

Excerpt from:
THE DECISIVE DUEL: SPITFIRE VS. 109
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**From Chapter 2 - Mitchell's S.6B Racer Takes off on a
Practice Flight, Summer 1931**



The seaplane's engine produced a long ear-shattering roar as they ran it up on shore. The pilot eased the throttle forward. The seaplane strained at the restraints that held it down. Watching were other pilots in flight suits, technicians and ground crew in overalls, and one man in a three-piece suit, a pipe stem clenched between his teeth, sometimes making notes on a clipboard he was holding, watching and listening to the massive roar. It was not all just noise to him.

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The run-up finished and the engine turned off; the seaplane was released from its bonds. It was eased forward onto a metal cradle with four automobile wheels and, with ground crew and technicians pushing, gently rolled down a concrete ramp that led into the Solent.

The waters of the Solent were busy with international commerce. Everyone handling the seaplane could look up and see a great ocean liner cruising to or from Southampton. Nearby, several motorboats were already purposefully cruising up and down, searching for any floating debris. Another motorboat came in, close to the cradle, and picked up a tow line as the seaplane entered the water, towing it onto the Solent and into the wind.

The mighty engine started up again. The propeller blew a plume of spray, the wind catching it as it accelerated; the spray almost concealed the plane itself, soon hurtling forward through the water. The pilot pulled his head well down, trying to shield his goggles from the spray. The nose swung slightly from side to side as it picked up speed and the pilot tried to get a view straight ahead, where the sheer size of the engine blocked his vision.

The little blue seaplane's wings started to lift it into the air. The motorboats raced behind, at a respectful distance, soon outpaced as the seaplane picked up speed, 'on the step', its two streamlined floats skimming the surface of the water, until it broke free and lurched into the blue summer sky. The spray disappeared. On the edge of a stall, it seemed to hang on its propeller for an instant, a few feet above the water. The pilot eased the stick forward. A brief plume of water rolled off its floats as the seaplane climbed

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away. A dissipating wake on the surface of the water showed where it had taken off. The elegant royal blue low-wing monoplane racer seaplane, taking off from the waters of the Solent on a practice flight that summer day, was wearing the RAF's red-white-blue rudder stripes.

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