

Several people to whom I have mentioned the attractive Stampe biplane speak of it as a (quote) 'French Tiger Moth'. In fact this is a total misnomer, for it is neither French nor, from a handling viewpoint, does it have many similarities to the famous de Havilland product. The Stampe is of essentially Belgian origin, as was its designer, Jean Stampe. There was a connection, though, for M. Stampe was the DH agent in Belgium and his original aim was to improve on the earlier DH60 Moth – the Tiger's predecessor.

Stampe – a former test pilot and one-time personal pilot to King Albert of Belgium – started designing his dream machine in 1932, with the aim of producing a pilot's aeroplane that would

have high qualities in the aerobatic role. To achieve this he chose an almost symmetrical aerofoil and four ailerons; also he 'modernised' his machine by incorporating brakes and a tailwheel instead of a skid, the combined results of which produced a very desirable machine.

The SV4 was aimed mainly at the military market, but by the time production was fully under way the whole project was halted. Because of limited facilities on home territory, the main production line had been set up in France, but when only ten had been completed the factory was

commandeered by the Germans. Surprisingly, though, for a biplane designed in the early 1930s, a demand restarted immediately after the end of World War 2 and substantial orders were placed for both the Belgian and French Air Forces (each of which established an impressive aerobatic display team), with others produced under licence in Algeria. Altogether 977 were built.

During its career the Stampe used engines of six different types, but by far the majority had French Renaults (SV4A and 4C) or British Gipsy Majors (SV4B). Today 48, mainly Cs but 4As and 4Bs, remain on the UK register.

Because of the different versions and various post-build modifications, any report on the type must be general in



Stampe SV4 **Better than a Moth?**

The 'French Tiger Moth' is not a Tiger Moth,
nor is it French, says **David Ogilvy**

nature. For example, the A and B are hand-swung, while the C has an air starter that I have not experienced. Also, there are different fuel systems with different levels of sustainment for inverted flight; of these, the Gipsy's system seems to be the preferred choice. However, basic handling is common to all and one warning that applies throughout is not to use the brakes whilst taxiing, as there is a lively tendency to nose over. They are intended for parking only.

Take-off is much as expected, but with swing direction (modest) depending on the engine. As soon as one is on the move, the controls reveal their characteristics, with the elevators lively performers and the rudder effective but mildly heavier than expected. My initial opinion of the ailerons

was that they are more akin to those of a monoplane than a biplane and, although on the climb they are not as crisp as a Chipmunk, they are closer to that than to a Tiger Moth. The rate of ascent varies according to the power unit and the propeller; at a predictably recommended 65mph I recorded about 750fpm, but I have heard of figures in excess of 1,000 on a modified 4B with a late-fit Gipsy Major 10/2 of 145hp. Not surprisingly, a Hoffman propeller is an asset. The speed on the cruise is likely to be about 95mph; at this figure, the draught is milder than one might expect from an open cockpit biplane and the ailerons show the benefits of their generous supply. From the erect condition, the stall and the recovery are relatively tame and (because of lowish

cloud on my few ventures with the type) I had no opportunity to spin – and get out of it – safely. However, I am assured by those who know, that this is a relatively harmless experience.

It is when we come to the art of aerobatics that the Stampe attains the fore. In the early post-war years it held its head high in the world of competition aros, while still it serves a special purpose in the training role. It is possible to complete a loop from a speed as low as 105mph but clearly a higher figure is more sensible. A slow roll is a pleasant experience and there is little difficulty in completing the manoeuvre smoothly, with the Frise ailerons helpful in keeping adverse yaw to a minimum. It is advisable, though, to take care of the nose position on the horizon

Colour photos: Keith Wilson



when in the inverted stage, or the roll-out will call for a heavy dose of rudder. A notable feature is the ability to keep the engine (Renault or Gipsy) purring when the wrong way up, so there is no feeling of urgency to complete the exercise.

The fuel system extends the scope of aerobatic activity to cover the needs and wishes of the most ambitious pilot, including starting manoeuvres from the inverted. For this and related practices I defer to those who specialise in the field,



Via Philip Jarrett

for I make no claim to be an expert. Certainly, I have enjoyed the conventional aeros and the lively ailerons that help with that pleasure, but clearly I have not tested the type to its limits. Without doubt, despite what I portray at the end of this report, the Stampe's smooth aerobatic qualities leave the Tiger Moth squarely in the shade; in particular, the Belgian machine rolls nicely, whereas our home-brewed equivalent certainly does not.

Back to inescapable behaviour – what

goes up must come down – the Stampe is a well-behaved participant in the landing process. From a recommended 60mph approach, the three-point altitude is not difficult to attain and, due to the soft undercarriage, the touch-down can be very comfortable. Despite this sense of security, though, a badly-judged hold-off can create an embarrassingly energetic bounce. The ensuing run is relatively easy to keep straight, as a sharp application of rudder does the trick. It must be remembered,

Above: the Stampe's aerobatic qualities 'leave the Tiger Moth squarely in the shade'
Above left: a Tiger Club Stampe – swing on take-off depends on whether it is powered by Renault or Gipsy
Left: Stampe rear cockpit; the draught is milder than one might expect

though, that aircraft of this era were designed for use on omni-directional aerodromes and most of today's sites are far from friendly for such machines.

From an ownership angle, the SV4 can be expensive to maintain. It has an unusually complex structure, with many bolted and split-pinned components. However, the advantage is that most of these can be removed and replaced – if they can be found. Fortunately, though, Stampes are available to fly at a few establishments, including the Tiger Club at Headcorn and Tiger Airways at Gloucestershire Airport.

Finally, I cannot resist a purely personal viewpoint. Whilst the Belgian product has a 'rounded' smoothness in both appearance and handling, (especially for aerobatics) it feels less like a vintage biplane than does the de Havilland machine. My initial impression on my first flight on a Stampe was that it is more like a monoplane in control response and, for the pure pleasure and atmosphere associated with vintage flying, I preferred the Tiger Moth. I admit, though, that this may be a twisted assessment based on familiarity; I learnt to fly on Tiger Moths and subsequently flew them from time to time over many years, whereas my flights in a Stampe can be numbered on the fingers of one hand. I mention this as a challenge, with a suggestion to readers to try their hands and feet on both and reach their own conclusions. I would be interested to hear the results. ■

