

SPEED KINGS!



DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF AIR RACING, THE SLEEK DESIGNS FROM CLAYTON FOLKERTS BROUGHT VICTORY AROUND THE PYLONS. HOWEVER, THESE AERIAL SPEEDSTERS ALSO CAME TO FATAL ENDINGS
BY TIM WEINSCHENKER

The Golden Age of Air Racing produced numerous unique pylon racers. Legend has it that backyard mechanics drew a chalk outline on the hangar floor and then built a racer to fill in the outline. Clayton Folkerts was a racer from that era who designed a series of aircraft with the prefix

“SK” — standing for *Speed Kings*. Typical of the time period, the *Speed Kings* were lightweight, small, and designed to use the best engines from Al Menasco. Folkerts constructed four *Speed Kings* and they did achieve success — but also tragic endings; all caused by pilot inexperience and a lack of aerodynamic knowledge. With the passing of time, the history of men such as Clayton Folkerts has become overlooked. The following article will hopefully rectify that fact and put Folkerts and his racers in historical perspective.

THE BEGINNINGS

Clayton Folkerts was born on 7 November 1897 in Wellsville, Iowa, as one of seven sons born to Atha and Johanna Voss Folkerts. From early ages, Clayton and his brothers were very interested in aviation with Clayton becoming the leader of the pack. As they got older, the brothers constructed their first aircraft — a high wing monoplane powered by a two-cylinder Indian motorcycle engine. We do not know how long it took to build this creation, but it was necessary to hand-fabricate all parts, including the propeller. Construction was completed in 1918 and, fortunately for the future of air racing, the monoplane did fly but not very high or very far! No doubt this successful flight inspired the brothers to build another... or at least it did for Clayton. The second effort was completed in 1921 and it was another monoplane, but this time powered by a Ford Model T engine. The plane flew longer, faster, and higher, giving young Clayton further encouragement.

In 1923, Clayton thought that his aeronautical endeavors were coming together. His acquisition of a 27 horsepower Lawrence engine led him to create a biplane to go with the powerplant and, while



The *Mono-Special* in its earliest form. The aircraft would receive numerous modifications over its career.



For the 1933 season, the *Mono-Special* became the SK-1 or *Folkerts Special* with a cutdown wing, modified gear, small tires, and equally small streamlined wheel coverings. Note the crudely applied race number.



From this angle, there is no doubt that the Folkerts SK-3's main mission was going fast. Besides test flights, the SK-3 actually saw little aerial time. For the races, it was disassembled and then trucked to the particular location. This view shows the short retractable landing gear to advantage along with the exhaust ports for the Menasco Super Buccaneer, fixed pitch wooden propeller, and short wing span.

