



BETTY SKELTON ERDE

Aviator (1926 - 2011)

Known as 'The First Lady of Firsts', Erde was an American racecar driver and an aerobatics pilot who set 17 automobile and aviation records. She earned her commercial pilot license at age 18 and was certified as a flight instructor the next year. Since neither the military nor commercial airlines would accept a female pilot at the time, Erde applied her skills to performing daring tricks in air shows. Her most famous trick was cutting a ribbon strung between two poles with the blade of her propeller, while flying upside down 10 feet off the ground. Erde was vocal about the need for more opportunities for women in aviation, and later in NASA's space programs, despite being laughed at in response.