

The World's First Air Racing Pilots – Part 1

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Léon Delagrange (1872-1910, French pilot's license No. 3). Before becoming a pilot Delagrange was a famous sculptor, represented at several exhibitions. In 1907 he became interested in flying and became one of the true pioneers of powered flight. He was the first to order an aeroplane from the Voisin brothers, enabling them to get established as manufacturers. Delagrange was killed on January 4th, 1910, during a display in Croix d'Hins outside Bordeaux, when his modified Blériot XI (equipped with a 50 hp Gnôme engine in place of the 25 hp Anzani) lost a wing.



Ferdinand Ferber (1862-1909, French pilot's licence No. 5bis). Ferber was one of the driving forces behind the birth of French aviation. He was an artillery officer and professor at the artillery school at Fontainebleu. In 1898 he became interested in gliding and built his own gliders. In 1905 he started experimenting with powered gliders and eventually built a couple of rather unsuccessful planes of his own design, before buying a Voisin in 1909. He flew under the pseudonym "F de Rue" in order not to compromise his military career. Ferber was killed on September 22nd, 1909, when he was hit by the engine of his Voisin when it nosed over after hitting a ditch after a landing outside Boulogne-sur-Mer.



Henri Rougier (1876-1956, French pilot's licence No. 11) was a bicycle champion who turned auto racer. He participated in several Grands Prix during the 1902-1908 period, with a best result of third in the 1906 Circuit des Ardennes. He became interested in aviation in 1908, bought a Voisin and was very active in meetings during 1909 and 1910, setting a world altitude record at 190 m in Brescia in September 1909. After this spell as flyer and as a partner of the Odier-Vendôme airplane company, he returned to auto racing, where he remained active until the mid-1920s. His biggest claim to fame as auto racer is winning the first-ever Monte Carlo Rally in 1911.