

FORGOTTEN RACE

THE 1938 PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL AIR RACES HOPED TO ESTABLISH A WEST COAST BASE FOR AIR RACING BUT THAT WAS NOT TO BE

BY TIM WEINSCHENKER



Program for the 1938 Pacific International Air Races. Oddly, it appears the artist used a top profile of the French Caudron racer that had been banned from US racing after its spectacular win.

During the dark days of the Great Depression, it was considered a source of considerable civic pride to be given the honor of hosting the National Air Races (NAR) during September's Labor Day weekend. The tradition began back in 1929 when Doug Davis flew his sleek Travelair *Mystery Ship* racer to an unexpected victory over the vaunted Air Corps and Navy aircraft that were entered and expected to take the gold. That year, the host city was Cleveland, Ohio. In 1930, the event was moved to Chicago. The years 1931 and 1932 saw the NAR back in Cleveland while 1933 had the racers flying from Mines Field in Los Angeles for the first time. Then it was again back east as Cleveland was home

for the 1934 and 1935 races. The NAR headed back west again in 1936 and Los Angeles would host the event that saw a stunning defeat of the American competitors by Frenchman Michael Detroyat in his fast and beautiful Caudron. Following the pattern of previous years, the NAR reverted east to Cleveland in 1937 and 1938.

Based on this record of East/West movement, it did not seem unreasonable when San Francisco submitted a request during 1937 to the NAR organizers that the races hold the 1938 Labor Day extravaganza in their city. It would also be the year leading up to the Golden Gate International Exposition, also known as the San

Francisco World's Fair — and event that was generating huge interest around the globe. To San Francisco civic leaders, it seemed a reasonable request to Cliff Henderson and his air racing group to host the Thompson, Bendix, and other Trophy races in San Francisco during September 1938 as a lead-in to 1939's festive atmosphere.

One can only imagine the disappointment when the letter they were waiting so anxiously for arrived on a cold day in late 1937 with the news that the NAR request was denied. Race organizers had decided to award Cleveland the honor for the 1938 NAR. Normally, this would have been the end



The Pacific International Air Races would end in financial disaster for the promoters but it would also end in tragedy for some of the pilots and aircraft. With a Grumman Duck from the Coast Guard in the background, the wreckage of Gus Gotch's Folkerts Special R283Y is pulled from the Bay.