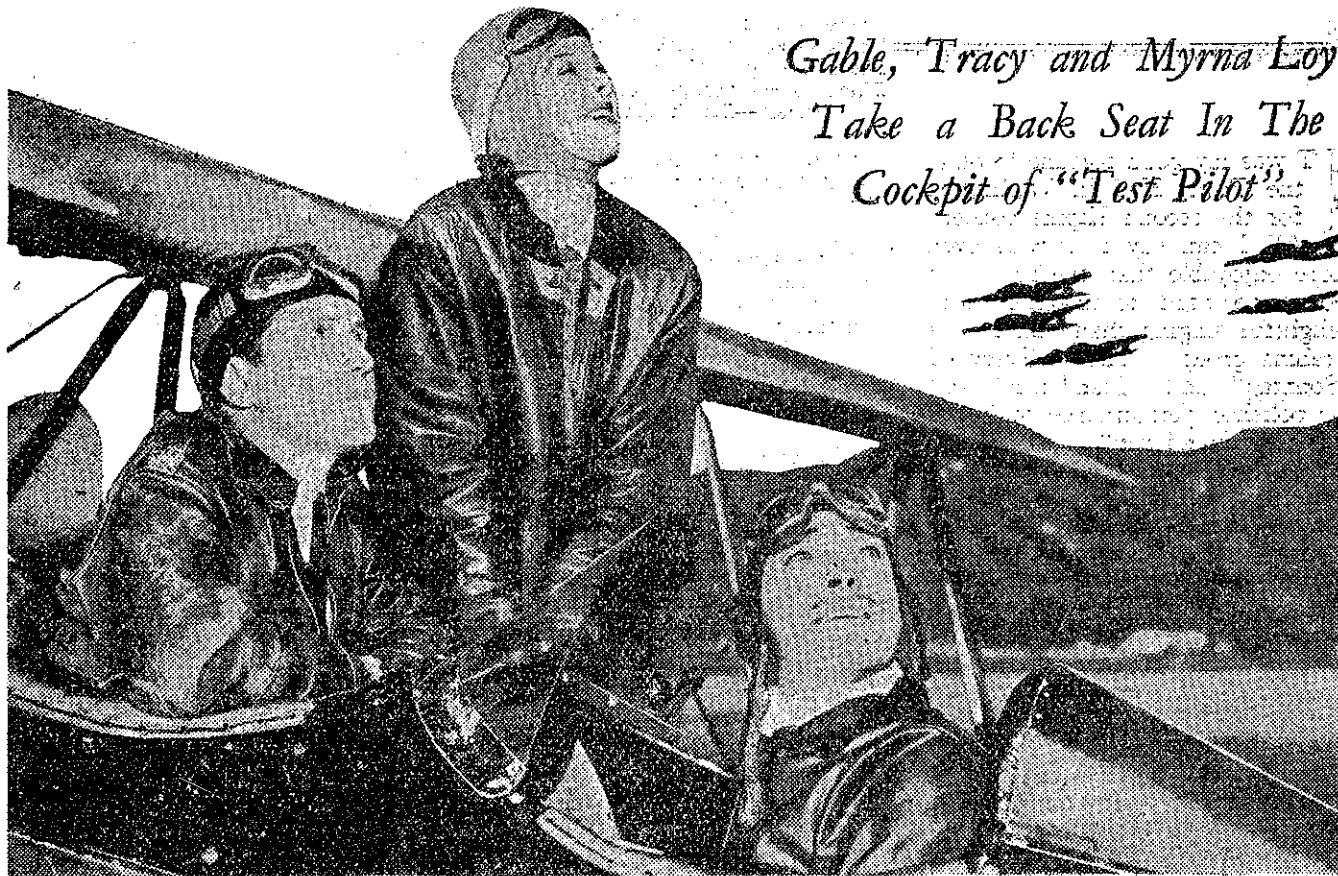


Film Record—by Gordon Mirama

PLANES ABOVE THE STARS

*Gable, Tracy and Myrna Loy
Take a Back Seat In The
Cockpit of "Test Pilot"*



["Test Pilot," M-G-M, directed by Victor Fleming, starring Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, Spencer Tracy. For immediate release, Wellington and Auckland.]



A Good Bet.

EIGHT years ago, the film industry gave us "Wings," and nearly tore our hearts out with Hollywood's version of gay living and gallant dying in the high, romantic clouds. Then followed a few more films in the "Wings" tradition, good of their kind, but all in the same heroic pattern. Still later came dozens of "quickies," in which aviation was no more than the lurid background for stories of courage, love and loyalties. Here, Hollywood was using the air to suit its own melodramatic needs—just as, next day, it might be using vast deserts, or stormy sea, or frozen Arctic wastes.

Now, so much later, we have another film in the "Wings" class. M-G-M's "Test Pilot" breaks no new ground, for its emphasis is still on the magazine-story conception of flying and sky-daredevils—all flames and smoke and heroics. Nevertheless, this is a film of aviation in which aviation is not just used as make-

weight atmosphere, but is indissolubly bound with the plot. The planes here are not merely small dark crosses moving oddly on a white screen, with an irritating drone from the back of the theatre. They are fallible, exciting marvels of science, whose uncertain power inevitably affects the minds of the men who fly them.

The Real Stars

THAT is the outstanding quality of "Test Pilot." The real stars (forgive me, Messrs. M., G. and M.) are not Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy and Myrna Loy. They are the machines themselves—the dark night-beetle with two bright eyes finding its way through stormclouds and gale; the crazy inventor's plane that burst forth into black smoke in the air race; the dead plane that fell like a stone, its wings peeling off; the five-engined bomber that flamed a track through the trees.

These are the real stars of the picture—the stars which work you up to an almost painful tensiety of excitement, and which make the emotional reactions of the human players understandable.

Waiting To Die

ACTUALLY, of course, even test pilots—the men who do the risky work of first testing new aeroplane designs and adjustments in the air—do not live at quite so high a pitch as M-G-M would like you to think. But

Director Victor Fleming uses his planes with such terrifying effect that you are given few moments of relaxation to remember that his picture, after all, is only melodrama. The whole film is played at an hysterical pace that is in tune with the roar of the machines.

There, perhaps, is the picture's main fault. The atmosphere throughout is too emotional, too highly-strung to be consistently convincing. While this film stays in the air it is well-nigh perfect, but on the ground there are patches where the human drama is blanketed by dialogue that is somehow too pregnant with meaning to be altogether natural.

And yet it is remarkable what a lot has been made of inherently simple incidents and conversations. Of the people who see "Test Pilot," I think that there will be hardly one who is not swept into understanding of the nerve-strained, fatalistic attitude of the stunt flier—the Hollywood flier admittedly—who lives desperately for the moment because the next moment may bring his death; and of the agony of uncertain fears which must be suffered by those who love the stunt flier, and who can do nothing but wait for him to die.

Gable's Zest

OF the cast, Clark Gable—a shade more robust and carnally virile even than usual—has only to be himself to make the character of the test pilot convincing. Despite the rather forced, stiff-upper-lip manner of some of his dialogue, there is zest and sincerity in