

North American P-51D Mustang

1944



General History

One of the Best

Historians will continue to debate which fighter was the best of World War II, but one of the finalists will always be the *Mustang*. With the ability to fly long distances and escort heavy bombers at high altitudes, the P-51 was equal to or better than almost every enemy fighter it encountered along the way. With speed, power and maneuverability, the *Mustang* was one of the greatest piston engine fighters ever created.

Fast from the start, the *Mustang* went from drawing board to flying machine in just 117 days. The plane was originally meant for service with the British Royal Air Force, and was powered with an Allison engine. In tests, it even outperformed the great *Spitfire*. But the P-51's real success came with U.S. forces and a Packard *Merlin* engine. It was flown in Europe and the Pacific, and after World War II the P-51 (redesignated F-51) flew more missions in Korea. When asked about the *Mustang*, one pilot summed it up, "It was elegantly simple and simply elegant."

Mustang's Soft Underbelly

The distinctive scoop under the *Mustang's* wings houses a radiator. P-51s have liquid-cooled engines, and if the *Mustang* had an Achilles Heel, this was it. Many fighters used air for cooling their big, round, radial engines. Air-cooled engines could absorb damage and keep flying. But the *Mustang's* liquid-cooled engine, packed into a sleek, pointed nose, gave it the ability to fly fast and far. As a result, if a *Mustang* suffered damage to a cooling system hose or reservoir, the pilot's fabulous flying machine became a "winged brick" faster than he could mutter "Mayday."

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About This Aircraft

Evergreen's *Mustang* was built in Inglewood, California, and delivered to the U.S. Army Air Force as serial number 44-63576. It flew for only a few hours with the 3rd Air Force in training units before becoming surplus. Purchased for \$3,500 from the government on June 29, 1946, the plane flew in that year's National Air Races in Cleveland. With North American test pilot George Welch in the cockpit, this *Mustang* was named Jay Dee and carried race number 37 on the rear fuselage. Later, in the Thompson Trophy competition, the plane began to trail white smoke from its overworked engine during the second lap and pulled out of the race.

Through 1949, this *Mustang* flew in national speed races, placing fifth (at 373.437 miles per hour) in its final appearance in 1949's Sohio Trophy Race. The *Mustang* then went into storage and finally reemerged in 1974. Passed through various owners, the plane was owned by Max Ramsay in 1977, who discovered that this *Mustang* had less than 400 hours flying time. It was then fully restored, a project that took nearly ten years. Evergreen acquired the plane in 1986, and it quickly became a favorite flying machine of then twenty-year-old museum founder, Captain Michael King Smith.



Specifications

Type:	Fighter Aircraft
First Flight:	NA-73X on October 26, 1940
Wingspan:	37 feet
Length:	32 feet 3 inches
Height:	13 feet 8 inches
Wing Area:	233 square feet
Weight, Empty:	7,012 pounds
Weight, Loaded:	12,500 pounds
Power:	One Rolls-Royce <i>Merlin</i> 724-1C 1,760 horsepower engine
Normal Crew:	One
Typical Armament:	Six .50 caliber machine guns; 2,000 pound bomb load

Performance

Cruise Speed:	362 miles per hour
Top Speed:	437 miles per hour at 25,000 feet (505 miles per hour maximum dive speed)
Range:	950 miles
Service Ceiling:	41,900 feet