

The World's First Air Races – The October 1909 Frankfurt Meeting ***Anders Bruun***

Internationale

Fliegerwoche

in der

ILA zu Frankfurt a. M.

3. bis 10. Oktober 1909.

Mk. 300000 Preise und Garantien.

Angemeldet sind u. a.:

Latham, Rougier, Blériot, de Caters, Sanchez Besa,
Edwards, Molon, Nervø, Euler, Dufour u. a.

From July 10th to October 10th a great aeronautical exhibition, the ILA (Internationale Luftschiffartausstellung), was held in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. As can be seen from its name, it was mainly focussed on lighter-than-air flight, but there was also place for other forms of aviation. At the exhibition fourteen prizes at a total value of 200,000 Mark (£ 10,000) were given, for aeroplanes, aeroplane models, dirigibles, dirigible motors, dirigible hangars, dirigible cars, propellers, free balloons, rubber balloons, balloon photography, carrier pigeons, light metal, aeronautical astronomy and cinematographic views of the flight of birds. Aeroplanes were mainly represented in the form of models and photographs, but baron de Caters was contracted to give several exhibition flights and the automobile manufacturer Opel offered a 20,000 Mark prize for the fastest flight between Frankfurt and Rüsselsheim and back (around 40 km) during the exhibition.

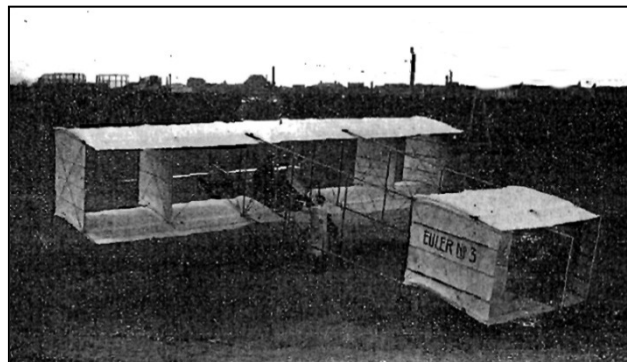
In the beginning of September the organisers of the ILA announced that an aviation week, modelled on those in Reims and Brescia, would be held during the last week of the event, on October 3rd to 10th. As usual, the announced list of potential participants was impressive, including Wilbur Wright and Mario Calderara, but in the end the final list of participants contained seven names, some well-known and some novices:

Louis Blériot	Blériot XI	Anzani
Pierre de Caters	Voisin (#1)	ENV
August Euler	Voisin	Simms?
Hubert Latham	Antoinette VII	Antoinette
Alfred Nervø	Voisin	ENV
Henry Rougier	Voisin (#11)	ENV
Franz Sido	Sido monoplane	?

Chileans José Luis Sanchez Besa and Emilio Edwards on Voisins had also entered, but they had wrecked their planes during the Berlin meeting. Jean Dufour on Farman and Léon Molon on Blériot were also entered, but didn't turn up. Calderara was there, but didn't fly. The main event was the 50,000 Mark "Preis der Stadt Frankfurt" for the non-stop flight of longest endurance, but there were several other competitive events, including daily speed and distance prizes on several days. The length of the course was given as 1.667 kilometres, but since the average speeds of the races are unrealistically high it was almost certainly shorter, probably little more than 1 km. There were also time and distance contests for gliders.

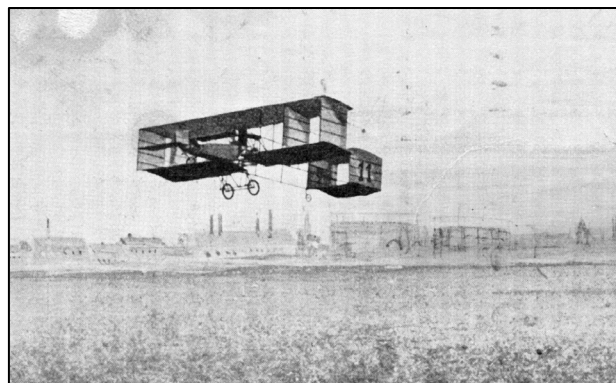
On the first day of the event, Sunday October 3rd, none of the big names made any efforts. The first flight was made

by the Danish flyer Nervø, who had just learned to fly in Mourmelon, and the day's flying was shared between him and the German Euler, who was also learning. The longest flight was only 1 minute 32 seconds. Monday and Tuesday were rainy, so apart from Latham making a couple of failed attempts there was no flying.



Euler's Voisin (Photo: Flugsport)

There was more action on Wednesday October 6th. Nervø and Euler continued their experiments with better and better flights, Nervø eventually completing a lap, before Euler hit a fence. The German pilot Sido tried to make a first start in a monoplane of his own construction. He ended up with the airplane standing on its nose and he had to be rescued from this precarious situation by helpers. Latham made three efforts, but his Antoinette engine was plagued by mechanical problems and his relatively small wheels got stuck in the sodden ground, so he could only make a single flight of one lap. The big star of the day was Rougier, who made a couple of spectacular flights during the afternoon. On the first flight he flew four laps before shutting down his engine and gliding down from an altitude of 60 meters. It first seemed like he might land short and hit factory buildings outside the airfield, but he managed to make a safe landing. Half an hour later he was in the air again, this time flying three laps, reaching altitudes of more than 150 meters. To the ecstatic ovations of the crowds he even flew above and overtook the airship "Parseval", which cruised over the field.

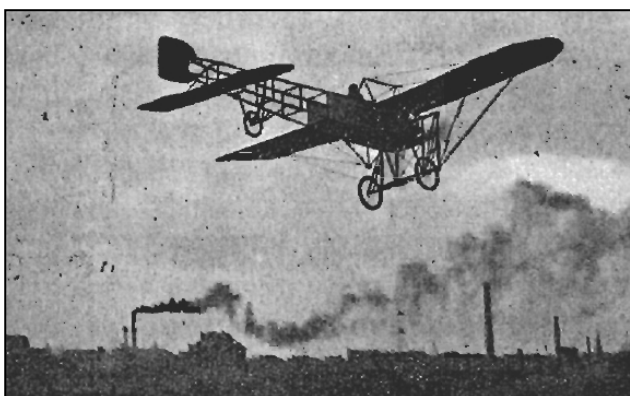


Rougier (postcard)

The Thursday was not as spectacular, but saw continuous improvements of Euler and Nervø. Daily speed and

distance prizes were awarded for the first time, with Euler and Rougier sharing the honours. After four more failed attempts to get airborne, Latham finally gave up and to the disappointment of the crowd withdrew from the contest and left Frankfurt. Apart from the mechanical problems, the big and unwieldy Antoinette was not suited to the small airfield. The short course required constant tight turns in which he had great difficulty keeping his altitude. Friday was stormy and rainy, so no flying was possible.

On Saturday October 9th, Blériot and de Caters were ready to fly. The weather was still windy and rainy during the morning, but when the wind calmed down towards the afternoon they wasted no time getting into the air. Blériot made four flights and de Caters three. Blériot took both the daily speed and distance prizes, destroying Rougier's previous best with a lap of 1 minute 17 seconds.



Blériot (Photo: Flugsport)

Sunday October 10th was the day for the main event, the 50,000 Mark Preis der Stadt Frankfurt. However, there was big drama not only on the airfield, but also in the courtroom. During the previous days Rougier had, without permission, used an engine and a landing gear which belonged to de Caters. These spares had been sent to de Caters by the Voisin factory on September 28th, after his crash during the Berlin meeting. Rougier had also suffered a couple of mishaps during that meeting and damaged his engine and landing gear. He was in desperate need of replacements so he "borrowed" them, without telling de Caters. During the Berlin meeting de Caters had during some stormy discussions, without success, requested Rougier to give them back. Since he didn't want to miss his chance at the Frankfurt prize money de Caters went to a local court, which sentenced Rougier to two weeks in prison and ordered him to give the parts back. This also resulted in Rougier being disqualified from the events in which he had used de Caters' parts. Blériot was first to try for the City of Frankfurt prize, starting at around four o'clock, beating the one hour minimum time with a flight of 60 laps in 72 minutes and 40 seconds. De Caters started soon before Blériot landed. He made a slower flight of 54 laps in 77 minutes, which since the contest was for endurance, not distance, secured the win. When asked for his impression of the flight after landing, de Caters remarked that "This roundabout flying is quite monotonous". Nervø tried for the 5-kilometre speed prize, but was forced down by strong side winds almost immediately. Blériot improved his one-lap time to 1 minute 13 seconds, taking the daily speed prize.

The meeting was officially concluded on Monday October 11th with the last three events. The Krupp-Preis was an

obstacle run above, below and above three wires, stretched at 15 meters above the ground and marked with small balloons. The distance between each wire was first 150 metres (this test had been run the day before) and then closed to 100, 60 and 30 metres. Both Blériot and de Caters completed the first two runs. Blériot also completed the 60 metre run, even though the wind of 8 m/s pressed the middle wire down to eight metres above the ground. De Caters withdrew, so Blériot was declared the winner. Nervø won the prize for the slowest flight. Nervø made an effort at the distance prize, but was forced down by engine problems.

The flying continued for two more days. There were several passenger flights and a contest for the quickest takeoff was held. This race over 200 meters from standing start was won by de Caters with a time of 10 seconds.

Results

Preis der Stadt Frankfurt (endurance)

1. de Caters	1 h 17:43	40,000 M.
2. Blériot	1 h 12:40	10,000 M.

5 kilometer speed contest

1. Blériot	3:43	2,400 M.
2. de Caters	3:54	1,600 M.
3. (not awarded)		800 M.

Daily one-lap speed prizes

October 7th:

1. Rougier	1:42	400 M.
2. Euler	?	200 M.

October 9th:

1. Blériot	1:17	400 M.
2. de Caters	1:18.2	200 M.

October 10th:

1. Blériot	1:13	400 M.
2. de Caters	1:17	200 M.

Daily distance prizes

October 7th:

1. Euler	4.5 km	400 M.
2. Rougier	3.5 km	200 M.

October 9th:

1. Blériot	18 km	400 M.
2. de Caters	14 km	200 M.

October 10th:

1. Blériot	90 km	300 M.
1. de Caters	90 km	300 M.

Krupp-Preis (obstacle course)

1. Blériot	10,000 M.
2. de Caters	5,000 M.

Prize for quickest takeoff

1. de Caters	10 s	5,000 M.
2. Euler	15.4 s	1,000 M.

Prize for slowest flight over 200 meters

1. Nervø	19.4 s	3,000 M.
2. de Caters	13.4 s	1,000 M.

References

- **Guy de Caters "Baron de Caters - ou la folie des volants"** (Guy de Caters, 2010, ISBN 978-84-613-8604-8)
- Diverse issues of **Flight, The Aero, L'Aérophile, La Revue Aérienne** and **Flugsport**