

Those Magnificent Men and their Flying Machines



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In 1965, there were two racing comedies released both of them set during the first 10 years of 1900's. The more popular of two was *The Great Race*, which was about an around the world automobile race; the second was *Those Magnificent Men and their Flying Machines*, about an air race between London and Paris in very early and flimsy aircraft. While I will admit there is something special about *The Great Race* and it certainly had more stars who were known in the United States, *Those Magnificent Men and their flying Machines* had something the other did not ? History.

What do I mean by history? First of all, there is the light-hearted review of man's attempts to fly featuring the comic skills of Red Skelton mixed with historic footage of some of the more outrageous of man's attempts and failures to fly before the opening credits. You are not likely to see more historical film footage of man's failed attempts to fly in another movie. But of even greater interest to someone like me is that every plane used in the film was a recreation of a historic airplane from the birth of aviation. In a few cases, they added some safety devices or a small change was made to better protect the pilots, but the planes did fly, or, at least, those that were supposed to fly did, and they were actually flown for the movie's footage.

Those Magnificent Men and their Flying Machines takes place in 1910 when English newspaper publisher Lord Rawnsley (Robert Morley) decides to sponsor a worldwide competition to determine which nation truly rules the air. Contestants from all over the world are invited to compete. There is also a romantic subplot involving Lord Rawnsley's daughter Patricia (Sarah Miles) and a developing love triangle between her, British pilot Richard Mays (James Fox) and American Pilot Orvil Newton (Stuart Whitman). A cesspool near the airport provides a bit of a running gag as does the Fire Chief played by British comic Benny Hill. There are a lot of slapstick situations and jokes throughout the film but I will confess that I get the most joy out of watching these old planes fly and being put through their paces. For the most part, this is a family film. However, as was common for the early and mid-sixties, it does contain some racial, religious and nationality stereotypes, so there are some groups it might possibly offend. But if you truly want to see examples of the wide range of flying machines of the early 1900's there is almost no better film.

Posted by Keith C. on June 8, 2016

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