Henri Giffard Encyclopedia Article

Henri Giffard

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Henri Giffard

1825-1882

French engineer who flew the first practical air-ship. When Giffard first became interested in aeronautics, balloons were the only means to fly, depending on wind for movement and steering. Existing engines were too heavy, so Giffard designed a 3-hp motor that weighed some 90 lbs and installed it on a 144-ft long, torpedo-shaped balloon. He flew the machine successfully at up to 6 mi an hour at the Paris Hippodrome on September 24, 1852, but could not make full turns. He continued working on the problem, but was stricken with blindness and eventually committed suicide.