



th Camel and Fokker Triplane

All this results in an aircraft which, initially, feels horribly wrong to a present-day aeroplane driver. We are not used to machines whose natural tendency at all times is to fall into their maximum angle of slipping spiral; nor are we used to a very powerful rudder which has the opposite of self-centring action and, therefore, a total *absence of feel*. On top of that there is no elevator trim, which means that you are constantly tending to climb or descend depending on how much you weigh, how much fuel you have on board, and the state of the aircraft's rigging at the time. And as if all that wasn't enough, you are also having to watch the fuel pressure gauge like a hawk. This is because the fuel is fed into the carburettor by pressurising the airspace in the main tank, and this pressure is maintained by the previously mentioned air-driven pump, which looks and operates very much like a model aircraft engine in reverse. So far so good, but the difficulty lies in the fact that the pressure must be adjusted by a manual blow-off valve so that it sits at a steady $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb/in². Too little pressure and the engine will stop. Too much, and eventually the tank behind your seat will burst like a balloon. The blow-off valve is very sensitive, and any change of airspeed or power setting requires the pilot to make a minute adjustment to maintain his $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb/in². During aerobatics the whole system is slightly less than helpful.

All in all, your first hour or so in the Camel tends to be somewhat busy as you chase slip needle, fuel pressure and attitude whilst at the same time sitting in a blasting gale and viewing the world from between a pair of Vickers machine-guns. During my first few minutes in the device, I can distinctly remember thinking that if this was the best of First World War aeroplanes, Heaven knows what the worst must have been like!

Once the initial shock has worn off (or, probably more accurately, once you have adjusted your pilotage to match the tenets of half a century ago), things rapidly get better. The machine becomes not so much difficult to fly as merely different. Exploring the performance envelope, you find that the stall is gentle and predictable, and that spins are perfectly conventional and stop on a dime if you apply moderately determined correction. Loops are likewise straightforward, with very low stick force per G, and stall turns to the left (with the engine) would probably be nigh-on perfect if I could ever bring myself to wait until that absolutely *right* last second before hitting the ultra-effective rudder. (As it is, I tend to kick a little early. Not

because I think it won't go round, but because I don't want to find out what will happen to those massive ailerons if for any reason it doesn't . . .)

Rolling manoeuvres, predictably, require rather more aggression. A barrel roll from 120 m.p.h. is fairly straightforward once you have learnt not to try to boost the rotation rate with pro-roll rudder, but slow rolls are something else again. You enter the slow roll using both hands on the stick at 145 m.p.h. Try to remember to barrel it a little so as to unload the negative G and thereby keep the engine running as long as possible—you lose power anyway after about 120°, so the rest of the roll is accomplished in an ominous slow-motion hush with nothing but the eerie howl of the wind in the wires for company. The whole procedure uses up nearly three-quarters of a mile of airspace in still air and finishes, thanks to the aileron drag, at something like 85 m.p.h. with the pilot feeling as if he has been upside down for ever.

With aching arms after aerobatics, the approach and landing is generally something of an anti-climax. Side-slipping requires care—the yaw instability plus the ultra-twitchy rudder can produce a lurch like falling off a gate if you cross the controls too smartly. Once you have

Built largely from original drawings, this intricate replica of a Camel supports a genuine rotary engine, unlike the aircraft flown in this article which is powered by a Warner Super Scarab radial

