



Recent photographs of H. A. Marsh and the Cierva research helicopter.

Britain's Test Pilots

No. 24. H. A. Marsh, Test Pilot and General Manager of the Cierva Autogiro Co. Ltd.

H. A. MARSH has probably more experience in testing rotating-wing aircraft than any other pilot in the world, and in these days when the helicopter can be said to have arrived, his unique experience should prove a considerable asset to the country. He started his business career as an engineering apprentice in Dorchester, Dorset, in 1918, but at the tender age of 17½ he followed the footsteps of his father and brother by joining the R.A.F. as a 3rd Air Mechanic. When the armistice was signed he re-engaged and was posted to the first aircraft apprenticeship course at Halton. After getting his corporal's stripes, he joined the second course of N.C.O. pilots at No. 2 F.T.S., Duxford, where one of his instructors was Flight Lieutenant, now Air Marshal, Peck.

Passing out in November, 1923, as a Sergeant Pilot with special distinction, he was the first N.C.O. pilot to gain this award. As a pilot his first taste of squadron flying was with No. 41 at home, for a short while before spending the next two years with No. 1 Squadron in Iraq. Those were still the days of rotary engines, and No. 1 had Sopwith Snipes with 200 h.p. Bentley engines. Some Snipe figures are interesting in light of present-day equivalents. Tanks held 38½ gallons of fuel, weight empty was 1,240 lb and top speed at 10,000ft was in the region of 118 m.p.h. The Snipe landed at 55 m.p.h. and the rate of climb was about 1,200ft per min.

It was on a Snipe, while he was proceeding on detachment, with the pay on board, that Marsh had an

engine seize completely while flying between Baghdad and Kirkuk. A forced landing was brought off safely and a second aircraft landed alongside and took off the money, but Marsh had to wait in the desert until a new engine arrived and was fitted.

A second engine failure which might easily have had very serious consequences occurred over Kurdistan where Marsh was lost in the desert for two days in a temperature of 120 deg in the shade. And, as he says, "there wasn't any."

Posted back to England again in 1926, he was sent to No. 111 Fighter Squadron, which was then equipped with Armstrong-Whitworth Siskins—the first fabric-covered all-metal aircraft to go into service in quantity. It had a 14-cylinder Siddeley Jaguar radial engine of 385 h.p.

Getting aboard his Autogiro while commanding the Radar Calibration Squadron.



R.A.F. Displays

Whilst with No. 111 he represented the squadron in the R.A.F. Display for both 1927 and 1928. In 1927 he was responsible for the show of individual aerobatics, which included some low spins. On the day before the actual show the dress rehearsal was given before thousands of London school-children. Weather conditions were bad and the cloud ceiling very low. Omitting to set his altimeter before taking off, he finished up by pulling out of a spin with less than 100ft to spare. Complimented on a good show, he was requested to "keep a little higher to-morrow."

In September of 1928 he went to