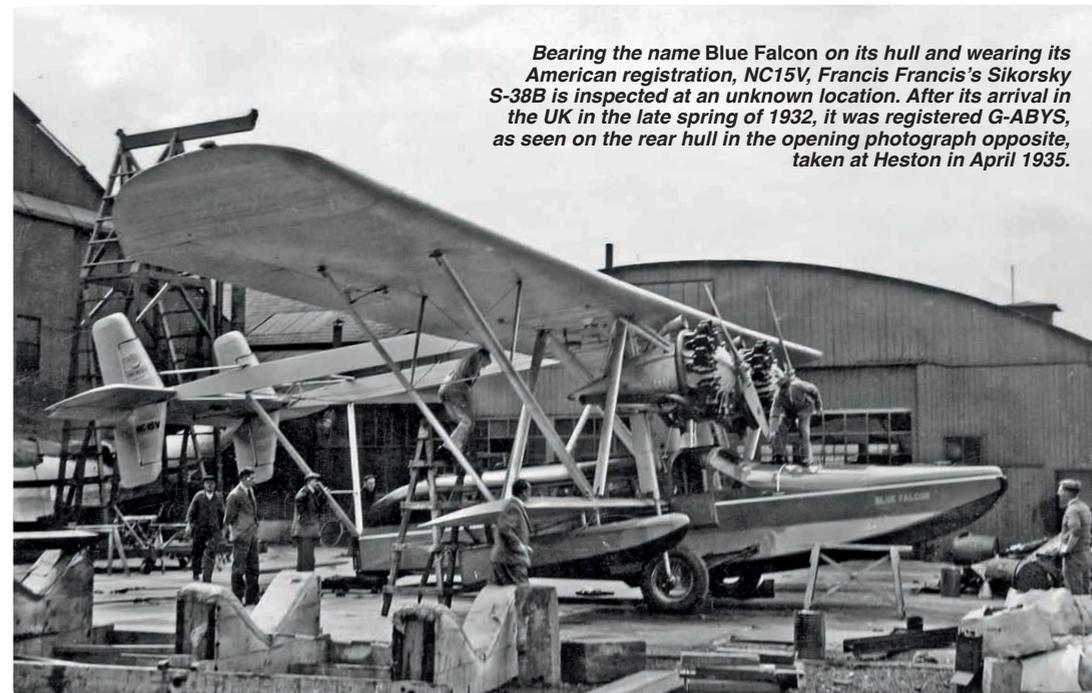
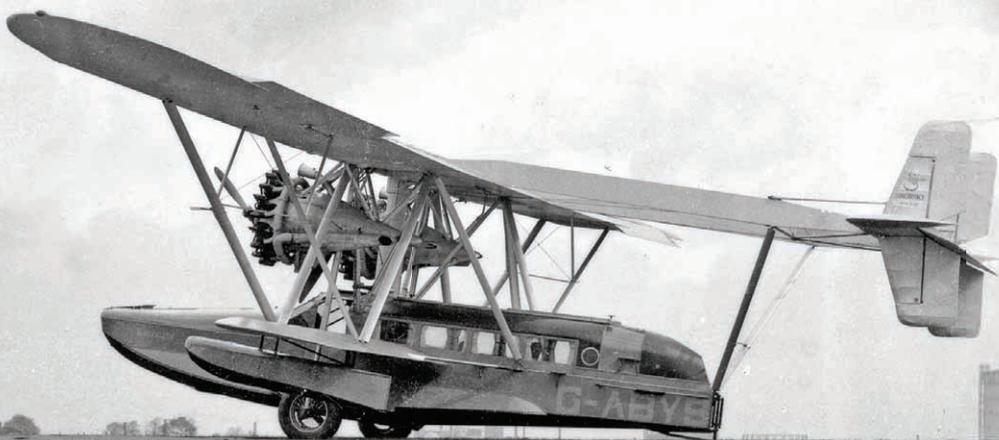


THE BLUE FALCON

A MILLIONAIRE AND HIS AERIAL YACHT

In 1922 the 18-year-old Francis Francis inherited a fortune from his grandfather, and within a decade had become an army captain, represented Britain in the Olympics and married an American actress. He had also acquired a passion for aviation. **PHILIP JARRETT** reflects on Francis's ownership of a "de luxe" amphibian



Bearing the name Blue Falcon on its hull and wearing its American registration, NC15V, Francis Francis's Sikorsky S-38B is inspected at an unknown location. After its arrival in the UK in the late spring of 1932, it was registered G-ABYS, as seen on the rear hull in the opening photograph opposite, taken at Heston in April 1935.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS VIA AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

IN 1922, WHEN he was 18 years old and attending Rugby School, Francis Francis and his sister Evelyn, aged 19, inherited large fortunes from their grandparents, their grandfather having been one of the founders of The Standard Oil Company. This made them both millionaires. In the succeeding years Francis gained a commission as a captain in the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues), but in 1929 he sacrificed his army career and resigned his commission after falling in love at first sight with the American comedienne and actress Sunny Jarman. Their engagement was swiftly followed by a secret wedding at Christ Church in Mayfair, London, on December 23, 1929.

A versatile sportsman, Francis was chosen to be a member of the British Olympic team in 1928 as a fencer, horseman and 400-yards runner, but unfortunately he was prevented from competing by diphtheria. He then became an accomplished amateur golfer, winning the Swiss Open Championship in 1936 and becoming Dutch Amateur Champion in 1935 and 1936. He also played three times for England in the Home Internationals in 1936 and against France in 1935 and 1936.

Francis could afford to indulge his interests, and flying was evidently one of them. Around 1930 he learnt to fly under the tutelage of Valentine Baker, the chief flying instructor of the flying school at Heston, and the two men quickly became firm friends. In January 1931 Francis bought Saunders-Roe A.17 Cutty Sark G-ABBC, a twin-inline-engined amphibian flying-boat. He followed this in July with Saunders-Roe A.21

Windhover G-ABJP, another amphibian, this time powered by three 120 h.p. de Havilland Gipsy II inline engines. Both machines were based at Heston. However, the Windhover was sold to Gibraltar Airways in September of the same year, and in March 1932 he sold the Cutty Sark to British Amphibious Air Lines.

A NEW AEROPLANE

Francis's affection for amphibious aeroplanes was undiminished, but his attention had been drawn to the USA. His next acquisition was a five-seat Sikorsky S-38B powered by a pair of 420 h.p. Pratt & Whitney Wasp radial engines. The S-38, which has been described as a major factor in the Sikorsky Manufacturing Corporation's eventual success, was a distinctive machine with its two engines strut-mounted between its parasol wing and the hull, and the tailplane and twin fins and rudders carried on twin booms extending behind the wing and strut-braced to the tail end of the hull.

Built in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1930, Francis's aircraft, c/n 314-19, described as a "de luxe" version and initially registered NC15V, was bought by Capt Francis in 1932 and named *Blue Falcon*. Francis travelled to the USA with his own mechanic, who also needed to gain familiarisation with the aircraft, and asked Sikorsky test pilot Boris Sergievsky, along with a company mechanic, to accompany him as pilot and personal instructor on a trip to the West Indies. The passengers were Mrs Francis Francis, her mother, their maid, Capt Francis's valet, one bulldog and two Pekinese.