG	0.58	0.58	0.51	2.47
42	E.V. Collibee	Tugan LJW7 Gannet	UVU	0.46	0.46	0.40	2.12
44	H. Plumridge	Miles Hawk	UAI	0.35	0.35	0.31	1.41
45	Miss I. Pearce	Monospar	UTK	0.35	0.35	0.31	1.41
46	P.H. Moody	Stinson Reliant	UTW	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.06
49	J.W.F. Collins	Percival Gull	UVG	scr	scr	scr	scr

⁶ *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), Tuesday December 22, 1937, page 13

⁷ *The Advertiser*, Thursday December 17, 1936, p25

These handicapped times were to be deducted from the competitors' total flying times on arrival Parafield so as to determine the winners of the handicap section.



R.M. Ansett's Porterfield VH-UVH at Parafield after the race. Note the registration was incorrectly listed as UVK in entrants' and handicap lists
Courtesy CAHSSA

The decision, apparently because of the small number of entries in the speed section of the race, to start all contestants on 16 December and require them all to stage over three days, was not popular with the commercial companies that intended to

enter. Some were not prepared to commit an aircraft or pilot, normally engaged in commercial operations, to a three-day race. Airlines of Australia withdrew its Stinson and perhaps Horrie Miller's decision not to enter (although he had intended to fly his Bristol monoplane rather than one of his commercial fleet) was for the same reason.

There were several thousand people at Archerfield in Brisbane to watch the start of the race at 7:30am. It was a beautiful day with clear skies, although there had been heavy rain and some apprehension that the start may have to be delayed. Cloud and rain enroute to Sydney was forecast and had caused at least one entrant to miss the start after being forced back to Sydney the previous day. C.A. Mulholland had started in F.W. Barrett-Wood's Genairco in Melbourne, was forced to overnight in Goulburn because of poor weather, then again in Sydney the next night. *The Advertiser* also mentioned H.C. Miller as a non-starter in his Bristol monoplane (Harry Butler's Red Devil modified and re-engined)⁸ although he was not listed as an entrant.



The contestants at Mascot 17 December 1936
Courtesy Queensland Air Museum-SAAM

⁸ *The Advertiser* Wednesday December 16, 1936, page 29

Thirty-one contenders plus press planes and the Civil Aviation Board's Monospar started virtually without a hitch with Royal Aero Club of Queensland marshals and a heavy police presence to keep the spectators and aircraft separated. The arrangements were judged a triumph for the organisers although two South Australians had a disappointing start: Albert Bond in his DH60 took three attempts to get airborne because of low engine revolutions on his first two tries, and J.L. Scott, also in a DH60, although first to take off, returned after thirty minutes with low oil pressure, and re-departed fifty minutes late at 8:20am.

All entrants completed the first stage to Sydney, with only scattered clouds and a few showers to contend with. Strong tailwinds favoured the slower aircraft south of Coffs Harbour so that the field was close together when arriving at Mascot. Monk and Maddocks, SA Club members, apparently reached a ground speed of 130mph in their old DH9, 40mph faster than its normal cruising speed, and May Bradford reached a groundspeed of 175mph in her Klemm Eagle.



Race contestants in front of H.C. Miller's hangar at Parafield 18/19 Dec 1926
 Foreground – VH-UKP Westland Widgeon – J.A. Marsh, left-centre – Nbr 6 VH-UMU
 DH60 – J. Bennett, left – (tail) Nbr 41 VH-UUG – DH85 – Nancy Bird and furthest from
 camera – Nbr 22 – VH-UHT DH9-B. Monk and W. Maddocks
 Courtesy CAHSSA

The DH9 was the same aircraft that Horrie Miller had flown to victory in the 1929 East-West race and Monk and Maddocks, together with two other Aero Club members had bought it to form Skyways Ltd at Parafield. I found a colourful description of the venerable old aircraft in the press: *"This high-backed black and white warrior, with a huge Siddley engine and an exhaust pipe like a steamship funnel..."*⁹ It had a short life after the race. Less than five months later, on 15 May 1937, it crashed at Kadina and was broken up for parts.

Jim Broadbent was first into Mascot after an exceptionally fast transit at Coffs Harbour, but J.W.F (John William Fitzclarence) Collins had the best overall time in his Percival Gull of 2 hours 55 minutes and a scratch handicap. P.H. (Percival Harry "Skip") Moody had the second fastest in his Stinson Reliant and Harry Plumridge the third in the Miles Hawk.

Reg Ansett won the section on handicap, with his 2 hour 19 minute handicap reducing his time to 1 hour 53 minutes. This was the last flight time reported for him for the entire race because of the handicapping error described later in this chapter.

The sector flight times, handicaps and net times of each of the contestants over the first stage were listed in *The Advertiser* as follows:¹⁰

⁹ *The Advertiser*. Thursday December 17, 1936, page 26

¹⁰ *The Advertiser*, Thursday December 17, 1936, page 25 (R.W. Hillier's times were omitted)

First Stage - 16 December 1936 - Brisbane to Sydney
Flight Time

Pilot	Archerfield - Coff's Harbour	Coff's Harbour - Mascot	Handicap	Net Time
R.M. Ansett	1.48	2.24	2.19	1.53
P. Moore McMahon	1.36½	2.16½	0.55	1.58
C.D. Pratt	1.27½	1.57	1.13	2.11½
R.W. Gropler	1.47	2.22½	1.49	2.20½
J.J. Connolly	1.51½	2.32	2.03	2.21½
J. Bennett	1.57	2.24½	1.49	2.32½
H.H. Broadbent	1.37	2.03	1.07	2.33
M. Bradford	1.36	2.06½	1.09	2.33½
N.C.P. Blight	1.48	2.19½	1.34	2.33½
H. Hughes	1.35½	2.08½	0.46	2.35
I.C.K. MacKenzie	1.55½	2.23	1.43	2.35½
P. Knappman	1.34	2.03	1.00	2.37
N. Bird	1.38	2.01½	0.55	2.44½
D.G. Cameron	1.37½	2.09	0.58	2.48½
E.V. Collibee	1.32½	2.02½	0.46	2.49
H. Plumridge	1.27	1.57	0.35	2.49
J.A. Marsh	2.24	2.58½	2.31	2.51½
I. Pearce	1.30	1.57½	0.35	2.52½
M. Monk	1.45	2.08	1.00	2.53
J.W. Collins	1.15½	1.39½	Scr	2.55
A.H. Tweddle	1.41	2.07½	0.53	2.55½
J.F. Jackson	2.12	2.39½	1.55	2.56½
A.G. Bond	2.23½	2.38	2.05	2.56½
C.H. Young	1.37½	2.09½	0.50	2.57
H.D. Bonney	1.40	2.14	0.53	3.01
R. Godsall	1.37	2.11	0.46	3.02
J. Robins	1.43½	2.20	0.58	3.05½
F. Thompson	1.59½	2.33	1.21	3.11½
P.H. Moody	1.23	1.51	0.02	3.12
J.L. Scott	3.01	2.47	2.27	3.12

Pat Moore McMahon was a violinist dubbed the "*flying fiddler*" and had given a broadcast in Brisbane the night before and hoped to do the same in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, but his net time shown above is clearly incorrect and should be 2 hours 58 minutes. R.W. Hillier, who started in a DH60, is not listed for reasons not explained, and "M. Monk" presumably was Bryan Monk.

The second day was more challenging. Four of the thirty-one starters made forced landings in heavy cloud and rainstorms during the day's second stage from Cootamundra to Essendon. Pat Moore McMahon didn't make it to his Melbourne concert after landing and getting bogged at a station south of Benalla, where he stayed the night and hoped to leave early enough to make it to the start of the third day's racing. The other three who landed enroute but continued to Essendon were Harry Plumridge in the Club's Miles Hawk, who found a suitable paddock near Euroa where he went into the town for a meal while waiting two hours before continuing; A.G. Bond in a DH60 who landed in a paddock near Seymour then had two narrow escapes when he barely cleared first the fence and then telephone wires; and Mrs D. Bonney in her Klemm KL32, who was lost in cloud and landed at Mangalore fearing she would otherwise run out of fuel.

At the end of this event-filled day, Jim Broadbent was the first into Essendon but C.D. Pratt was the leader on handicap with a total Brisbane-Melbourne time of 4 hours 26½ minutes, followed by Roy Gropler with a time of 4 hours 44½ minutes then J.J. Connolly in another Klemm at 4 hours 51 minutes and 54 seconds. Why some contestants' times were rounded to the nearest half minute

while others were given in minutes and seconds is never clear. Pratt won the second stage section prize with a net time of 2 hours 15 minutes, with J.L. Scott second and Gropler third.

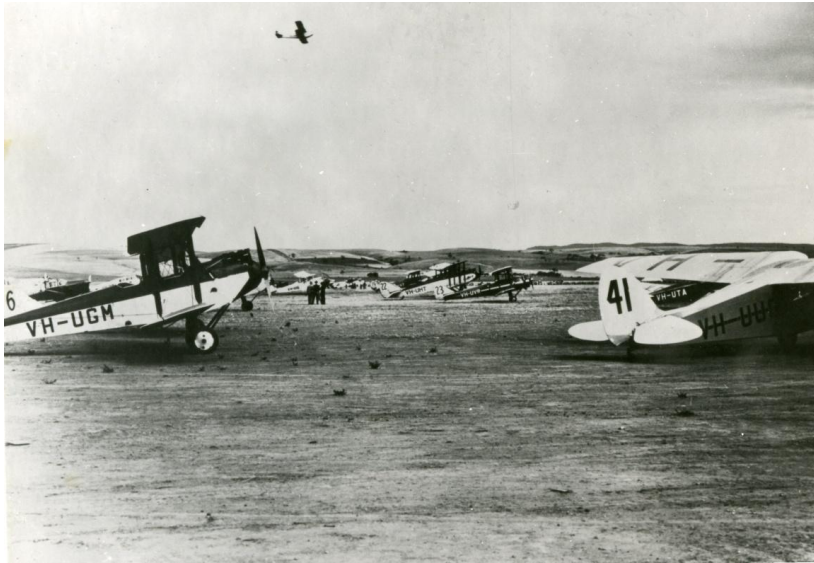
The second stage times are listed in the following table published in *The Advertiser*:¹¹

Pilot	Second Stage - 17 December 1936 - Sydney to Melbourne			
	Flight Time		Handicap	Net Time
	Mascot - Cootamundra	Cootamundra - Essendon		
C.D. Pratt	1.27½	2.00½	1.13	2.15
J.L. Scott	2.08½	2.40.35	2.27	2.22.05
R.W. Gropler	1.48½	2.24½	1.49	2.24
N. Bird	1.24	2.00½	0.55	2.29½
J.J. Connolly	1.59½	2.32.54	2.02	2.30.24
J.A. Marsh	2.10	2.51½	2.31	2.30½
J. Bennett	1.54½	2.28½	1.49	2.34
N.C.P. Blight	1.45½	2.22½	1.34	2.34
H.F. Broadbent	1.34	2.07½	1.07	2.34½
A.H. Tweddle	1.30	2.02	0.53	2.39
H. Hughes	1.41	2.12½	0.46	2.44½
P. Knapman	1.37½	2.10½	1.00	2.48
J.F. Jackson	2.05	2.38½	1.55	2.48½
I. Pearce	1.26	1.59	0.35	2.50
I.C.K. MacKenzie	2.05	2.38½	1.43	2.50½
M. Bradford	1.38½	2.21½	1.09	2.51
D.G. Cameron	1.39½	2.14½	0.58	2.56
R. Godsall	1.35	2.08½	1.09	2.57½
C.H. Young	1.37	2.15	0.50	3.02
R.W. Hillier	1.57	2.21	1.16	3.02
J. Robins	1.45	2.18½	5.58	3.05½
E.V. Collibee	1.35	2.22	0.46	3.11
J.W.F. Collins	1.24½	1.47	Scr	3.11½
F. Thompson	1.58½	2.35	1.21	3.12½
P.H. Moody	1.25	1.52.42	0.02	3.15.42
B.W. Monk	2.40	2.20	1.00	4.01
A.G. Bond	2.09	4.04	2.05	4.08

Reg Ansett's time was not released, which caused considerable surprise, because by then the committee must have identified the handicapping error that caused it so much grief after the race. Pat Moore McMahon, Harry Plumridge and Mrs Bonney also missed the publishing deadline because of their forced landings.

The last day's racing was from Essendon to Nhill, then on to the finish at Parafield. The Flying Fiddler was not able to reach Essendon in time for the start, so was out of the race. The remaining thirty contestants started thirty minutes late at 8am because of fog in Essendon, and all finished, although J.J. Connolly ran short of fuel on the first leg, landed at Rainbow and got bogged. That delayed him for nearly three hours and he arrived so late at Parafield that he was not clocked in as finishing. All the other contestants arrived at Parafield after some enroute adventures. May Bradford was forced down with magneto problems 20 miles outside Nhill, which, as a licensed engineer she was able to fix herself. She had further trouble in Nhill where she had to get a broken fuel pipe welded. J.W.F. Collins could not find the Nhill aerodrome and landed in a paddock nearby to get his bearings. Then

¹¹ *The Advertiser*, Friday December 18, 1936, page 31



Race contestants parked at post-race pageant 19 December 1936 at Parafield
 Left – Nbr 11 - VH-UGM DH60 – A.G. Bond, Centre Nbr 22 – VH-UHT DH9 – B. Monk and
 W. Maddocks, Nbr 23 – VH-UVR Avro Avian – A.H. Tweddle,
 Right – Nbr 41 – VH-UUG DH85 – Nancy Bird
 Clarence Moir Collection - SAAM

in Nhill itself, May Bradford nearly landed on top of the taxiing A.G. Bond after narrowly missing Captain P.G. Taylor's¹² Percival Gull and a fuel wagon.

They all arrived in Nhill within 30 minutes of each other but then endured a long wait while a coordinated departure sequence was worked out so that they would arrive at Parafield as close to race order as possible. It was while they were in Nhill that an official telegram arrived for Reg Ansett from the race committee *"stating that the handicappers had reported a miscalculation in*

*the working out of his handicap, and that the committee had decided to accept the recommendation of the handicapper to amend the handicap to 1 hour 55 minutes first day, 1 hour 55 minutes second day and 1 hour 40 minutes third day – a total of 5 hours 30 minutes."*¹³ This represented a reduction in his handicap of 1 hour and 9 minutes and a serious shifting of the goal posts when the game was nearly over.

Anyway, they arrived over Parafield just after 3pm after hedge-hopping their way from Nhill to avoid headwinds in such proximity that they looked like a *"cloud of gnats"*. They seem to have been sensible enough to separate themselves widely after crossing the finish line and making a left-hand circuit before landing, although this flight path took them across the path of those still heading for the finish line. They apparently paid *"each other courtesies in priorities of landings,"* not easily done, one would think, in those days when few of the aircraft would have been equipped with radios.



Post-race pageant 19 December 1936 – a dusty day at Parafield
 3 RAAF Hawker Demons overhead, from right – Nbr 28 VH-UPR Desouter – H. Hughes,
 Nbr 19 VH-UVZ DH82 – H.F. Broadbent,
 extreme left Nbr 23 – VH-UVR Avro Avian – A.H. Tweddle
 Courtesy CAHSSA

¹² P.G. Taylor's entry form for the race was received too late for him to compete but he flew the course in his Percival Gull VH-UVA as a representative for the *Sydney Morning Herald* with photographer Leonard (Chas Schaedel, note to the Author 9/6/2011)

¹³ *The Advertiser*, Saturday December 19, 1937, page 26



Race winner J.W.F. Collins in Percival Gull VH-UVG
Courtesy Chas Schaedel

Collins was first over the line in his Gull and the five lady pilots all crossed the finish line within 18 minutes of each other, with Ivy Pearce being the first. Roy Gropler was the first South Australian over the line.

Within thirty minutes they were all lined up in front of the club house with the exception of Connolly's Klemm Swallow that did not arrive until 5:30pm, being inspected by the Governor, Sir Winston Dugan, the Parliamentary

Under-Secretary for the Dominions, Lord Hartington, the Premier, the Minister of Agriculture and the Lord Mayor. If the Minister of Agriculture seems a strange inclusion, he was there in his capacity of Patron of the Model Flying Club. All the contestants were very happy with the race arrangements and agreed that *"the outstanding feature of the race was the efficiency of the organisation, not only in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, but also at each of the intermediate stopping places."*¹⁴ This race after-glow unfortunately quickly became disgruntlement the following day.

The total net times for all three days of the race were listed as *"unofficial placings"* in *The Advertiser* as shown at right:¹⁵

There was no explanation for the omission of Harry Plumridge or Mrs Bonney from the list but Reg Ansett's omission was deliberate. The Race Committee had identified an error in the calculation of his handicap at an early stage of the race. This was certainly before the start of the third stage as evidenced by its refusal to publish his times for Sydney-Cootamundra-Essendon stages, but why Ansett was only advised on arrival in Nhill is not clear. The late advice certainly enraged the Ansett brothers, who lodged an immediate protest.

The first prize of £250 in the speed race was awarded to J.W.F. Collins, and the second prize to P.H. Moody but no prizes were awarded for the handicap section pending resolution of the protest. £500 for first place was at stake. The race committee met for three hours on Friday night without reaching a resolution. Mr Ansett was reported in Saturday's *Advertiser* as saying he was strongly urged by the committee to withdraw his protest but *"as he considers it highly unjust to be advised of an alteration in handicap so near the*

Net Times Brisbane - Adelaide	
Pilot	Net Time
C.D. Pratt	6.35.45
I.C.K. McKenzie	7.12.13½
R.W. Gropler	7.17.51
N.C.P. Blight	7.44.54
H.H. Broadbent	7.45.39
P. Knapman	7.52.20
J. Bennett	7.57.38
H. Hughes	8.8.31½
A.H. Tweddle	8.13.16
N. Bird	8.13.42
M. Bradford	8.14.42½
J.A. Marsh	8.21.58½
E.V. Collibee	8.30.57
I. Pearce	8.40.51
D.G. Cameron	8.41.39
J.F. Jackson	8.45.36½
R. Godsall	8.55.31
R.H. Hillier	8.58.37
C.H. Young	9.0.57½
J.L. Scott	9.9.33
J.W.F. Collins	9.24.12
J. Robins	9.30.51½
P.H. Moody	9.34.13½
F. Thompson	9.34.48
B.W. Monk	9.54.40
A.G. Bond	10.10.35

¹⁴ *The Advertiser*, Saturday December 19, 1936, page 26

¹⁵ *The Advertiser*, Saturday December 19, 1936, page 25

end of the race, he refused to withdraw". He also said that "he had been advised to lodge a protest by the majority of the pilots in the race, who considered that I had not had a fair deal."

The basis of the protest, apart from the obvious unfairness of such a late shifting of the goal posts, was Ansett's contention that he had flown the race in accordance with the handicap he had been given in Brisbane. He reviewed the other contestants' handicaps in Sydney and Melbourne and *"estimated the speed it would be necessary for me to fly to hold the advantage gained at the close of each day."*¹⁶ In short, he contended he flew as fast as he needed to and not as fast as he could.

James Churchill-Smith effectively called this nonsense and maintained that none of the pilots had been told their handicaps, which were known only to the race committee, so that the question of any change being made to an official handicap did not arise. Clearly the pilots *did* know their handicaps, official or otherwise, from the outset, so this seems to have been a piece of face-saving pedantry.

It was not until the following Wednesday, 23 December, that the race committee, which included Premier Butler as chairman, V.H. Ryan of the Executive Centenary Committee and various other notables not connected with the Club as well as Churchill-Smith, came to a decision. Ansett got the £500 first prize and the Goodyear Trophy. C.D. Pratt was relegated to second place and received £100 and Roy Gropler got third place and £25. Gropler also won the Brisbane to Sydney section prize and the de Havilland Trophy for the best performance by an Aero Club trained pilot over the whole course. James Churchill-Smith, perhaps wisely given his earlier comments about there being no issue with the change, refused to comment on the reasons for the decision.

All the prizes were awarded as follows:¹⁷

SPEED SECTION

First (£250) – J.W.F. Collins, Percival Vega Gull, VH-UVG. Time 9 hrs 24 min 12 sec

Second (£100) - P.H. Moody, Stinson Reliant, VH-UTW. Time 9 hrs 24 min 13½ sec

HANDICAP SECTION

First (£500 and "Goodyear" trophy) – Ansett Airways Ltd, Porterfield, VH-UVK. Gross time 12 hrs 24 min 6 sec (Handicap 6 hrs 39 min) Net time 5 hrs 45 min 6 sec

Second (£100) - R.T. Vincent, Klemm Eagle, VH-UTG. Gross time 10 hrs 5 min 45 sec (Handicap 3 hrs 30 min) Net time 6 hrs 35 min 45 sec.

Third (£25) – R. W. Gropler, German Klemm, VH-USZ. Gross time 12 hrs 30 min 51 sec (Handicap 5 hrs 13 min) Net time 7 hrs 17 min 51 sec.

DAILY SECTIONAL PRIZES OF £25 EACH

First day – R.W. Gropler, German Klemm, VH-USZ. Gross time 4 hrs 9 min 30 sec (Handicap 1 hr 49 min) Net time 2 hrs 20 min 30 sec.

Second day – J.L. Scott, DH60X Moth, VH-UGM. Gross time 4 hrs 49 min 5 sec (Handicap 2 hrs 27 min) Net time 2 hrs 22 min 5 sec.

Third day – Miss N. Bird, Leopard Moth, VH-UUG. Gross time 3 hrs 14 min 42 sec (Handicap 49 min) Net time 2 hrs 22 min 42 sec.

DE HAVILLAND TROPHY for the best performance by a pilot trained by any of the Associated Australian Aero Clubs – R.W. Gropler

T.E. PERRY TROPHY for the best performance by a lady pilot – Miss Nancy Bird.

¹⁶ *The Advertiser* Saturday December 19, 1936, page 25

¹⁷ *Wing Tips* No 96, December 1936, page 3

The decision to award the first prize to Reg Ansett probably needs to be seen in the light of the furore that arose over the pageant held on the Saturday, 19 December, the day following the race. It



Pageant grandstand –Parafield 19 December 1936
G Dunn collection - SAAM

was the largest number of aircraft ever assembled in South Australia and must have been a wonderful spectacle. At least 3,000 people attended. There was a fly-past of race contestants; 12 RAAF Hawker Demons demonstrating dive bombing, strafing, aerobatics and message pick-up from the ground; Jack Buckham doing his comedy routine as 84 year old Mr Wandsworth McDuff mishandling a Moth; Lieutenant James Reece performing a parachute jump from 3,000 feet; and the aerial derby and usual competition flying.

All this was followed by a gala dinner for Club members, contestants and visitors when the first hint of trouble in paradise came in Murray Fowler's speech. He said *"unfortunate circumstances have prevented us doing all we would have liked to do for our visitors."*¹⁸

This must have been prompted by the storm of criticism, led by Jim Broadbent, that was levelled at the Club over its handling of the pageant and its treatment of contestants that was reported in every newspaper from *The Cairns Post* to *The West Australian* throughout the following week. Broadbent did not have a good word to say. The fly past *"was just a mass of planes"*. *"Some of the pilots had been so disgusted that they did not participate."* The pageant program *"had been run in a very haphazard fashion, and it seemed that there had been no effort to run to schedule."* Contestants were left *"to stand around in the dust and to get into Adelaide as best they could."* *"There was no official welcome of any description and the pilots, after spending considerable sums of money in the race were not even thanked for their participation."* The club house was locked and they had to go around to the back of the building where (a positive you



Pageant crowd – Parafield 19 December 1936
G Dunn collection - SAAM

¹⁸ *The Advertiser* Monday December 21, 1936, page 24

would think) they were *“offered a beer.”* If all that was not bad enough, he summed up by saying he *“considered that the lack of consideration and courtesy shown to visiting pilots by the Centenary Race Committee was appalling”*, then rubbed salt in the wound by saying how well they had been treated at every other point of the race.

Other pilots chimed in too, but less vociferously. Broadbent clearly had an axe to grind. P.H. Moody said *“the committee could have done more for the visitors”*, and *“more could have been done at Parafield to manage the dust”*, suggesting (the mind boggles) *“that spraying with oil would have helped.”* He qualified these criticisms with acknowledgement of the huge task James Churchill-Smith had faced and that they *“were offered in a constructive sense.”* Even Maude Bonney got into the act with some gentle sarcasm. She said *“although we did not expect to be entertained, we all would have appreciated meeting the president, secretary, or one of the committee on our arrival or during our stay in Adelaide.”*

The committee must have been absolutely shattered. The event was held under the auspices of the Premier as an official Centenary event and was supposed to highlight all that was best about the State on the national stage. Instead the fiasco over the handicapping followed by this barrage of well-publicised criticism must have done the opposite. The epilogue was a piece in the Queensland press, which does not seem to have been reported in Adelaide, saying that C.D. Pratt and R.T. Vincent (his passenger and owner of the aircraft), *“who had been acclaimed winners of the handicap section but later awarded second place, claimed for £400 damages against the SA Centenary Committee. The appeal was unsuccessful.”*¹⁹ They had made their claim, based on the first prize value less that of the second prize they had been awarded, on the Club in a letter of 25 January, copied to the State Centenary Executive. James Churchill-Smith advised the committee that he had been in touch with the Secretary to the Premier, and it was resolved to leave the matter in the hands of the State Centenary Executive. Whether the claim for damages referred to in the press was through the courts or was merely the 25 January letter is not clear, but the committee reported receiving a letter from the Crown Solicitor requesting the Club to advise Vincent’s and Pratt’s solicitors that he *“would accept any process they intended to issue.”*²⁰ This suggests a keenness on the part of the Government to see the matter settled but nothing more about the matter and in whose favour it was resolved was reported. Either way it must have added to the sour taste left by Broadbent’s criticism.

The committee wisely did not enter into a press debate but Murray Fowler mounted a dignified but spirited defence in the December issue of *Wing Tips*²¹. He contended that only one or two pilots had voiced their feelings while in Adelaide, but destructive criticism had been taken up by others after returning to their home states and receiving pressure from their local press. He then went on to lay out a litany of failures of the contestants to read their race documentation, which, had they done so, would have alleviated most of the problems. They were offered hotel booking services, which only 12 of the 29 finishing contestants took up; an official welcoming party was considered but rejected because it was assumed that tired contestants would rather park their aircraft and go straight to their hotels; instructions to report to officials who could then provide them with information about transport and other arrangements were ignored; instructions to wear their competitor badges so that officials could identify them were ignored; requests for dinner numbers were not answered so that some contestants did not receive invitations for their partners or associates; lunch was supplied at the club house on pageant day but naturally some contestants may have had to wait a short time for a seat – and so on.

¹⁹ Cairns Post Tuesday February 2 1937, page 10. Also reported in the *Courier Mail*

²⁰ Minutes Book 5 February 8 1937, page 148

²¹ *Wing Tips* No 96 December 1936, pages 1/2

So why did Jim Broadbent set out publicly to humiliate the Club with such vituperative criticism? We can't know of course, but my theory is that his resentment was rooted in his close friendship with Jimmy Melrose and Melrose's disappointment over the Club's failure to buy his Puss Moth VH-UQO after the Mildenhall-Melbourne race in 1934. Helen Blake, in her recent book about Melrose, quoted his journal where he wrote *"I saw VH-UQO yesterday in England, [on 26 March 1936] now after all its adventures with me and with Broadbent – it's sad to think that just some pilot here has My Hildegard when the Aero Club of SA could have bought her – with my uncle's money..."*²² There is no record in the Club's minutes of any consideration of purchasing the aircraft, so whether an offer was made and, if so, how resentful Melrose might have been that it was refused we can only surmise. However, having sold the aircraft to Jim Broadbent instead, only to have him sell it in Basra after a forced landing while enroute to England, might have transferred some of that resentment to him too. Perhaps Broadbent felt a sneaking sense of 'guilt' about selling the aircraft so lightly, and perhaps that, in conjunction with the rawness of Melrose's death only five months before, caused him to lash out at the Club.

Sadly, May Bradford and two female passengers were killed in a horrific crash on 24 January 1937 at Kingsford Smith aerodrome in Sydney, when they burnt to death in her Klemm Eagle after a collision with another aircraft on takeoff. I.C.K. McKenzie²³ died a week later, killed on 30 January 1937 with his passenger at Essendon when his aircraft spun into the ground. J.W.F. Collins joined the RAAF and was killed as a Flight Lieutenant while flying his own aircraft near Archerfield in 1941. Gropler's and Broadbent's deaths are described in previous chapters. Jack Bennett was luckier. He crashed his DH60 Metal Moth at Nhill on New Year's Day 1937 and only suffered a broken nose and wrist. His sister was in the front cockpit and broke both ankles.²⁴

To finish on a brighter note, Ivy Pearce got engaged immediately after the race to Jason Hassard, who was an Airlines of Australia pilot and navigator for her Monospar during the race. Maude Bonney, who was the first woman to fly solo around Australia in 1932 then the first Australian woman to fly solo Australia-England in 1933, went on to fly the first solo Australia-South Africa flight in 1937.²⁵

Mike Milln²⁶
History Group Member
South Australian Aviation Museum
November 2012

²² *Boy Phoenix C. James Melrose*, ©Helen Blake, privately printed 2009, page 113

²³ McKenzie is variously spelt 'McKenzie' and 'MacKenzie' in race documentation and the press

²⁵ Chas Schaedel, note to the Author 9/6/2011

²⁶ Mike Milln is author of *Wing Tips – The story of the Royal Aero Club of South Australia – Book 1: 1919-1941*, 2011 Avonmore Books. This article comes from Chapter 17 of the book