

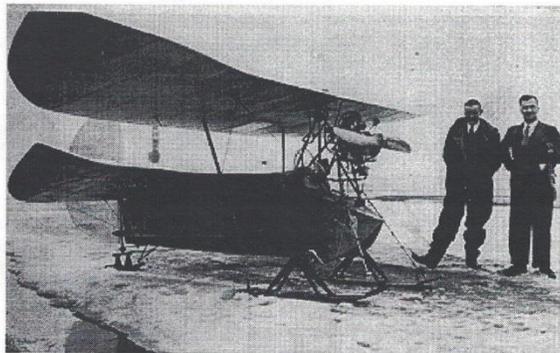
Beyond the Sunset (#2)

By George Fuller

In the spring of 1936, enthusiasts who went to Saint-Hubert to watch the flying had something new to contemplate; an airplane that they might be able to build at home even during the economic Depression that prevailed. It was called the "Pou de: Ciel" or "Flying Flea", the creation of French inventor and amateur aircraft constructor Henri Mignet.

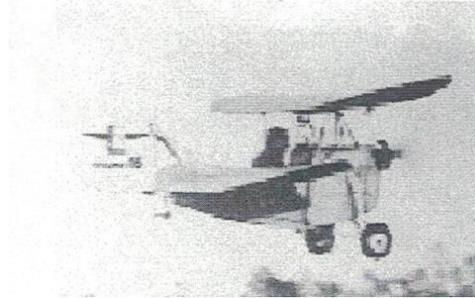
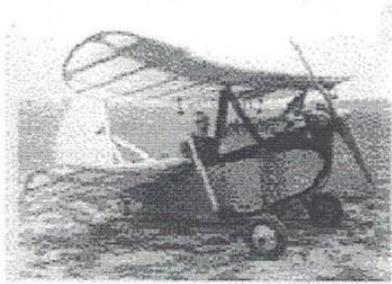
He mounted a low-powered engine on a short, wheeled fuselage terminating with a relatively large rudder. Above the single seat cockpit was the main wing which was pivoted around the main spar and could be tilted for longitudinal control. In tandem, attached flush with the fuselage top was another fixed wing of shorter span. Both wings had dihedral for lateral stability, there being no ailerons. A single control column moved back and forth to tilt the wing. Its sidewise movement actuated the rudder for turning.

Mignet flew it for the first time in 1933 and promoted his Pou with a book describing its construction and operation in detail. It became a "best seller". Within a year, 100 of the tiny craft had been built, mostly by dedicated amateurs. Within three years there were 300. By April 1936, in Great Britain alone, 81 were complete or under construction.



This picture was taken on the day of the first flight. Stuart Graham (left) and Dr. Millette (right)

Montréal physician Dr. Georges Millette had learned to fly at the Montreal Light Aeroplane Club qualifying for his pilot's license in 1929. The following summer he purchased an Aeromarine-Klemm light monoplane which he operated until it was damaged beyond repair in a crash in the Laurentians in 1934. He arranged to have a Pou built for him by George Lace, an air engineer with Canadian Airways. Fitted with a 35 h.p. French Poincard engine it was completed in the winter of 1935-36 and mounted on specially made skis.



Dr. Millette asked his friend, government aviation inspector Stuart Graham to test it for him. Canada's first bush pilot accepted the assignment, and on March 1st CF-AYM made its first flight. He later described the experience in an article he wrote for the 'Canadian Aviation Historical Society journal' published in 1970. Briefly stated, he was worried about the controllability of the little airplane and warned those interested accordingly. In July 1936 another pilot found that it would not recover from a dive that was turning into an outside loop. Luckily the Pou impacted with the ground before it had passed the vertical. He was thrown out with only minor injury. Similar accidents and several fatalities caused the French authorities to ban further flying of the Pou pending satisfactory modification of the design.

Several Pous were constructed in Canada, one other in the Montréal area by O. Demine and his son in a garage in Westmount. CF-BIH was completed in 1937 and flown with limited success. It was fitted with experimental floats but had insufficient power for water takeoff. Despite these setbacks Henri Mignet must be recognized as an important pioneer in the home-built aircraft movement.

George Fuller