



# FAR-FLUNG Flycatcher

Fairey's naval fighter in Argentina, 1929–30

Argentinian aviation historian **RICARDO M. LEZON** and **MATTHEW WILLIS**, author of a definitive book on the type, examine recently rediscovered documents in Argentina which shed new light on the activities of the sole Fairey Flycatcher sent there to undertake handling trials with the nation's Naval Aviation Service in 1929, despite its obvious obsolescence

**ABOVE** *The best of all worlds? The Flycatcher was convertible into an amphibian, with fixed-axle wheels protruding from a point ahead of the step of the twin floats, and a skid mounted at the rear of the latter. The sight of a Flycatcher apparently taking off from a grass airfield on floats must have caused double-takes for the uninformed!*

**T**HE FAIREY AVIATION Company Ltd enjoyed considerable success in export markets during the interwar period. One Fairey type from that era which did not serve outside its native country's military was the Flycatcher biplane naval fighter. Apart, that is, from a sole example tested by Argentina's fledgling *Servicio de Aviación Naval* (SAN — Naval Aviation Service) in 1929. Recently discovered documents in Argentina have shed more light on this unusual diversion for one of Britain's more distinctive carrier fighters.

## Robust conventionality

When the Flycatcher began to enter frontline Royal Navy service in 1924, it was hardly on the cutting edge of technology. While it was in many ways an innovative aircraft, ideally suited to the tough maritime environment, its speed and climb performance were well below those of contemporary land-based fighters such as the RAF's Gloster Grebes and Armstrong Whitworth Siskins, which also used the same Armstrong Siddeley Jaguar powerplant. Even the Admiralty expected the Flycatcher's replacement to be on hand within two or three years of the Fairey machine entering service. It may seem surprising, therefore, to learn that Fairey went to some effort to sell the Flycatcher to the SAN as late as 1929.

Naval aviation in Argentina began in 1916 and had been expanding since 1921, when the Naval Aviation School at Puerto Belgrano was founded. Naval air stations were established at Mar del Plata and Punta Indio in 1923 and 1925 respectively, and further expansion of the Service was under way by the end of the decade. Fairey was one of several overseas manufacturers to benefit from this expansion, orders being placed



*The Fairey Flycatcher was the Royal Navy's only fighter from 1924 until 1932, and proved extremely popular with its pilots, offering a compact, highly manoeuvrable and robust machine which could be easily adapted as a landplane, floatplane or amphibian. Here, S1280 of No 403 Flight takes off from HMS Glorious in 1930. VIA AUTHORS*