

CLAYTON FOLKERTS

Clayton Folkerts: Iowa's Amazing Airplane Designer and Builder Wins National Honors

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People viewed air races from grandstands like these at the Cleveland Municipal Airport in 1937. Iowa Clayton Folkerts' "Folkerts Special" was a popular and winning airplane in these early aviation events.

A good percentage of the 293 people living in Bristow, Iowa, in 1936 gathered at the Opera House on Tuesday, Sept. 29. *The Mason City Globe Gazette* covered the event honoring a hometown native son.

Clayton Folkerts had just returned from several national air races where his plane, "Folkerts' Special," had captured some impressive prizes.

Folkerts had started building planes when he was just a kid on the family farm about two miles east of Bristow. The local newspaper, the *Greene Recorder*, called him a "mechanical genius." He ended up working for Miller Flying field in Dubuque for a

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time and eventually went to Wallace Field in Bettendorf and Central States Aero Company in Davenport.

By 1927 Folkerts had designed and built a monoplane that had room for one passenger, with the pilot and passenger sitting side by side in an enclosed cabin. A crowd of 5,000 had witnessed the first test flight of the “beautiful little Monoplane” at Davenport in April 1927. They reported it was “unique, comfortable and handsome.” Flying out of a Moline airfield, it had reached a speed of 100 miles per hour.

In 1929 Folkerts tested a plane the *Davenport Democrat and Leader* called the “smallest airplane ever designed and flown in the Tri-Cities.” Designed and built by Folkerts, the “tiny ship” had a wing spread of 24 feet and a length of 17 feet. It weighed 260 pounds. The test revealed the plane averaged 40 miles on a gallon of gasoline and had a ceiling of 10,000 feet.

By fall 1936 a plane designed and built by Folkerts’ was winning national air races around the country. The “Folkerts’ Special,” built in Canfield Hangar in Waterloo, “broke all existing records for planes in its class” in a race in Los Angeles, according to the *Greene Recorder*. Folkerts walked away with prize money totaling \$10,000 for reaching speeds of 243 miles per hour. From there he traveled to a race in Detroit, where he won first place in all four of the races he entered. He won \$5,000 there. Then it was on to Cleveland, where Folkerts once again captured first prize.

After the national races, Folkerts dismantled his plane, stacked it on a trailer pulled by his car and headed to Bristow for a little break. Crowds gathered at Merfeld’s garage where the plane was stored. They wanted a glimpse of the amazing little plane.

The celebration at the Bristow Opera House was a big success. The Commercial Club had organized the festivities. The school band and girls’ glee club provided music. The Butler County sheriff and the mayor spoke. Folkerts was given a gold wrist watch.

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