

SOPWITH AVIATION COMPANY FIGHTERS



The 1913 'Tabloid' was the first Sopwith fighter

The Type St.B's compact design and small size led to the nickname "Tabloid" after a popular small medicinal tablet. With outstanding performance and docile handling Tabloid land-planes were ordered for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) as high speed scouts, the first of a long line of fighters from Kingston.

In 1914 a Tabloid floatplane was the first British aircraft to win a major international air race

Sopwith experimented with floats on a Tabloid and entered it at the last moment for the Schneider Trophy Contest at Monaco. Harry Hawker had taken a Tabloid to Australia so it was the highly experienced Howard Pixton who flew the floatplane to win the hugely prestigious 280 km race. A few extra laps flat out saw him take the 300 km world speed record to 92 mph.



The 1915 Schneider, a military floatplane development of the 'Tabloid', was Sopwith's first aircraft in large scale production

The Schneider, and its development the Baby, served with the RNAS throughout World War I pioneering operations from ship and shore on submarine and Zeppelin patrols. They were also used against Zeppelin bases and did sterling work around the Mediterranean. Some 600 Schneiders and Babys were built in Kingston and by sub-contractors. Seven were sold to France and ten bought by Norway were used for coastal patrols until 1930, making it the longest serving Sopwith type.

The 1916 '1½ Strutter' was the first two-seater fighter with a fixed forward firing synchronised gun as well as the usual observer's flexible rear gun

With Sopwith in full production for the RNAS, the RFC's desire for this remarkably clean, fast, well armed fighter was met by subcontracting with a design royalty paid to Sopwith. Of the 5,500 built, only 250 were built by Sopwith and 4,200 were built in France for the French army. Providing work for other factories was to be a recurring theme in the story of Kingston designed aircraft.



The 1916 Sopwith Pup was lightweight and highly manoeuvrable. The world's first fixed gun single-seat fighter was a favourite mount of many 'aces'

The Pup served with great success as a fighter in all theatres throughout World War I. It was also used extensively on pioneer carrier operations. In June 1917 a Pup took off from a ship gun turret platform and in August Squadron Commander EH Dunning flew a Pup off the foredeck of HMS Furious, subsequently making the first ever landing on a ship under way. Dunning's achievement inspired the development of the aircraft carrier which changed naval warfare forever.

The 1916 Sopwith Triplane was the world's first triplane fighter, a formidable dog-fighter with an exceptional rate of climb and agility

So confident was Harry Hawker in this aeroplane that he looped it three times on its maiden flight. Used extensively by the RNAS, who had 150 aircraft, the Triplane was dominant against the German 'Jasta' fighter squadrons over France in 1916 and early 1917. The Sopwith Triplane inspired Anthony Fokker to design his Dr1 Triplane.



The 1917 Sopwith F1 Camel, successor to the Triplane, became the most successful allied fighter in World War I

Late in 1916 Herbert Smith, by then Sopwith's Chief Designer, designed the famous Sopwith Camel. It was the first British fighter to have twin synchronised Vickers guns. Heavy armament with outstanding agility made the Camel the most successful fighter of the war, serving with both RNAS and the RFC. Camel pilots shot down nearly 1,300 enemy aircraft. The RNAS 'Ship's Camel' had wing-top guns and a detachable rear fuselage. In service from mid 1917, 5,490 Camels were delivered by the end of the war.

The 1918 Sopwith 5F1 Dolphin was another 'world first' carrying four guns

The first Sopwith fighter powered by the British made Hispano-Suiza liquid cooled engine (previous types used air cooled rotary engines), the Dolphin was highly regarded by RFC pilots brave enough to fly with their head above the top wing. 1,560 Dolphins were produced but it saw operational service only in France towards the end of World War I.

