Alberto Santos Dumont: Brazil's Favourite Aviator

Most people have heard of the Wright Brothers, the two Americans generally considered the inventors of the first practical airplane. Few people 30 _____ than Brazilians have heard of Alberto Santos Dumont, another visionary in early aviation.

Santos Dumont was born in 1873 in Minas Gerais, Brazil. When he 31 _____ 18, he was sent to Paris to study astronomy, physics, and mechanics. He became interested in dirigibles, or airships held up by a "lighter-than-air" gas often 32 _____ in a balloon.

Santos Dumont's balloons won many races and prizes, including one in 1901 for circling the Eiffel Tower in less than 30 minutes. Reportedly, Santos Dumont took the 100,000 franc prize and split it 33 _____ his workers and Paris's beggars.

After conquering the skies in lighter-than-air vehicles, Santos Dumont became interested in heavier-than-air vehicles. His 14-BIS plane left the ground on November 12, 1906, to fly 34 _____ a speed of approximately 37 km/h and a height of 6 metres to reach a total distance of 220 metres. This flight demonstrated that a heavier-than-air vehicle could take 35 _____ by its own means.

The Wright Brothers had flown their Flyer I in 1903 with the help of a catapult's launch. The Wright Flyer flew for longer distances at a higher altitude than the 14-BIS. 36 _____, most people consider the Wright Flyer the first practical airplane. Undaunted by this classification, Brazilians still celebrate Santos Dumont as a national hero.

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