

Countries too dangerous to fly over in Great Air Race 2018: Dick Smith proposed air race too dangerous

Jocelyn Airth, The Sunday Telegraph

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It was a daring ask — fly a monstrous 18,000km from London to Darwin in under 30 days — for a life-changing £10,000 prize.

Six aviation enthusiasts — all war veterans — took up the “impossible” challenge by Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes in 1919 knowing no aircraft had flown farther than 5000km.

The world watched as competitors who took part in the Great Air Race crash-landed in Bali, plunged to their deaths in Corfu, or found themselves imprisoned in Yugoslavia.



Brothers Ross and Keith Smith, flanked by mechanics Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett, became the first Australians to fly from England to Australia in less than 30 days. Picture: South Australian Aviation Museum.

Brothers Ross and Keith Smith took off in their Vickers Vimy G-EAOU twin-engine plane at 9.05am on November 12 from the Hounslow Airfield in England. with Sergeants Wally Shiers and James Bennett on-board as co-mechanics.

They flew through Lyon, Rome, Cairo, Damascus, Basra, Karachi, Delhi, Calcutta, Akyab, Rangoon, Singora, Singapore, Batavia and Surabaya with nine additional unscheduled stops before finally reaching Darwin on December 10. They were the first team to successfully make the flight and claimed the prizemoney.

To celebrate 100 years since the Smith brothers’ historic flight, businessman Dick Smith AC proposed a recreation of The Great Air Race, showcasing 100 years of innovation in aerospace technology.

Pilots, engineers, mechanics and aviation enthusiasts around the world will come together to compete in the 2019 Centenary E-Race.

With low pollution, electrically powered, innovative and fuel-efficient aircraft on display, the event will promote a new era of sustainable aviation.

Inspire Strategic Solutions director Craig Sheridan has been working closely with the NT government, NT Major Events Company, federal government and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to recreate the event as authentically as possible.



Dick Smith wants to recreate the Great Air Race next year. Picture: Hollie Adams

“We were able to get very close to the original Great Air Race route,” Mr Sheridan told The Sunday Telegraph.

“The original route went through Syria and Iraq, and we obviously can’t go through war zones. So instead we’re circumnavigating through Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and back up through Pakistan and India.”



Pilot Michael Coates will compete in next year's Great Air Race from London to Darwin to mark 100 years since the first race. Picture: Liam Kidston.

Mr Sheridan said the event will replicate a full service Tour de France race model, with pilots completing stages throughout the course.

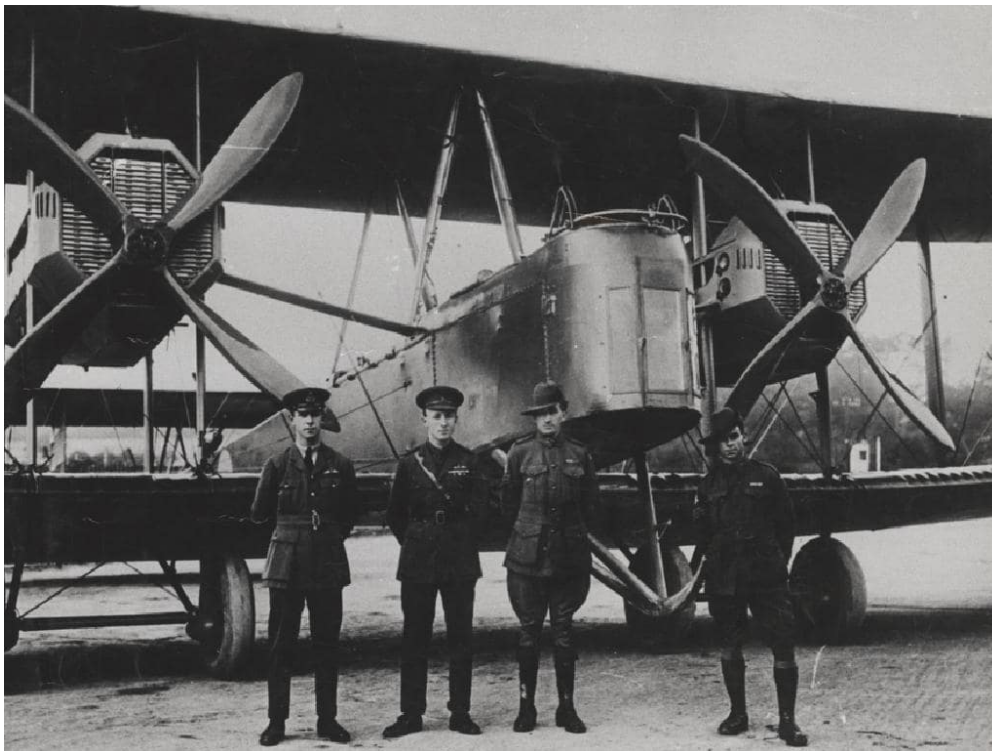
Seasoned Australian pilot Michael Coates is hoping to take out the E-Race's "Efficiency" class.

"I'm looking forward to the race. Everyday will be an adventure," Mr Coates said.

"It's always been a dream of mine to participate in a reproduction of an old air event."

The three-time NASA Centennial Challenge winner has competed in aviation events around the world.

In his successful 30-year aviation career, Mr Coates has been waiting for the chance to fly the exciting route presented by the E-Race.



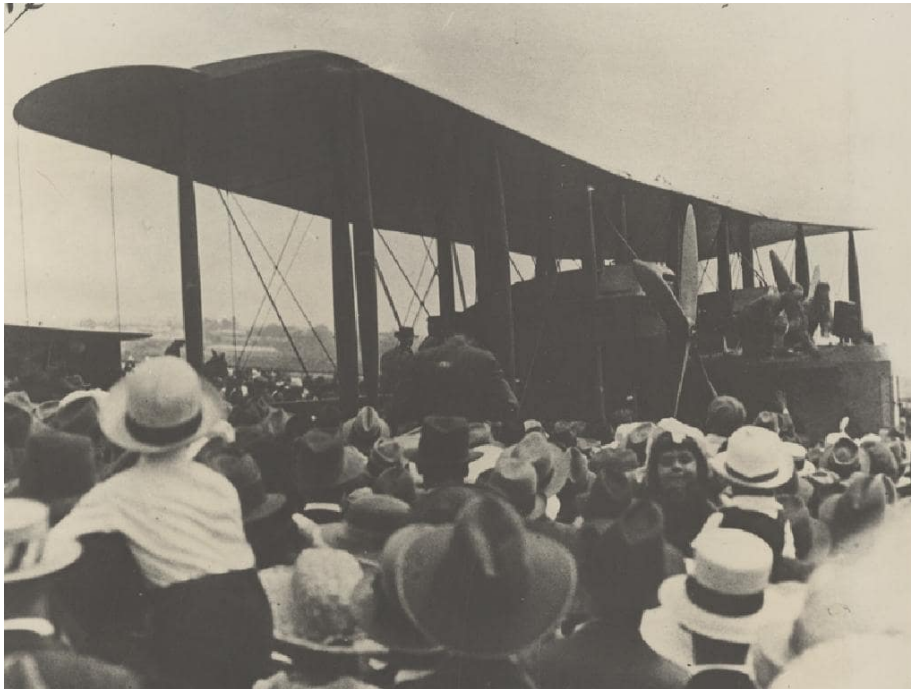
Ross and Keith Smith, James Bennett and Walter Shiers with the Vickers Vimy.

“Some of these countries are hard to fly through. It’s expensive and hard to get permits in places with restrictive airspaces, like Saudi Arabia,” the Gold Coast-based pilot said.

Mr Coates expects the race to be challenging and will fly a light two-seater Pipistrelle aircraft, known for its speed and fuel efficiency.

“Big flights can be emotionally demanding. It will require a lot of concentration, multi-tasking and navigation. Also being aware of other aircraft, weather and birds,” Mr Coates revealed.

“In a small two-seater aircraft, you can’t fly high enough to go over the weather and you don’t have a weather radar.”



Ross and Keith Smith arriving at Darwin December 10, 1919. Image: State Library of South Australia

For Mr Coates, the Centenary E-Race represents more than competition — he believes the event will highlight the innovation and determination of the aviation industry.

“It’s been 100 years since the first flight from London to Darwin, and we’ve had people on the moon, we’ve had flights to Mars,” he said.

“We’re not sitting back, we keep challenging ourselves.”