

HOW TO BECOME AN AVIATOR:

by one who Knows



On being asked to write a short account of how to become an Aviator for the *12th Lancers Journal* I was immensely flattered. Judge of my horror and dismay, however, on learning that two officers of the regiment were at that moment going through a course of instruction, and that therefore I should have to stick strictly to the truth.

It is not really much more difficult to become an aviator than a chauffeur, but slightly more expensive, and it takes a little longer. To become a chauffeur all that is needed is a pair of fur gloves, leather goggles, and unlimited swank; but to be an airman you must have, in addition, a woollen cap or helmet, a leather coat, and a large vocabulary of incomprehensible words. Every sport or game has its own slang, but the euphonisms of the aeroplane are wonderful and sacred things. For instance, to speak of your aeroplane other than as my 'kite' or 'bus' is rank heresy, and stamps you at once as an absolute tyro at the game. The propeller is a 'windstick', and the control lever a 'joystick', the petrol and oil is 'juice', and an engine never stops or breaks down, it 'peters out'.

Having learned these and a few similar expressions, you must acquire a motor bike. Having got it and made it as noisy as possible, run over a few dogs and children, and so earn a reputation for recklessness and speed. You are very unlikely to be caught out, and can always plead to officious policemen that they seemed too dazed to get out of your way, and were doubtless drunk.

Now you are beginning to get a reputation, and so must live up to it. The next thing is to procure a girl to take about on your 'buzz box', anybody's will do, and if you are imbued with the true spirit of aviation, your inherent instinct will show you the right sort. This is a very important stage and should be treated as such, as your whole career, and that of future generations of aviators may depend upon it. Well, having got your girl (I really haven't time to tell you in detail how to get her, but you'll find it in the new Flying Corps regulations); put her on the back of your bike and take her a short trip to Brighton at about 50 miles per hour, just to accustom her to the feeling of 'pace'. How she stays on I can't tell you, and if she's not the right sort, she won't, but if she is, by dint of placing her arms firmly round your neck and by the exercise of her woman's ingenuity, you'll find her still there at the end of your journey.

You may now consider you have got over the most difficult part of your instruction, the rest is comparatively easy. Make friends with some mechanics. It sounds well to be able to casually remark to one that Jones's bus seems to be flying a bit carbré to-day (this is French and very knowing), and if he's very oily and dirty he may accord you the honour

of shaking hands, and this, of course, stamps you straight away as one of the inner circle. It will impress your girl tremendously, more especially as the smell of castor oil lasts for hours. Now all you have to do to become a complete aviator is to learn to fly, and this is comparatively easy.

There are several schools in England, some have aeroplanes on which to learn, and some haven't. You learn quicker at the former sort, so we will presume that is where you elect to go. Well, you walk in and pay your tuition fee of £75. If you are exceptionally clever you might avoid doing this, but I only know of one man who succeeded in doing so. He said he'd have one flight to see how he liked it, and would write a cheque when he came down; he wasn't able to write anything when he came down, but they gave him a lovely funeral and everyone said heaven had sent a judgment on him for trying to do poor honest aviators out of their just dues. However, we will suppose you have passed a bad cheque, or somehow or other arranged the financial part. You are told to appear at the aerodrome at daybreak next day, which you do, feeling very-cold and miserable. You find no one there, and, having waited for over an hour, you go back to bed in a bad temper. Later on in the day you again go to the aerodrome and indignantly ask why no one was about. The junior mechanic answers you with withering contempt, 'What, in that wind, it was blowing a blooming gale'. You don't like to say you didn't notice any wind to speak of, and so reply in as off-hand manner as possible, you suppose it was a bit puffy. You spend the rest of the morning wandering about rather miserably among the sheds wondering why everybody seems to be working so hard and getting in everyone's way; however, they are used to it, and answer questions in a way that shows they have been asked each one at least one hundred times before and don't expect you to be anything better than a born fool. In the afternoon you take your girl out on the buzz box and feel better. The next morning you have a look at the weather and cannot make up your mind if there is too much wind or not, but eventually decide to go up to the hangars on chance. All the way there you try and not notice any little wind there is, though all the time you know it won't be 'flying weather'.

You are right; on arriving at the aerodrome everything is closed and no one about except a few misguided pupils like yourself. The next morning you arrive somewhat later and are surprised to see the bustle and life that has suddenly arisen. There seems an almost feverish anxiety not to waste a minute and aeroplanes are going up and down the ground with pupils in various stages of proficiency. By arriving late you find you have lost your turn, but in a few minutes the instructor notices you and calls you forward. It is very cold