



**This page: beach landing en route. Inset showing the strain of all those 10 to 14-hour days at the controls.**

am upside down?" he asked—but somehow he found himself in forbidden airspace over the pyramids... by complete accident.

It is amazing that he didn't get lost more often. Astonishingly, Maurice carried no charts for the legs outside Europe. At one stage, he was reduced to reliance on a map drawn on a table napkin by U.S. competitor John Dawson. However, in contrast to this apparent lack of preparation, he did take spares, including an inner tube, engine seals, fabric for patching, dope and glue. A spare propeller went with one of the support aircraft and Maurice sat on a life-raft pack. This last precaution caused him increasing physical distress, as the hard surface of the raft pack resulted in a torn rectal wall (Kirk became, quite literally, a split-arse pilot over the course of 200 hours of flying in the race). This unpleasant condition was still plaguing him months after the race was over.

Throughout the race, Maurice's greatest fear was falling asleep at the controls. Indeed, he had to be lifted from the cockpit at the end of several of the later legs. However, he never did find himself nodding off at the controls. "The adrenaline kept me going," he asserts. By the time the Cub reached Sydney, it was in need of a complete overhaul. The pushrod tube seals had started to leak early in the event. Maurice's queer-looking enlarged oil sump had pretty much saved his bacon, but even so, oil was coming into the cockpit as he flew over Australia. He also suffered broken propeller bolts, but continuing on four (out of six) when no spares were available did not greatly perturb him. "I wouldn't have done any aerobatics or spinning with the propeller in that condition," he says, tongue firmly in cheek.

Kirk polarised views during the race. Beside his obvious sponsors and supporters, there were many competitors who sympathised with his approach to the challenge. Some of these people talk of him 'representing the spirit of the venture'. Others regarded him as a mere of a nuisance, a maverick and a liability to those who perhaps regarded themselves as sensible and serious competitors. Kirk's Pan calls were an early feature of the race; as a realisation of the enormity of his task grew, some people quit the anti camp and, if they did not join the pros, at least came to admire his doggedness.

Maurice Kirk refuses to bend to normal convention and rules. He is either a champion of individuals' rights or a public menace, depending on your viewpoint. In the interest of editorial balance, I tried to draw a senior CAA man—in normal circumstances a most genial fellow, and very much one of us—on the subject of Maurice Kirk. "I do not want to talk about him," he responded, and his expression stopped further enquiry in its tracks. So, no comment from the CAA, then.

AOPA's Martin Robinson was a little more forthcoming, although still guarded. Perhaps the UK arm of the organisation feels outflanked by AOPA Australia making Mr Kirk an honorary life member in recognition of his epic flight. Martin himself seemed torn between admiration of the man for his courage and stick-and-rudder skills, and weariness with Kirk's other honorary crown as a thorn in the side of officialdom. Having explored the 'my God, how did he do it' theme, he dropped his voice to a lower, almost scandalised, conspiratorial tone: "You know, he actually asked for our support in putting a live machine gun on his D.H.2."

Later, I asked Maurice about Martin Robinson's story. Great snort of laughter, then, "I did have a Firearms Certificate." What had he been planning to do with the gun? Shoot up the CAA's Enforcement department from the air? "No, no, it was for air display stuff... but it could have been used for something like that!" Further snorts of laughter.

The trouble is that it could all yet end in tears. Maurice wants to take *Liberty Girl* on from Australia, to complete a global circumnavigation. He has put his entire stock of old aeroplane stuff up for sale, to finance the venture. No one would doubt his commitment or flying ability to succeed in this, but his biggest obstacle is a domestic one. As I write, Maurice Kirk is battling in court to save his licence.

Maurice has long since left the newspaper funny pages, to join the ranks of famous, eccentric British adventurers. Has he become too well known, too highly regarded by the international media and too high a profile a target to be prevented from continuing his heroic flight? Or will officialdom have the last laugh on 'Captain Kirk'? †