



Amy Johnson

Amy Johnson was born in 1903. She grew up to become one of the most influential pilots of the twentieth century.

Johnson spent her early years in Hull. She was the eldest of four sisters. She studied at Sheffield University before moving to London. She worked as a typist for a while and seemed happy enough. One day, she had nothing to do and boarded a bus for the Stag Lane Aerodrome in London. When she arrived, she watched planes taking off and landing. The image stirred something inside her. Johnson began spending more and more time at the aerodrome. Little did she know that she would soon be emulating the flights of those adventurous pilots.

Even though Amelia Earhart was breaking records in America, most pilots in Britain were from the wealthy upper-classes. Most were men. Amy had to rely on her father's money to take flying lessons. She gained her pilot's license in 1929.

Amy Johnson set off on her first record-breaking flight in 1930. She aimed to become the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia. She took off on the 5th of May flying a second-hand plane which she named 'Jason'. She had no radio link to people on the ground and had to guess at the weather. Before then, Johnson's longest flight had been from London to Hull.

Even though her trip was meticulously planned, the Daily Mail were more concerned with her being a woman. They announced that she had set off with a "Cupboard full of frocks". It would take many years for some to accept that female pilots were just as capable as men.

The route that Johnson took to Australia was incredibly daring. Most pilots flew well-charted flight paths that took them over safe areas. Amy decided to take the most direct route. She laid a ruler on a map and used that to draw a straight line from England to Australia. This took her over inhospitable and uncharted terrain. She had to fly for eight hours at a time to make sure she reached her refuelling stops.

Amy Johnson reached India in 6 days. This was a new record. She managed this despite having to stop in Iraq during a sandstorm. She faced her biggest challenge when she reached Burma (now known as Myanmar). A monsoon ripped a hole in one of the wings and damaged the propeller. Local engineers repaired the wings with old shirts. The delay meant that Johnson couldn't break the record for the fastest flight to Australia.

Johnson landed safely in Australia on the 24th of May. She became the first female to complete the

journey.

Amy Johnson went on to set multiple aviation records. She set speed records to Japan and Moscow and from London to Cape Town. Amy and her husband moved to America in 1933.



The Second World War gave Johnson a new challenge. She joined the Air Transport Auxiliary to help move planes around the country. In 1941, Johnson set out to deliver an aircraft from Blackpool to Oxford. Somewhere along the way, she got lost and abandoned her plane at sea. She was never seen again.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find a word in the text that tells you Amy Johnson was an important pilot.
2. What does the word “eldest” tell you about Amy and her sisters?
3. Find and copy a phrase that tells you what impact watching the planes at the aerodrome had on Johnson.
4. Find a word or phrase in the text that suggests Johnson wouldn’t have got a pilot’s license without her father.
5. Which word tells you that Johnson had carefully planned her record-breaking journey in detail?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

In which year did Johnson get her pilot’s license?

I

Why did the Daily Mail say Johnson had taken a “cupboard full of frocks”?

P

How do you think Johnson felt when she couldn’t break the record for fastest flight to Australia?

S

What were the challenges that Johnson faced on the trip to Australia?

R

Who did Amy Johnson move to America with?

Answers:

1. Influential
2. She was older than the others
3. The image stirred something inside her
4. Rely on her father's money
5. Meticulously

R: 1929

I: Because she was a woman

P: Accept answers that recognise the frustration at the weather but also pride in being the first woman to complete the journey

S: She had no radio contact and had to guess at the weather. She flew into a sandstorm and a monsoon broke her plane.

R: Her husband