

Louis Breguet

BREGUET'S MONSTERS

THE BREGUET TYPE XX, XXI AND XXII LÉVIATHAN SERIES

During 1920–26 French designer Louis Breguet developed a series of large airliners powered by an ambitious powerplant concept incorporating coupled engines driving a single propeller. **JEAN-CHRISTOPHE CARBONEL** details the origin and evolution of an innovative idea that was simply too far ahead of the available technology

“These high-powered machines will carry far away — even beyond the oceans — the famous name of Breguet, flagships of superior French aviation . . .”

RIGHT Louis Breguet, great-great-grandson of the famous horologist Abraham-Louis Breguet, was born in Paris on January 2, 1880, and completed his first fixed-wing aircraft in 1909. A pioneer in the construction of metal aircraft, Breguet designed his eponymous company's ubiquitous Type XIV general-purpose biplane.

MAIN PICTURE The sole Breguet Type XXII, F-ESBI, in September 1923, with its Lorraine-Dietrich push-pull-configured engines attached to interplane struts. This was in contrast to the Type XXI, which incorporated a coupled Breguet-Bugatti engine driving a single propeller.

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THIS IS A STORY from a century ago — the immediate post-Great War years. Between 1920 and 1926 the press became very excited about a series of giant flying machines conceived by French aircraft designer Louis Breguet. Aviation had come of age during the First World War, but it was still subject to the limited performance of the engines then available. The latter's low power and poor reliability presented a severe handicap for prospective airliners, limiting the number of passengers that could be carried and aircraft range, thus stifling the feasibility of developing profitable airliners.

Breguet had a potential solution to these problems, namely “the realisation of high-power propulsion units through the individual coupling of [a] group of engines on to a single axle transmitting the power from the associated engines to a single propeller. This [will] enable the construction of large transport aircraft, propelled by a single central propeller, itself powered without possible mishap, by a propulsion unit easily controlled and maintained throughout the flight by a mechanic in an engine room. These high-powered machines, which will never suffer any forced landing, will carry far away — even beyond the oceans — the famous name of Breguet, flagships of superior French aviation”. This emphatic declaration was to be proven — or not — by a series of aircraft named *Léviathan*, after a huge sea monster from religious mythology.

Breguet's multi-powerplant configuration was initially

