

Tracing old Imperial Airways routes

Two seaplanes from Como to Mâcon, to commemorate the seaplane history of the town. 25,000 people came to see the seaplanes. And to fly.

There are a number of places that in the past were of vital importance in water aviation, but where today there is no single trace of any seaplane activity. Orbetello, Venezia, Desenzano in Italy are some examples of this sad reality. The Azores is another one. And so is Mâcon.

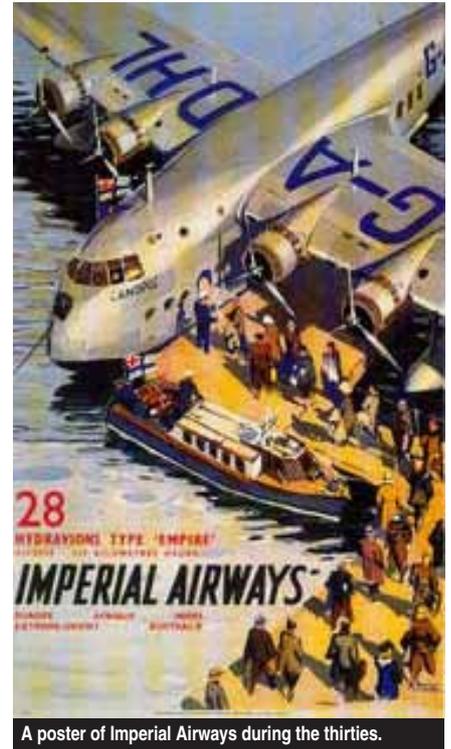
In the nice French town, on the banks of the Saône river and north of Lyon, only a few fans of local history were aware of the Imperial Airways operations at the end of the 1930s.

The stretch of the river in the town centre became a stopping place, or better the first stopping place on the long journey to Australia or South Africa undertaken by the Short S 23s of the British company. These delicate airplanes guaranteed quick transport and contributed to the unity of the British Empire in an extremely critical historical period.

This fragment of the past which nobody recalls, needed to be remem-



Roberto Ruberto with a passenger.



A poster of Imperial Airways during the thirties.

bered. "Why not use modern seaplanes to remember the old ones?" the management of the Aéro Club du Mâconnaïis must have thought. They organized a magnificent exhibition on the history of seaplanes in the local City Hall and came to Como to find out if we were able to take our seaplanes to the



This man flew on both seaplane operating on the Saône and obtained the signatures on his T-shirt of both pilots.



The team from Como and the local team responsible for the celebrations. From the left, Serge Bontand, Cesare Baj, Roberto Ruberto, Franco Cereda, Roos Decaesstecker, Alain Forêt, Enzo Schettino.



The Prefect of Mâcon getting out of the Lake after his first experience on a seaplane.



Cereda, Ruberto, Decaesstecker and Baj in front of one of the dozens lighted panels installed all over the city of Mâcon.

commemorative event. Which of course we did, with our Lake Renegade I-AQUA, which was newly operative, and our Piper Super Cub I-BUFF.

Two Cessna 172s, leaving the next day, had to fly back because of bad weather over the Alps.

It was a beautiful experience, even if the weather was not that nice. The event had been widely publicized; the town was full of posters advertising our arrival and there were flags everywhere: Union Jacks (recalling the British seaplanes), Italian (recalling Como) and of course French flags.

Over 25,000 people came to watch the seaplanes on their river, clearly a very emotional experience.

In 2 days, 2 seaplanes flew 170 passengers, among whom the Prefect. Local newspapers and television gave extraordinary importance to the event. A lot of authorities, such as the Mayor and a Senator have started to make enquiries about the opening of a permanent water surface for seaplane operations.

We were all treated exceptionnally well : first being offered private accommodation at the homes of our hosts and then sleeping in the same hotel in which the S23 passengers used to stay.

A perfectly organized operation and a big success for the locals, thanks (as is so often the case) to the organizational efforts of very few people : Serge Bontand, a manager of the Aéro Club du Mâconnais; Alain Forêt, instructor at the Club and former military instructor on the Mirage, and Marie Noelle, President of the Club. We are sure that apart from these people, many others were essential to the success of the event, with their hard work.



The two seaplanes from Como on the front page of the newspaper of Mâcon.

Succès pour « Imperial Airways des hydravions sur la Saône »

C succès total pour cette (première ?) édition de la ma- Airways et de son volet mâconnais. Succès de la conférence de M. Noly, qui s'est d'hélicoptères montés sur flotteurs, des modèles réduits de taille impression- public de la présence de deux Cessna, empêchés de passer les Alpes samedi a mis du baume au cœur des organisateurs. En effet, en fin d'après-midi, on to-



Some of the 25,000 people along the riverside.