

Britain's Test Pilots

No. 12—HARALD JAMES
PENROSE, O.B.E., F.R.Ae.S.,
A.M.I.N.A.

CHIEF TEST PILOT OF WESTLAND
AIRCRAFT, LTD.



H. J. Penrose, O.B.E., and an air study of him flying the Westland/Hill Pterodactyl Mk V. The Mark V had a 700 h.p. Rolls-Royce Goshawk steam-cooled engine.

IN things aeronautical Penrose has two particular claims to distinction. The first, of great importance in these days, is that he has more experience of flying tail-less aircraft than any other pilot in this country—and probably in the world. The second is that he was first airborne in a man-lifting (in his case a child-lifting) kite at Reading in 1912. The contraption was a three-kites-in-tandem affair with a sort of bosun's chair beneath.

About the same time, at the age of eight or nine, he must have been one of the pioneer aero-modellers, and distinctly remembers being spanked for coming home late after going to see Salmet flying at Woodley, near Reading, from a site very close to the present airfield of Miles Aircraft.

His first flight in a power-driven machine was with Muir at Reading, in an Avro 504—that hardy perennial which every test pilot appears either to have flown or have been flown in. The 504 made its debut in 1912 and was still flying in 1930. It was the Tiger Moth of the 1914-18 war.

Getting Airborne

In 1922 Penrose went to the London University for a four-years' course in general engineering and aeronautics, and spent his leisure time scrounging flights where possible, with odd bits of flying instruction thrown in. He was as poor as most students and things had to be done that way. One of his rather better bits of scrounging was a flight in the prototype D.H. Moth (G—EBKT) with Hubert Broad.

During his course Harald spent six months at Handley-Page, Ltd., where he did very little flying but picked up a lot of aerodynamic knowledge while working on the wind tunnel, and a further six months at Westlands. Here he worked in the shops getting practical experience, and did quite a lot of flying as a technical observer with Openshaw (who was then Westland's test pilot and was killed in an air collision while racing a Westland Widgeon at Bournemouth in 1927). Most of this flying was done in the Yeovil bomber, the Westland Limousine, the Widgeon I and the D.H.9A Trainer.

Having successfully completed his University course in 1926, Penrose joined Westlands. At first he worked in the

shops as a fitter at the munificent wage of £3 per week, but after six months of this he became a design draughtsman on Capt. G. T. R. Hill's (the brother of Air Marshal Sir Roderic Hill) staff, who were producing the first Hill Pterodactyl. At the same time Harald joined the R.A.F. Reserve and did his *ab initio* training under Papa Uwins at the Bristol School of Flying. If I remember right, he would at that time be flying the Lucifer engined Bristol P.T.M., which had more built-in vibration than any other aircraft before or since.

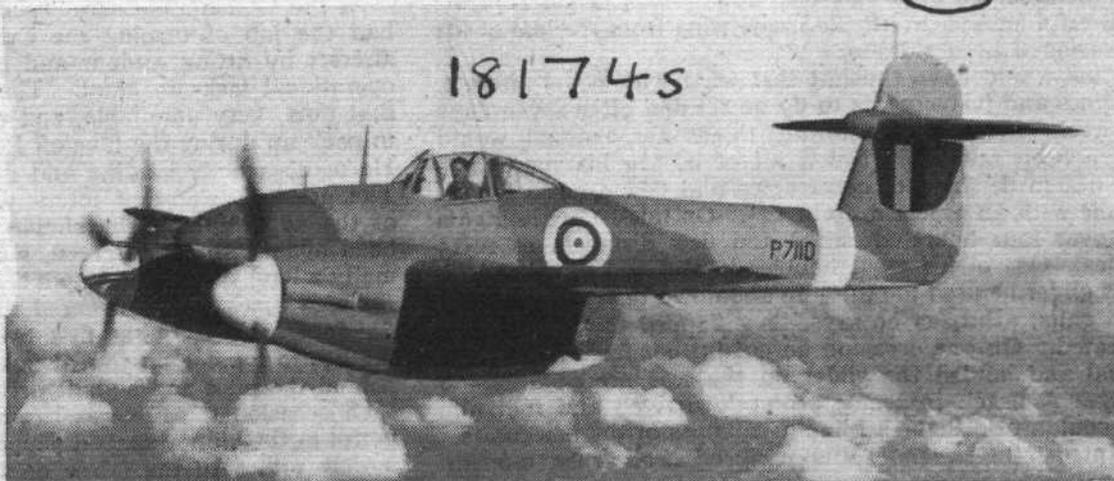
About this time Penrose began to get some reward for his labours and was appointed manager of Westlands Civil Aircraft Department—himself and ten men!—which dealt with the production of the Widgeon and later the Wessex. From this it was but a step to testing them as well as making them, and finally to demonstrating them at weekend meetings all over the country.

Never content with the job in hand he then drifted into flying Westland Wapitis and Wessexes. More flying time was also put in by doing 100-hour flying tests of Bristol's engines, equipment and airscrews. He also helped with sales and general liaison with R.A.F. squadrons under Louis Paget, who was then Westland's chief test pilot.

After a short course on a seaplane Mongoose-Avro at Hamble in 1931, he took a Wapiti landplane and seaplane to Buenos Aires for a demonstration visit. On the day

"Flight" photographs

"Flight" photograph.



Flying the Peregrine-engined Westland Whirlwind. Although designed as a fighter the Whirlwind went into service as a ground attack aircraft.