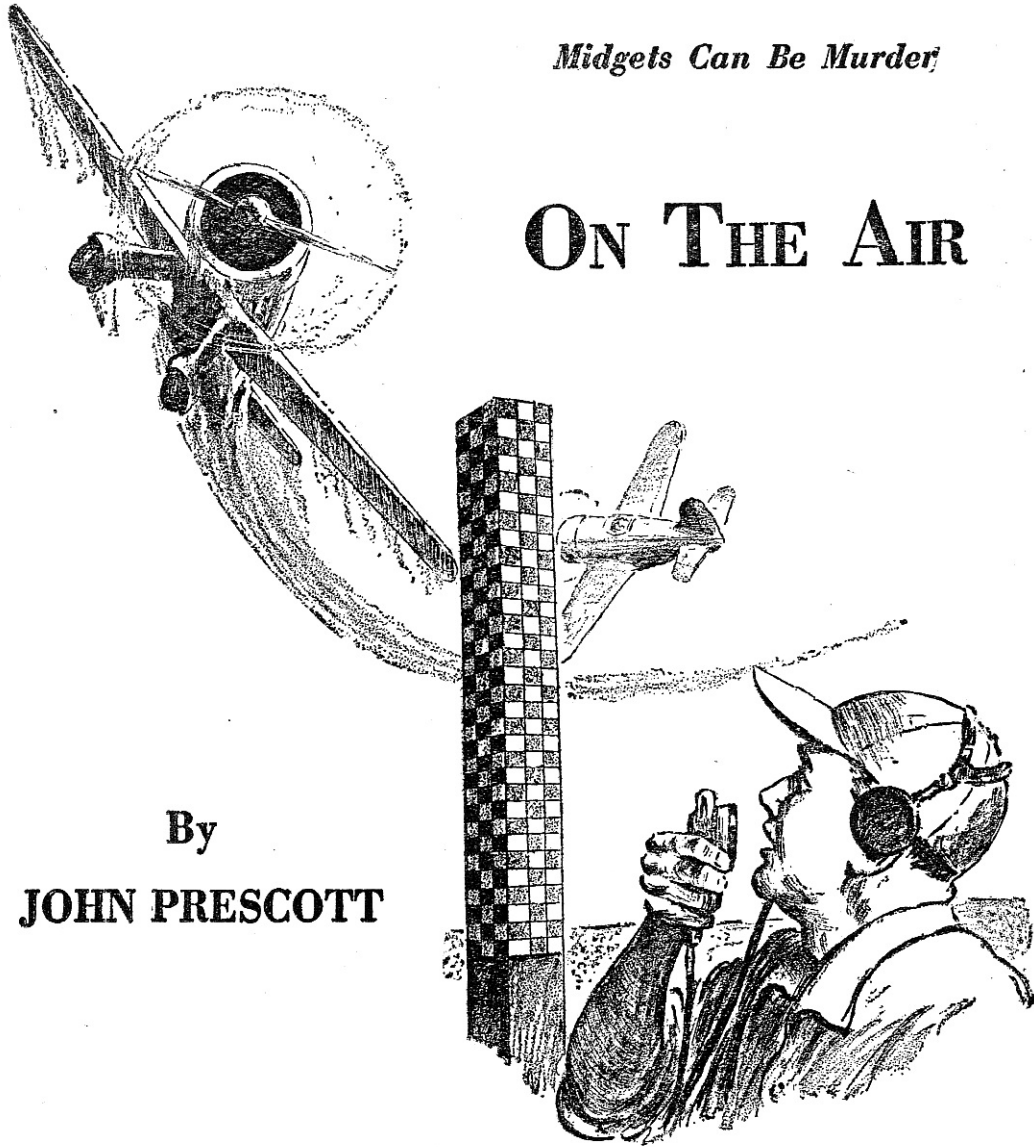


Midgets Can Be Murder

ON THE AIR

By
JOHN PRESCOTT



ALWAYS there is something in this business. If it isn't one thing it's another. There's no chance for it ever to get dull and unexciting and just ordinarily placid like other businesses sometimes do; and like it would be nice for this one to do now and then. No, it's never that way, and that's why I sometimes think it would be better if I got out of it and tried hooking rugs or making pottery or daubing my fingers with mud and charcoal to create primitive paintings, or driving a truck. But

I never do.

So I put up with the trouble and the grief and inconvenience and carry on. But still it's always something. If it isn't Tony Allen, my boss, with a new idea which I have to discourage, then it is something wrong with the plane. And sometimes it's both; like the time he gleefully ignored the rules of the game and hooked up a blower to the Continental, thus boosting her modest eighty-five horsepower somewhat, and also drawing upon himself the wrath of the race committee, who quite rightfully

held that Tony Allen or not he will follow the same rules with the midgets as the rest of the people.

But usually my trouble with him was not of that stripe, because he generally leaves the handling of the airplane, which he calls Hodge-Podge—and that is apt because it is pretty much that when it comes to parts—to me, and is off gadding about the country to one of his radio stations, of which he has a great many.

So then my trouble mostly evolved from one, Harry Jones, the pilot of the midget, who, though having a name which sounds inoffensive enough, was possessed of two vices. He fancied himself a singer, for one thing, and that was absurd because his was the kind of voice that would be right at home directing operations in a gravel pit; and he was growing fat—a thing which was far more insidious and was strangely coupled with the singing business because he believed himself in best form when he could crook his fingers about a mug of beer. And of course that was a deterring factor in the winning qualities of the Hodge-Podge.

You might think that ridiculous, but when you consider that the ship weighs no more than five hundred and fifty pounds empty and is only some sixteen feet long and four feet high you get an idea of what Harry's growing avoirdupois was doing to it. He weighed in at one-fifty when he came to work for us after the war, and at the time my grief commenced in earnest the needle on the drugstore scale was nudging the thick side of the two hundred mark.

And that is no good for racing a very small airplane at one hundred and eighty miles an hour around a three mile closed course at something less than sixty feet above the ground.

I had been feeling this for a while and though I carped at him about it I had tried

to make up for it by polishing the valves a little more and souping the injection system somewhat, because Harry, delusions and all, was a fine, plodding sort of guy, and I didn't want to see him lose his job.

I got by with it until Miami and then it got out of my hands entirely. Tony showed up for that one and he saw then what I had known for a good while. There was very little soup left to put into the Continental, and he knew, as I did, that there was only one thing left to do.

As such the Miami races were fine, but then they always were because at that time of the year you have only to think how cold it is elsewhere and then Miami becomes glorious indeed, races or no. And it was still nice that time, even though things did not turn out quite like they should have; I guess it was that I had been expecting it and was not surprised.

IT WAS not bad to begin with because the Hodge-Podge had enough of the old stuff to get Harry off the ground in line with the others and into the lead. That was fine, but I had nearly expected it because I had changed fans to give him more take-off thrust. I am of the old school which holds that the take-off counts for a very great deal, and while there is much benefit to be had from a smaller fan which will give a higher engine RPM I knew that such would not do for getting Harry's ponderous bulk off the ground and into the front row. That guy needed all the blade area the Continental could swing.

But with that adjustment he got away on the running take-off well and took the first pylon in the fifteen lap race with a bare whisker between the shiny glass canopy and the checkered paint. The Continental snarled high and hungry and the red-painted buglike little ship looked for all the world like she was going mad,

and not to be headed. And she wasn't for awhile.

From nearly anywhere around the closed course you could see the planes, low as they were, because no one leg was over a mile long and they were formed in a triangle with huge, rising pylons at the turns. In the papers some guys called it dirt-track racing, and in truth, it's something like that because the paying customer can sit nice and tight in the stands and see every move that's made. It's not as fast as that Thompson Trophy stuff, but then how long can you keep your eyes on four hundred miles an hour?

FROM where Tony and I were in the infield with the tool kit, fuel tins and what-not we could see everything very well indeed. We could see how Harry slammed her flat outside the first pylon and came out and went blurring red and streaked low along the ground to the next turn. She didn't look like any sort of airplane at all doing that; rather like some sort of beetle, or maybe one of those lacquered June bugs.

We could hear her howling very clearly, too, although I knew right away that Tony could tell by the sound of her that I'd changed the fan. He didn't say anything just then; he just looked like he was trying to think ahead of that, and kept watching her and the others which were close-packed behind. They had begun to creep a bit during the stretch, and by the time the first lap ended they all went round the home pylon in a big bunch; like bees heading for the hive. Harry was still out front, but it didn't look like he could hold it.

Well, he didn't, but he kept it longer than I thought he would. Harry was kind of dopey and retiring and not very aggressive and if you looked at him you might get the idea that he could never

learn to fly a plane; but he was not that way at all. As a matter of fact, he ran up a creditable score with a Mustang for himself, and so he was inclined to be deceptive. He was deceptive right then, and he kept his expanding girth in the lead a good deal longer than I thought he would.

But that all ended before long and after they had all shaken out some and made eight or nine laps I could see that Harry was going to start dropping soon. The takeoff had given him an advantage, and I had hoped he might be able to exploit it some, but I knew then that what I had sacrificed to get him the lead was going to do him in now. A guy with his lard needed two airscrews—one to get him off the ground and another for level flight.

He dropped to second at the beginning of the tenth lap, and to fourth by the end of it. Tony Allen had it figured out by then, and he was more than a little angry.

"What made you do that?" he asked me uncivilly. "How come you gave him the long prop? I'll bet she isn't pulling over twenty-six hundred."

Well, twenty-six hundred wasn't bad as such, because that's what the mill was built to turn at, but I'd hopped it up some and so her normal RPM was higher.

"It seemed like a good idea," I said to him. "I wanted to make sure he got the lead."

He didn't say anything for a moment. They were going by again, on the twelfth, and so it was hard to hear. Harry had sagged to fifth.

"How much does he weigh now?" he asked me after they were gone.

I knew that one was coming sooner or later; it was bound to. In those shapeless coveralls Harry didn't look much different than he had when he was lighter, so there was no way of Tony knowing unless he got clever, which he just had, and doped it

all out on the basis of that fan. There was no sense in being evasive about it anymore.

"About two hundred. I figured he'd need the big fan for the take-off, and I hoped he could hold the lead somehow."

"Well, now you know," Tony Allen said, and when he got mad that way his clean, smooth face got all dark and kind of blotched. "A fine thing to pull when I'm ramming around the country and have to leave things to you. Why didn't you let me know?" He stopped and glared. "How long has this been going on, anyway? He's lost four in the last two months; four out of six. What a hell of a record that is. Does he sleep with a ham hock?"

I shrugged and shook my head. Harry was a great one for the trencher, but it wasn't that. It was the beer and the quartet singing in some back-street joint in the small hours, which of course meant more beer. But I had a feeling it wasn't the right time to mention that.

"Maybe it's glands," I said, and if I hadn't known better I maybe could have sold myself on that one. "Guys have glands that do that sometimes. They just get bigger and bigger."

Tony Allen brushed that away with a derisive snort. "We've got to do something," he said. "We can't go on this way. That's not what I bought the plane for."

HE WAVED his arm in the general direction of the planes which were going into the last lap. They were blazing around the home pylon again, moving like streaks of light—red, green, blue, black and yellow. They were going a million miles an hour, it seemed, screaming flat along the ground past the stands and spreading suddenly flat against the sky as they jerked their stubbed wings into the turn. They were no more than a hundred

feet above the ground and I could feel the vibration wriggling and squirming in the earth. They went by and it was quiet at last. Harry was back in sixth, and there were only seven planes.

I waited until they were gone and then said, "What?"

"We got to get someone else," Tony Allen said, and he looked in surprise at me, as though he was wondering if I was too thick to figure it out myself. "In another month that plane won't get him off the ground; hell, that engine's only got a hundred and eighty-eight cubic inches. He needs a transport now."

I said quickly, "Look, Tony, give the guy a break. Look at his record. Think how hot he was last year, and the year before. Remember all those wins he got? How he took the Hodge-Podge and kicked her right to the top of the heap?"

Tony didn't say anything for a minute and I got the idea that he wasn't thinking of what I'd just said. There was something different about him, somehow, as though the irritation Harry caused was only incidental. He watched the planes clear off to land and I began to hope for Harry's sake because Tony didn't know him as I did; he didn't know how there was nothing else in the world that Harry knew how to do; or that he blew his dough just as quickly as he got it.

After a while he said slowly, still preoccupied, "All right, Louie; you're making me cry. But this has been going on a long time and I know it. We can't just carry the guy. One more ride he gets, and then we see. Atlanta, in two weeks; he wins, or else—"

"Okay," I said as quietly as I could in all that racket. "That's fair enough," and I guess it was because Tony had been right. We'd been carrying Harry for a long time. "You want to tell him now?"

Tony Allen said slowly, "No, you tell

him. I might get sore and push him in the belly. Besides,” and he snapped out of whatever he was in, “I got to go. I got an appointment in New York in five hours.”

He gave me a quick flip with his hand and then he moved off across the grass and I turned around and watched the ships come in to land. Harry was the last one in and he came down a long, flat angle and flew it right into the ground. He bounced it over to where the gear was, ran the engine out of fuel and let her die. When he got out of the pit he looked big enough to stick the plane under his arm and carry it away. He also looked somewhat sheepish.

There was no sense in holding off and so I gave it to him right there; just the way Tony had told me. I didn't know what to expect and for a moment he said nothing.

He didn't even seem to be thinking of what I'd told him. His brows were fretted together and he was looking way off at one of the pylons. Then he began to hum in a weird way and he looked at me. His face had an expression of childish delight.

“What's that one?” he asked me. “What's that one about the miner and his daughter? It's been runnin' through my mind all day.”

“That's Clementine,” I said, and I began to edge away.

But I was not fast enough. Even the blast of an overhead midget was not enough to drown out that awful caterwauling about the miner's daughter whose footgear was herring boxes, and who finally drowned in a fine display of beautiful bubbles.

WELL, the happy dewy ending was to have a first-class win at Atlanta wherein all the old doubts and hoodoos would be dispelled and Harry would once more be numbered among the elite, but I had a feeling before we went that it would not be. And it wasn't. Though I spent a

full ten days preening the Continental and the ship, and all my nights supervising Harry's diet, our reward was not forthcoming. He got away fine again, because I'd used the big fan, but after that it was the old Miami story, only faster and more complete. And that time I was not sure whether I gave a damn or not.

I didn't expect any wondrous transformation, nor did I envisage divine intervention to overcome his prodigious bulk, but I think I had a right to expect some change in attitude. But he was the sort of guy who didn't seem to realize the danger he was in; it didn't appear to make any difference whether he made the grade or not, and if it wasn't for the responsibility which I in some obscure fashion felt for him I would have washed my hands of him long ago. But how can you send a child out into the snow.

Every once in a while before that race I'd surprise him with a little look of fear and wonderment on his face, as though it was sinking in at last, but mostly it seemed that he wasn't more than vaguely aware of what was happening to him.

I don't know just when it was during the heat that I saw Tony coming to where I'd set up shop in the infield. It was along toward the middle, though, because the planes had been buzzing around the course for some time. I'd known he was going to show up because I'd gotten his wire, a terse thing, but he hadn't mentioned company, and here he was, coming across the field with a girl. And a very handsome one at that.

We exchanged amenities and I observed in a covert way that she had a very fine face, nice and compact and everything arranged in such a way as to make it even beautiful; and then for awhile I didn't pay much attention to them because things had reached a critical stage and I was beginning to pray a little bit for

Harry.

But presently I became aware, as she and the boss exchanged a chatter back and forth, that this girl, whose name was Genevieve Smith, was not the usual sort of spectator at all; and I think I could even feel the hair at the back of my neck crawling a little as I caught fragments of the talk between the passing planes.

"Oh my," she said one time. "They are small, aren't they? Nothing like a Thirty-Eight at all, or a Fifty-One. What's their top speed? No retractable gear either."

Then a plane went by and for awhile I didn't hear anything. When the noise died somewhat Tony was saying something I couldn't catch but Genevieve Smith nodded knowingly and said, "What it needs is more RPM. It's swinging too much blade."

I caught that very clearly and when I scowled at her Tony was looking around behind her and grinning at me. It was one of those wordless gestures which say a great deal and then I knew who this Miss Smith was and what she was doing there. Tony had pulled the fastest one I'd ever seen him pull; indeed he had taken things into his own hands and had got himself a pilot who weighed just about one half of what old Harry did.

That was all intuition, or whatever it is that tells you there is disaster at hand, but I knew as surely as if he'd told me himself, and I thought what a cross-up for Harry—and what a come-down; replaced by a pint-sized dame.

I could not think what Harry's reaction might be except perhaps to realize at long last where his follies had led him; but I might have known it would not be worth trying to guess, because it was beyond anything I had imagined. When he landed he waddled the ship over and got out and hung his head. Then he saw Miss Smith and took an interest; he began to smile in a

way that was absolutely sickening and I wanted to yell at him and say, "You jerk! She's stealing your job!"

But it was too fascinating and I could only stare stupidly as he got friendly in a bear-like way and, as Genevieve Smith's mouth formed an expression of distaste when he lumbered toward her; and as she seemed to recoil somehow when she heard that awful voice of his. He did not seem to be aware of anything but her, not even Tony Allen who had to shout at him several times that he was fired. But even that didn't seem to bother Harry Jones. Tony wasn't in it then at all.

WELL, strictly speaking, Harry Jones was not fired as conclusively as it had sounded. Miss Genevieve Smith, while possessing a formidable background, including war-time WASP service, and a number of cross-country races in converted pursuit ships, was not acquainted with the midgets and so Harry was to be retained until she became "oriented," as Tony Allen put it.

For myself I would have said, "Nuts, and to hell with it," and would have packed off in a dudgeon, but Harry, the shambling fool, did nothing like that at all. As a matter of fact it did not seem to bother him a bit and in a day or two I was aware that he was undergoing a curious transformation. For one thing, he got his hair cut, which was a vast improvement, and for another he developed the habit of reporting on the job with a crease in his pants. But while these were desirable in themselves they were obviously motivated by what we know as dame reaction.

He even built and installed a small and compact two-way radio just aft the headrest in the Hodge-Podge. "Instruct her better this way," he said. "Practically no weight to it at all."

But this expression of efficiency and

devotion was totally lost on Miss Smith, and it struck me when she spoke of it that she could be very brittle when the occasion demanded; and the occasion seemed always present when there was anything concerning Harry Jones.

"That big boob has gone and put a radio in here," she said to me one morning. "It's bad enough listening to him on the ground, but to have that voice assaulting me in the air, too, is going to be unbearable. Does he think I can't fly?"

"Well, he wants to make sure you do it right," I said with equal hauteur. I had developed a keen dislike for this young thing who was easing my friend out of room and board, and though he had lost his mind and didn't seem to care, I wanted her to understand that all was not posies and trilliums with me. "He has spent a lot of hours in that ship and he doesn't want it smashed all at once."

We understood each other quite well after that one, and I will say that her blue eyes were just as pretty frozen over as otherwise. It was very pleasant to have scored and I only wished that Harry would come to his I senses and adopt the same attitude; but he became more hopeless every day. Sometimes he got absolutely maudlin with that girl.

BUT there was a ray of hope and it appeared in a strange and untoward fashion; it was the sort of thing I had not looked for with him and so it was not evident to me until we took the Hodge-Podge and Miss Smith to her first race at Dallas. Because he was not flying that day, Harry did not wear his all-concealing coveralls, and so it was clear for all to see. That man was losing weight.

The reason for it was obvious because for weeks he had been bending over backwards and sideways to get himself a tumble from that job-thief, and though it

was a total failure from that standpoint I began to get an idea on how I could apply his absence from the beer halls to his benefit; for in truth he was abstaining totally.

This thought was so compelling that I found it somewhat difficult to concentrate on the race, which was some different than our other ones because now the Hodge-Podge carried only a hundred pounds in the pit; and showed it. As it was, Miss Smith made a respectable third out of it; a fine showing, I will say grudgingly, though I am prone to believe that Harry's muttering into the radio was some help.

But this idea clung to my mind far more tenaciously than did the memory of Genevieve Smith descending flushed and very trim in her jumper from the plane, and that of Harry Jones becoming all red and stammering when he tried to help her, and not even minding when she fired him a glance of disdain. And so I took it, while it was still young and fresh with life, to the hotel where Tony Allen was staying.

He had come down for the races, but for some reason of which he did not advise me, had not appeared at the field. I found him lying on his bed with an ice-bag on his head; and he did not look happy.

I said without any preliminaries, "Well, she got a third. Buzz Koffend won it, and Tommy Grant took second. How come you didn't show up?"

He waved his hand listlessly and looked pained.

"I got a headache. I couldn't stand to hear those damned things banging at me all afternoon." He took the ice bag off and looked at me. "She got a third? Not bad for a start."

"Yeah, but she got a hand from Harry. He gave her tips on the radio." I took a breath; it was as good a time as any and there was no place he could run to. "Harry's losing weight," I said. "It's silly,

but he thinks he's a lady-killer and he's trying to knock the pounds off. He's been behaving very well lately. Not a beer in four weeks, I think he should be down to his normal weight by the time Cleveland rolls around. How about giving him another shot at the Hodge-Podge?"

This time Tony sat up on the bed and let his feet dangle.

"Don't be ridiculous," he said. "He had his chance, and goofed it up. This Smith is all right; not much chance of her putting it on like him. In a few weeks she ought to be up there with the best of them and then we don't have to think about it anymore."

He flapped his hand at me and lay down again. He replaced the ice bag and sighed.

"Besides, I can't worry about that. I got enough on my mind. I got network troubles; unless I dig up some first-class talent I'm going to lose my most opulent sponsor. Continental's offered him Melba Lane."

Then I got the why of the ice bag and the ash tray heaped high with short butts and the telephone next to the pillow, and I guess I felt a little sorry for him, but not so much that it didn't please me some to see him squirm the way Harry was squirming; or the way Harry should have been squirming, which he wasn't. When I got back to the small hangar we'd rented for the day he was polishing his windscreen lovingly and giving bawling vent to Sweet Genevieve. Miss Smith was nowhere around.

WELL, pretty soon late winter became early spring and then late spring and we began to work further north. The trees were budding with little knots all over the ends of the branches, the sun became warm, a few green shoots speared up out of the wet ground, and Harry Jones

kept getting thinner. He was getting positively sleek, but all this was lost on Genevieve Smith, and worse, on Tony Allen. He was a hell of a stubborn guy.

And he was morose, too, and I was thinking all the time that it was a good thing we didn't see him more frequently than we did. Sometimes he'd show up, like at Nashville, and that time at Cincinnati, and grouse around, always preoccupied, and with no cheer like in the old days. The only pleasure he took was in Genevieve's winning, which she was doing considerably of by that time, and then he would smirk at me and say, "Well, at least we're making money on this end for a change."

But I did give up my thoughts on Harry Jones. There did not seem to be much chance, but I kept pounding away at Tony about it and then finally one day he amazed me and threw up his hands and said, "All right, damn it, I'll give him a chance; if Jenny louses things at Cleveland I'll let him try it again, but if she wins we don't need him any more at all. So we'll settle him one way or the other. Maybe I was rash in signing her on, but she's been all right so far; although I know Cleveland will be tougher. We'll make our decisions after that one."

He looked at me and smiled crookedly. "What the hell, maybe it won't make any difference by then anyway. Maybe we won't even have a plane."

I didn't follow him too well on that, but I'd got what I wanted and so I shoved off and left him with his troubles, which really seemed considerable. I went back to the races again and I kept quiet. I didn't say anything to either of them; somehow or other I got the idea it wouldn't make much difference to Harry—the guy was lost—and it occurred to me that I couldn't very well take it to Miss Smith and gloat over it.

I'd thought there might be some pleasure in that, but now that I had the opportunity to put the pressure on it didn't seem right; and while sometimes when that ice was floating around in her eyes I'd get sore enough to let her have it straight, there were other times when her guard was down and she looked like the girl next door. She had nice yellow hair and when she was that way it made you want to pet it or something like that.

But she was never that way when she was really aware that we were around, especially Harry, and I used to wonder why in hell he didn't give up and call it a day. She would get just as sore with him as a girl can get, and when she did that I'd stop thinking of her as the girl next door and get back to regarding her as something that was in the way and which I would be glad to get rid of if I could. And Cleveland was coming closer.

All this time we kept getting more short and snappy with one another, except for Harry, who put up with whatever Genevieve Smith had for him and asked for more, and I was beginning to wonder why I had ever taken this interest in him in the first place and why I had gone to all the trouble of trying to keep him on.

AND then suddenly one day all that was behind us and we were at Cleveland, with the big crowds, the airplanes, the Army and Navy, the bands and all the tension that goes with that sort of thing. The service boys put on some fine acrobatics and formation stuff and strafing runs; the Thompson Trophy ships ran off a few hot heats which you could hear; but could barely see because they were only blurs in the air, and then presently it was us, and Genevieve Smith, as calm and cool as an icicle, was getting into the Hodge-Podge and Harry was bending over the set which he had set up

on the ground in the infield.

Tony Allen showed up just before takeoff and he talked quietly to Miss Smith for awhile, fiddled beneath the cowl of the ship, sneered at Harry and scowled at me. He was in a fine mood, all right, no different from any time in the past month or so.

Then there was a lot of noise from the speaker system and everyone cleared away from the line of ships and I went around and pulled the fan through. I had spent a whole week on final ad-libbing with the Continental; I had put on the short prop and had even trimmed that down another half inch so Miss Smith could have the engine turn faster than it ever had before. It came through sweet on the third pull and then I jumped away; when the flag came down she was in the front row and the first one off the ground.

I had seen that Genevieve Smith fly some six or seven races for us but I will say I never saw her fly anything like the way she did that day. You'd think a mere girl would peter out in the face of all that competition—there was a pile of money up there and there were a number of rough pilots flying—but the way she handled the Hodge-Podge you got the idea she was not so very mere at all. And that was too bad in a way because I'd got myself all set to relish any bad luck she might have, and here I was, admiring her a little.

And that kind of grew on me after a bit because she took her turns as good as Harry ever had; she slammed the ship flat up and vertical to the ground, and tore around the checkered poles with no more than a sliver of light between her and the marker. She took her straightaways flat out and low, ramming the Continental for all it had and then cutting up in a tight wrench for the next turn. She did it all very well indeed, and I could see my bid for Harry fading. I could get no response from him

because he was bending over his microphone, but I caught Tony Allen's first smile of the day and I knew that I was right.

She had led all the way from the take-off run and she had stretched the lead slowly and steadily until by the tenth lap it began to look almost cut and dried. In the middle of that one I bent over Harry's shoulder to try and hear what he was saying, and when I looked up the Hodge-Podge was on fire.

You could not tell immediately and at first you might think the red paint was running or doing something queer, but then in a second you could see the red-black bubble of flame expanding from the engine cowl and flicking in a crimson tongue along the fuselage. And you could see the smoke, the thin, black and gray streamer, whipping like a kite tail as the ship roared along the ground and trailed it around the pylons.

Tony Allen had turned white and I yelled at Harry Jones, "Get her down! Get her the hell out of that thing!" And Harry bobbed his head numbly and began to speak with pathos into the microphone, all the while following the burning midget with eyes which were suddenly stricken and hollow.

THAT was in the tenth lap and all around us I could hear the rising screech of sirens and see people running and the crash trucks and meat wagons milling around and darting along the grass, but not going in any particular direction because Genevieve Smith had elected not to land at all, but appeared to be finishing her race.

By the time the twelfth lap came up the trucks and wagons had stopped all that futile plunging around and were scattered about the course waiting for something to happen, but still she kept up there, or

down there rather, because she was flying even lower now as though she was trying to win a race with something other than mere airplanes.

Tony Allen's face was totally ashen by then and I found myself talking sort of incoherently to no one in particular, just babbling out loud, "Come on, baby, bring it in. All is forgiven, you're a sweetheart if there ever was one. You're a honey. Oh, sweet Genevieve."

But still Genevieve did not quit, and it looked like murder sure; she kept screaming around the course in that flaming double boiler until she came out of the last lap and passed the final pylon in a wide streak of sticky smoke. Then she shot up high in a slow turn and rolled around to come in to land; and all the sirens started screaming again and the trucks went galloping across the field to where she was going to smear herself all over the ground.

Only she didn't. She came down in a steep angle, slipping some to keep the fire away from the glass, and then she went out of view just as she touched down. I heaved a big lungful of wind and looked at Harry; and damn him, he was singing into the mike.

Well, she landed all right and kept rolling like a burning bundle of sagebrush until she got nearly to us and then she flipped up the canopy and piled out and started to run. She ran faster than I ever saw a girl run before and she didn't stop until she crumpled right up in Harry's arms.

He looked positively stupid standing there and not knowing what to do, and even more so when she hauled off and gave him a kiss that must have curled the soles of his shoes. He began to sag a little and she went to Tony and kissed him, but only friendly like, and then me, but with much reserve. When she went back to

Harry she sort of leaned on him and cooed. And he looked as though he'd just stepped into heaven.

"Oh, Harry, I was scared; scared to death," she said. "I'd never have made it if it hadn't been for you. But you talked me in, and you sang me in, too—you gave me enough courage or whatever it was to finish and to land, too. It was just sort of down to earth and calm, sort of homespun. I always thought you had a terrible voice before, but today it was the most wonderful thing in the world."

She leaned away from him a bit and gave him the most beautiful smile I'd ever seen. "You're just like those guys with the radio voices with the pull, Harry. You're a dream." And then she kissed him again.

WELL, like I said before there is always something with this business, and you never know what it is going to be next. When Tony Allen heard her say that he reared up and looked at

Harry as though he had never seen him before, and then he tore off across the field toward the nearest phone faster than the Hodge-Podge. When he came back he had a grin a mile wide and he began to behave toward Harry as though he was a rich relative.

And I guess he was in a sense because shortly after that Harry went on the air for that sponsor Tony had been having trouble with, and today they call him Homespun Harry. He has a national hook-up, and since he doesn't even have to think about his weight any more he and Mrs. Genevieve Jones have gone to live in Milwaukee where he has breweries on all sides and in any direction.

As for myself I still have charge of the Hodge-Podge, though at present we have no pilot. But if I could be sure that things would turn out as well for me as they did for Harry I might try to fly the damned thing myself.