

Orthon Hoover's "Bichinho"

written by Gary Kuhn | May 29, 2023



The airshow held in November 1949 at Florida, a small city in central Uruguay, compares to those held today in other lands, where prosperity permits a fascinating variety of aircraft to appear. The years around 1950 were "golden" — as those of greatest importation of aircraft into Uruguay. Likewise, nearby Argentina was beginning an era in which many and varied types of planes were imported from the dozens of postwar manufacturers in the United States and Europe. The photograph seen above, taken by Hugo Walter Souto, highlights this *fiesta* of flying.

In the background are the twin booms of PP-DRE, the only SECAN Suc-10 Courlis to cross the Atlantic from France. But the truly historic aircraft, also visiting from Brazil, is PP-THH. This prototype was a step in the development of aircraft design in South America's largest nation. It was a creation of Orthon (later simplified as Orton) W. Hoover (d. 1958).

Hoover arrived in Rio de Janeiro from the United States in 1916, as a mechanic and instructor for three Curtiss F flying boats purchased by the Brazilian Navy. He would eventually become Brazilian, but returned briefly to the north when his country of birth entered World War One. Research is needed in the New York state records of the Curtiss factory to discover his role in 1917-18. At war's end, he returned to Brazil, delivering three Curtiss aircraft. Hoover soon became established in Sao Paulo, Brazil's richest and most industrial state. He organized a flying school and helped create an aviation service. This force would oppose the national air force during a three-month uprising in 1932 against control from the capitol, Rio.

Despite defeat, Sao Paulo remained the focal point of Brazil's modernization. In 1931, Orthon Hoover had been among aviation enthusiasts (including the nephew of Alberto Santos-Dumont) founding an aircraft company. It built the forerunner of the only Latin American design ever produced in over 1000 examples — the Paulistinha, named for its state. Then in 1938, Hoover helped the technical research institute create the IPT "Bichinho." PP-THH was a single-seat, fixed gear design, constructed of native wood and powered by a 60 hp Walter engine. Somewhat modified over time, it flew for many years at the Aeroclube de Rio Claro.

By the time of the November 1949 airshow in Uruguay, IPT had built three additional Bichinho prototypes, among other projects designed and constructed. The research institute trained engineers and provided facilities involved in the eventual creation of Embraer. Thus, the sporty Brazilian light weight prototype seen at Florida, where no doubt examples of its Paulistinha distant relatives also provided variety for the visiting enthusiasts, was much more significant than its lack of production status would suggest.