

# BLÉRIOT XI

## THE CHANNEL CROSSER

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AND HIS LITTLE  
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'England's isolation has ended once and for all.' So wrote one English newspaper the day after Louis Blériot flew across the English Channel from France. The French aviation pioneer, in his modified type XI monoplane, took off from Les Baraques, near Calais, at 4.41 am on July 25, 1909 and landed at 5.17 am in Northfall Meadow, near Dover. He had flown almost 24 miles (38.6 km), almost entirely over water, in a fragile plane powered by a weak and unreliable engine. This daring exploit made Louis Blériot famous as a pilot and as a designer and builder of aircraft. His type XI established the classic formula of the tractor monoplane, a formula that remained unchanged until the start of the First World War.

The Blériot XI made its debut at the Paris *Salon de l'Automobile et de l'Aéronautique* in December 1908, in the aeronautical section, along with two other Blériot planes: the type IX (another tractor monoplane) and the type X (a pusher biplane). But these latter two models never flew, although the Blériot IX managed to make a few 'hops' in the following January and February. But the third plane, the XI, was another story. It made its first flight at Issy on January 23, 1909, and was clearly an efficient, if still not perfect, aircraft.

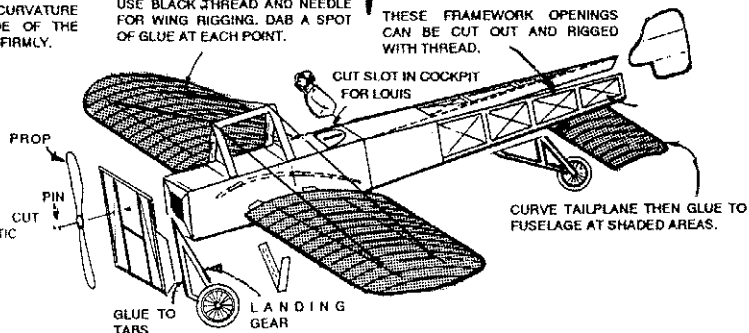
Raymond Saulnier made a fundamental contribution to the plane's design. The plane was first equipped with a 30-hp REP engine, which drove a four-bladed metal propeller. During testing, however, the engine was replaced by a 22/25-hp Anzani, and a Chauvière two-bladed propeller was installed. Other changes involved the control system: the rudder was enlarged, while the elevons at the outer ends of the tailplane were made to function only as elevators. Their lat-

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eral function was taken over entirely by warping the trailing edges of the wings. This modified Blériot XI gave excellent performance. Between May 27 and the historic Channel crossing, Louis Blériot made some remarkable flights at Issy and Toury; the best was on July 4, a flight lasting 50 minutes 8 seconds.

Blériot was already thinking about flying across the Channel. In October 1908, the London *Daily Mail* had offered a prize of £1,000 to the first aviator to cross the Channel in either direction. Blériot's exploit was preceded by the unsuccessful attempt of another aviation pioneer, Hubert Latham. Latham flew a stronger and heavier plane, the Antoinette IV, powered by a 50-hp Antoinette engine, considered the best engine of its time. Latham took off from Sangatte (Calais) on July 19, but after less than 8 miles (12.9 km), the engine broke down and he was forced down on the water. Pilot and plane were picked up by a French destroyer.

The Blériot XI had an outstanding career. Apart from its sporting activities, it was also the first plane sold to the French Army and the first to serve during military operations. It was flown by Captain Carlo Piazza on October 23, 1911, during the Italo-Turkish War.

The type was used quite extensively by the French and British in the 1914-15 period.

**Aircraft: Blériot XI**  
**Manufacturer: Louis Blériot**  
**Year: 1909**  
**Engine: Anzani 3-cylinder radial, 22-25 hp**  
**Wingspan: 25 ft 7 in (7.8 m)**  
**Length: 26 ft 3 in (8 m)**  
**Height: 8 ft 6.5 in (2.6 m)**  
**Wing area: 150.7 sq ft (14 sq m)**  
**Weight: 661 lbs (300 kg)**  
**Speed: 36 mph (58 kph)**  
**Frame: ash, bamboo, steel tube**  
**Covering: rubberized fabric**

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