

THE AUSTRALIAN VINTAGE AVIATION SOCIETY

1909 DEMOISELLE



The Demoiselle ("Damsel" or "Damsel") was a series of aircraft built in France by Brazilian aviation pioneer Alberto Santos-Dumont. They were light weight monoplanes with a wire braced wing, mounted above an all open framework fuselage built from bamboo. The pilot's seat was below the wing and between the main wheels of the undercarriage.

Several variants were built, each improved on the previous. His last (the Type 20) being the most successful and in October 1909 it was announced that a production run of 100 aircraft was planned. However, only 50 were actually built, of which only 15 were sold, at a price of 7,500 francs (\$1,600) for each airframe. The French pioneer aviator Roland Garros learned to fly in a Demoiselle at a flight school in 1910.

The June 1910 edition of Popular Mechanics published drawings of the Demoiselle and wrote "This machine is better than any other which has ever been built, for those who wish to reach results with the least possible expense and with a bare minimum of experimenting." American companies sold drawings and parts of Demoiselle for several years thereafter.

Santos-Dumont was so enthusiastic about aviation that he released the drawings of Demoiselle for nothing, thinking that aviation would be the cause of a new prosperous era for mankind. Ultimately, his designs were too small for anyone but the lightest of pilots, and other designs soon dominated the market.

Largely forgotten by the time WWI began, the aircraft attracted renewed interest in the late 1960's with the release of the movie "Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines" which featured a flying Type 20 (flown by a small woman as all the men were too heavy for it to get airborne).

Santos-Dumont could be considered ahead of his time, as when the modern ultralight aviation movement began, it did so with designs very similar to his.

This example is a modern take on what is believed would have been the final model had he kept working on the design. It shows the simplistic but effective layout. Its size has been increased slightly over the original so that regular size pilots can fly it. It is powered by a modern 50 horsepower 2 stroke engine.

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