



# The Rocket Man: And Other Extraordinary Characters in the History of Flight

*David Darling*

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## **The Rocket Man: And Other Extraordinary Characters in the History of Flight** David Darling

The wonder of flight has long captured the human imagination. In this beguiling history – ranging from the first aircraft to astronauts and beyond – David Darling tells the stories of the true life adventurers whose wonder has translated into bizarre contraptions, magnificent achievements and, sometimes, startling folly.

Discover outrageous attempts to fly like a bird and fall from the edge of space. Meet Napoleonic ballooniste Sophie Blanchard and her daredevil husband; the real “X-Men” who flew the supersonic experimental “X-planes” for the US Air Force; stuntman Lincoln Beachey, looping-the-loop in a pinstripe suit; and, of course, The Rocket Man himself: Yves Rossy, who in 2006 was the first person to cross the English Channel using a jet-pack.

Eccentric and reckless, Darling’s daring cast of dreamers is guaranteed to entertain and inspire.

## **The Rocket Man: And Other Extraordinary Characters in the History of Flight Details**

Date : Published October 3rd 2013 by Oneworld Publications

ISBN : 9781780742977

Author : David Darling

Format : Hardcover 216 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Aviation, Science, History, Historical



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## **From Reader Review The Rocket Man: And Other Extraordinary Characters in the History of Flight for online ebook**

### **Susan Johnston says**

There have always been people who wanted to slip the surly bonds of earth, make like a bird and fly. From ancient times with the story of Icarus, there have been daredevils who attempted to soar above the ground. This is an interesting book on a number of those foolhardy individuals. Foolhardy because longevity is not a common characteristic of these folks. The numbers are not with them and even those who experience success frequently run out of the most important component- luck.

Mayday is a comprehensive look at the risk taker and the inventor/scientist from the early days of gluing on a pair of wings and hoping for the best to creating suits with jet engines that are the closest thing to bird-like travel.

We should all be glad that these brave individuals pushed the limits as we marvel at how utterly insane they seem to us normal human beings.

Without them and so many others like them, our world would be much smaller.

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### **Michael Evans says**

Nice read as a gift or during a day sitting in a jury duty lobby. Gift for aviators and aerospace fans.

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### **amruta says**

I recd. this in a giveaway.

Disclaimer aside: FUN read about inventive and passionate (sometimes bordering on crazy) individuals!

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### **Forrest Ross says**

Fun, easy read.

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### **Erin Britton says**

The Rocket Man is a compendium of the crazy and courageous exploits of a motley crew of aeronautic pioneers. From mismatched air-ballooning couples to World War One flying aces via brave barnstormers, stealth fighters, the original rocket man and Howard Hughes, David Darling gleefully narrates the lives (and, fairly frequently, deaths) of those peculiar characters who have shaped the development of aviation from its inception right through to the present day. The book is full of larger-than-life tales that will frequently have you questioning whether the person being discussed is extraordinarily brave or extraordinarily crazed and Darling's narrative whizzes along at Mach 3 speed. While many of the people being discussed are still

justifiably famous today for their exploits and misadventures, some of those included (such as balloonist favourite of Napoleon, Sophie Blanchard, pinstripe-suited pilot Lincoln Beachey or Black Ace Raymond Collishaw) are far more obscure now and so Darling has done an excellent job of restating their place in the history of aviation. The Rocket Man is a fascinating book full of little-known facts and outlandish tales of derring-do; it's a riveting read and is highly recommended.

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### **Anna says**

Rip-roaring adventures from aeronauts and scientists from throughout the history of manned flight. Each biographical vignette is a short quick read which would make this a great choice for a reader on the go, but they are all so exciting I ended up finishing it almost in a single sitting.

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### **Jbondandrews says**

While it was somewhat interesting reading this book I was hoping for a few more women to be mentioned or at the very least the author could have cited where he got the information about Sophie Blanchard.

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### **Brian Clegg says**

The full title of this book is 'The Rocket Man and other extraordinary characters from the history of flight,' and David Darling has got that right, sure enough. These are amazing individuals from the earliest days of flight, through the amazing barnstorming aerial performers, via the risk-taking test pilots of the first supersonic jets to the people who jump off buildings wearing wing suits.

Two things seems to unite these people – an urge to live on the edge that puts them at very high risk of death, and remarkable stories that are both uplifting and horrifying in equal parts. I really don't know whether to class these people as very brave or very stupid. Certainly they have to be people who aren't too worried about their long-term survival, given the number of stories that end with the main character dead.

David Darling has cleverly avoided wheeling out all the old familiar names. It's not that the likes of the Wright brothers and Chuck Yeager, for instance, aren't there, but they come in as sidelines to the more dramatic stories of others. So, for instance, it is Lincoln Beachey, showman and record breaker, we discover in the era of the Wright brothers, while Jack Woolams and John Walker take more of the X-plane story than Yeager (or Neil Armstrong, an X-15 pilot), even though we do inevitably get Yeager's story of breaking the sound barrier.

If I'm frank there is very little science in here. The subject is all technology, and there is much less on how flight and these specific planes worked, and much more on the lives, adventures and (all too often) deaths of these remarkable individuals. But then, the stories are remarkable enough to cover them. The only slight surprise was not to have more than a throw-away one liner on the rocketbelt, given that made such a great subject in *The Rocketbelt Caper*. Don't expect to learn a lot of science – but do expect a rollicking, rip-roaring tale.

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### **Ian says**

A really good, short history book on all sorts of different aerial pioneers. From the dawn of aviation all the way up to modern times with Burt Rutan's Voyager, Rossy "Rocketman" and BASE jumper Corliss. It is interesting that the only WW1 representative was Canadian Ray Collishaw and his Black Maria Sopwith ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raymond\\_...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raymond_...)).

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### **Hannah Burton says**

From ballooning to base jumping, David Darling explores some of the most amazing aeronautical exploits in the history of flight. Whether you have a previous interest in this subject or not, the fourteen different chapters race through such wonderful and fantastical stories that it is hard not to be impressed and drawn in by the many astonishing characters. Darling's style is refreshingly stylish, engaging and humorous (on a subject that could easily become dry) making it a fun and readable book.

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### **iain meek says**

Amusing if you like aircraft.

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### **Linda Smatzny says**

This book is to be a gift so this review is about the book not so much the contents. The book has fourteen adventures. Each chapter has either drawings or photos(all black and white) to illustrate the people and the flying devise involved. It goes from the late 1700's up to the present time.

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### **Austin Frihart says**

Mayday! A History of Flight Through Its Martyrs, Oddballs and Daredevils by David Darling is a book unlike any other one I have read before. It doesn't focus on one main character, and instead each chapter focuses on the life of a person who made important contributions to the study of aviation. The people range from hot air balloon makers in Paris during the 1700s to parachutists who completed remarkable stunts during the 2000s, and everything in between. The best way to describe this book would be that it is a humorous and informative summary of some of the greatest aviators in history.

Due to the constant changing of characters, it's not easy to outline the plot of the book. Each chapter somewhat follows the same progression. The chapters usually start with the early life of the person, and then move to what they accomplished during their lives, how they died will usually follow, and then their legacy

will often be presented. Due to the dangerous nature of flying before and during the early 1900s, many people from that time period who are featured in the book died in an aviation related accident.

I think that the purpose of writing a book like this that has a different set of characters in each chapter is to demonstrate the diverse field of aviation. Most of the people in this book are famous for different things, such as wing-walking and testing rapid deceleration. The people in this book are best described as daring, brave, and adventurous, because they pushed the limits of what their aircraft and bodies could do, and the field of aviation is much safer because of them. Not only did the author present a compiled book about the history of aviation, but he also incorporated humor into the book. My favorite moment while reading had nothing to do with the actual story of the book. It was actually an inside joke that the author placed into the text, a joke only meant to be understood by people who know a lot about aviation. The passage in question was talking about John Stapp, who subjected himself to harsh conditions in order to study the effects of those conditions on a human. For one test, he flew in an unpressurized and unheated plane at high altitude, in "conditions even Ryanair passengers wouldn't tolerate" (Darling 82). Just as a brief explanation, Ryanair is often said to have terrible passenger conditions, from bad seats to regular hard landings, and they are often described as one of the worst airlines. This book is full of other jokes and funny moments like that. Anyone who enjoys reading about airplanes and flying should read this book, because it's educational in an entertaining way. The only criticism I have about this book is that it should be longer and include more influential aviators.

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### **Karina Lites says**

When I found The Rocket Man at my local library, I glanced at the cover, decided it "looked interesting" then tossed it into a pile of miscellaneous non-fiction I had picked out the same way.

After reading the book I am so thankful for that passing moment. While reading The Rocket Man I was introduced to so many historical flyers that my elementary classes never taught me about. Rocket man gave me a new appreciation for the development of flight over the years. The style it's written in made me feel like I was reading many short stories, instead of a small novel. The facts were clear and concise. I often found myself tapping the arm of whoever was sitting near me and saying "This is so interesting!" Or "Check this out!" Then I would proceed to read aloud a paragraph or two from the book. If you are interested in history, non-fiction or simply fascinating stories about people's lives and want a quick read, I would definitely recommend this book.

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