

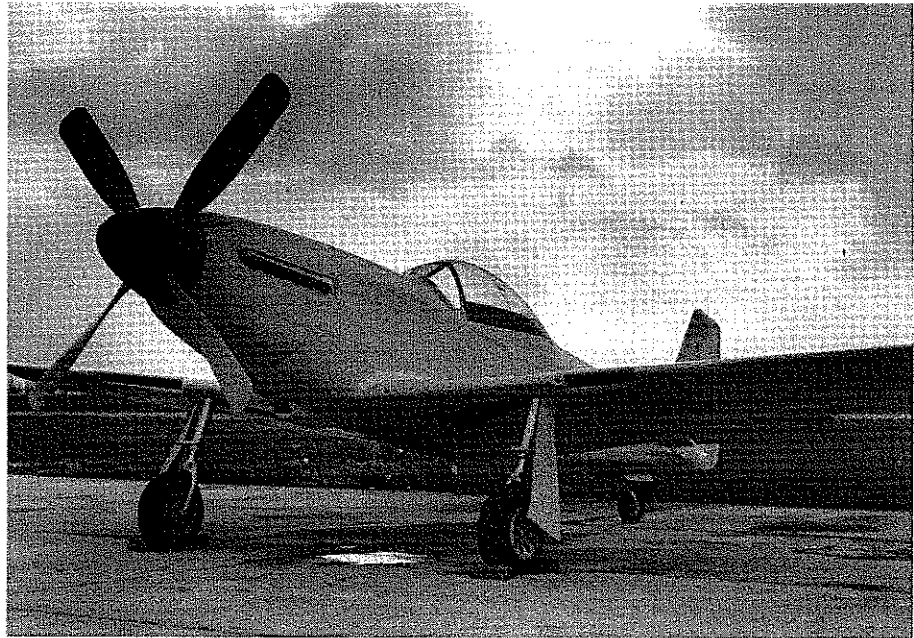
NEAM AIRCRAFT IN PROFILE: ANSON JOHNSON'S RACE "45"

One of the New England Air Museum's (NEAM) most differentiating characteristics is its vast array of rare and historic aircraft. Through its many diverse aircraft, the NEAM can detail the evolution of both the fighter aircraft and the practical helicopter, and can reach back to humankind's first forays into controlled flight. Uniquely so, this museum also displays the wares and engineering genius of such aviation pioneers as Igor Sikorsky, Louis Bleriot, the Granville Brothers, Vincent Burnelli, and Charles Kaman.

One aircraft presently owned by the NEAM that is both rare and historic, is Anson Johnson's North American P-51D Mustang, bureau number 44-72400. That the NEAM owns a Mustang may come as a surprise to many of this museum's newer members, especially since the aircraft has been in storage for the last 28 years.

The NEAM Mustang was owned and flown by airline pilot Anson Johnson. He had been a ferry pilot during WWII. Apparently captivated by the "need for speed," Johnson modified his Mustang over several years, and competed at the National Air Races in Cleveland between 1946-1949. His Mustang was registered as N13Y, and is known to some as "Race 45." In fact, he won the National Air Races in this Mustang in 1948, and was awarded the Thompson Trophy.

As with many of the NEAM's unique and prized aircraft possessions, N13Y was acquired many years ago when this museum was called the Bradley Air Museum. During the Bradley Air Museum's formative years, a visionary group of aviation historians sought out and acquired significant and historic aircraft long before their market value



P-51 minus belly scoop awaits the 1949 Thompson Trophy Race in Cleveland.

and popularity reached the point where they are today. N13Y was acquired by this museum in 1972, partially complete, for \$12,000.

Today, N13Y methodically undergoes a process of detailed and protracted preservation and restoration. Over the last few years, visitors to the NEAM restoration center may have caught a glimpse of N13Y's horizontal stabilizer, left main wing, propeller spinner, or bubble canopy. And those few visitors to the NEAM storage building may have seen the graceful lines of its slender fuselage resting quietly alongside its younger sibling, the North American F-86 Sabre. On display in the Civilian Hangar, is N13Y's modified Hamilton-Standard propeller.

While N13Y's presence within the NEAM collection is relatively low-profile, this aircraft continues to receive periodic commentary and review in various aviation publications. These literary references include a detailed historical account of its racing days, entitled "The Saga of N13Y," which was pub-

lished in 1972 in the AAHS Journal. Some 20 years later, in 1992, Dustin Carter's definitive book on Unlimited air racing Mustangs, entitled *MUSTANG: The Racing Thoroughbred*, devotes an entire half-chapter to N13Y, with the balance of the chapter written about the late Dave Zeuschel's highly modified P-51 known as Stilleto.

More recently, a rare color photograph of N13Y appeared in the February, 2000 issue of *FlyPast* magazine, in an article entitled "Big Iron," which reviewed warbirds flown during the post-war period at the Cleveland Air Races. Then in the April 2000, the *PacificFlyer* magazine, published a story exclusively about N13Y. (This article appears with the author's permission below.)

But perhaps the most comprehensive article ever written about N13Y, has just appeared in May 2000 on the internet at a website called www.warbirdaeropress.com. Typically, most air racing historians group N13Y into the set of 1928-

1949 Cleveland air racers, since they all competed for the Thompson Trophy. In contrast, airline pilot and Unlimited Class air racing historian Scott Germain chose to consider N13Y within the more contemporary context of the Unlimited Class air racers that currently fly at Reno. In researching his work on Race 45, Scott visited the NEAM to interview the N13Y restoration team. His website article also includes a few photographs of Race 45 that have never been previously published.

At present, the NEAM is appropriately focusing most of its restoration building space and resources on the TB-29A project. Accordingly, work on N13Y has shifted from large airframe components to link-

ages, internal systems, and cockpit and fuselage assemblies. At such time as the B-29 leaves the restoration building, work will resume on the larger airframe structures of N13Y. The NEAM Mustang rebuild project enjoys the support of the Museum's Director, who negotiated the acquisition of missing Mustang parts, including a rare V-1650-224.

The restoration team on N13Y is small, talented, and certainly dedicated, and is comprised of Don Chouinard, Dave Isner, and Tom Palshaw. It is important to note that the preservation and restoration progress being made on N13Y is not measured by speed, but rather in work that is performed expertly and correctly irrespective of time. Work

on N13Y will continue for a number of years. But when N13Y is completed, it will join the NEAM's collection of air racers as one of the NEAM's finest preservation and restoration efforts. 57

What follows next is the full text of Chuck Stewart's article on N13Y which recently appeared in the PacificFlyer magazine, including the two photos which also appeared in that article. Should any NEAM member choose to read more about N13Y, it is suggested they log on to Scott Germain's website and, as Scott chooses to say, Fly Safely—and Fast! ✈

This article was written by David Isner, Museum Board member, volunteer, and member of the P-51 restoration Team.

NEW ENGLAND AIR MUSEUM RESTORING 1948 THOMPSON TROPHY WINNER

By *Chuck Stewart*

One of the oldest Unlimited air racers around, a P-51D that won the 1948 Thompson Trophy Race, is being restored by the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, Conn. The P-51, which first raced in the Cleveland National Air Races in 1946, will be in its '49 Thompson Race configuration upon completion. It will be displayed in the museum's National Air Race exhibit alongside a 1930 Laird Solution and a replica Gee Bee R-1.

CHEQUERED PAST

One of the few D-Model Mustangs surplused right after the war (most continued flying with the Air Force and Guard,) 44-72400 was purchased in July 1946 by Woody Edmundson for \$3,500. Registered N13Y, it flew in the '46 Thompson Trophy Race in stock configuration, taking seventh place.

N13Y returned to Cleveland in 1947 with its first speed mod (two feet cut from each wing) and a new owner: Anson Johnson, an airline

pilot from Tennessee. Johnson's debut flopped when the plane blew an engine in the Kendall Trophy Race that preceded the Thompson. Johnson was back in '48 and this time, he stripped more than 1,000 pounds from the plane, knocking the empty weight to 5,700 lbs. He also replaced the Mustang's stock Merlin with a lighter, 1,620-hp Packard-built V-1650-25 rigged with a home-made water-injection system.

Johnson qualified for the '48 Thompson with a speed of 398.6 mph, making #45 the fastest Mustang to date. But his hoped dimmed when Chuck Brown set a new qualifying record of 418 mph in a Bell P-39 and two of Cook Cleland's F2G Corsairs qualified at more than 400 mph.

Despite the odds being against him, Johnson lucked out when the P-39 and both Corsairs developed engine problems and had to quit the race. Johnson moved from fourth place to first place and won with a speed of 383.8 mph.

EVEN MORE MODS

Even though he won, Johnson knew he had to do something radical to make #45 a contender in 1949. His employer, National Airlines, offered the services of its chief engineer and several mechanics to help.

Armed with \$15,000 prize money from his '48 win, they started taking things off the plane to reduce drag. The first to go was the Mustang's hallmark belly scoop and coolant radiators, which were relocated to the wings outboard of the landing gear wells. Johnson also cut the stock Hamilton-Standard prop from 11 feet in diameter to 10 and installed a hydraulic accumulator from a DC-4 to speed retraction of the main gear.

When rookie racer Bill Odom crashed in Jacqueline Cochran's radically modified P-51C "Beguine" at the start of the '49 Thompson, it was Johnson versus Cleland's Corsairs. Johnson was holding his

Continued on page 6