

Future Today

HOW VITAL IT IS TO CHECK THE FACTS

Susanne, Pierre and their three children were running late this morning. After enjoying the coastal metropolis of Rio de Janeiro for the last five days, the family were now on their way to Sao Paulo which was the next stop on their tour of Latin America. Unfortunately, their taxi was late and the rush hour had already started. Would they still make it to the airport in time?

Even though the passengers were nervous and impatient, the taxi driver seemed to enjoy entertaining his foreign guests. "Ah, you are from France and want to go to Santos Dumont Airport? That's a great airport and this Santos Dumont was a real Brazilian hero. **Did you know that Santos was the first person in the world to fly an airplane? We Brazilians invented flying.**" He laughed and was obviously proud of this, while Pierre and Susanne frowned.

"Nonsense, Susanne thought," but she didn't want to risk unnecessary discussion with the man who had it in his hands whether or not she would still catch her flight. Unfortunately, her husband had come to a different conclusion. Pierre laughed briefly and replied to the taxi driver. "You mean Santos Dumont was the first person to fly in Brazil, right?"

The taxi driver shook his head vigorously and almost rammed the vehicle in front of them. "No, no Senior," he said, already a little annoyed: "Santos was the first person in the world to fly and if you don't believe me, I'll drive you straight to the nearby museum to prove it to you."

This was the cue that Pierre also understood and after a serious look from his wife, he decided to leave the subject alone and agree with the taxi driver. Shortly afterwards they arrived at Santos Dumont airport and although Pierre's tip was very generous, the taxi driver still seemed offended that his story was not immediately believed.

A little later the family were on the plane when their eldest son Philipp enquired about the argument in the taxi. Pierre explained the situation to him and said: "It is widely accepted **common knowledge that the Wright brothers were the first to fly a motorized aircraft.** That was in 1903 and their flight only lasted a few seconds, but it was the starting point for a development that continues today." Philipp nodded and seemed to turn back to his iPhone when he suddenly looked up and said: "**Dad, I don't think you're quite right about the Wright brothers.** There's something interesting on Wikipedia about this Santos Dumont".

The son continued "It's a very exciting fact, Dad. **In fact, on 23 October 1906, Alberto Santos-Dumont made the first powered flight** in front of the Aéro-Club de France and won the prize money of 3,500 francs. **At the time, he was considered the first person to accomplish this.** Only then the Wright brothers began to claim to have completed the first powered flight three years earlier on 17 December 1903, albeit 'behind closed doors'. As a result it was not until the end of the 1940s that they were considered to be the first people to succeed in doing so."

Even on the website of the German Patent and Trademark Office, the question of who actually made the first powered flight is explicitly addressed. Apparently, other aviation pioneers are also considered, such as the German-American Gustav Weißkopf, Richard Pearse from New Zealand, Clement Ader from France or Karl Jatho from Germany.

But at least the fact remains, however, that Alberto Santo-Dumont was the first to have his flight officially confirmed. So it seems absolutely okay to honour him by naming an airport after him.



"Pierre suddenly felt a little uncomfortable and thought of the taxi driver who had rightly been annoyed by him and his know-it-all attitude.

Just as the realisation that the first documented powered flight in aviation history can be attributed to the Brazilian aviation pioneer Alberto Santos-Dumont who, like his achievements, has been unjustly and largely forgotten today outside of Brazil. **It is always important to check your facts.**

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