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## Fly a Warbird

It's a fantasy as old as Snoopy dreaming of gunning down the Red Baron from the cockpit of his doghouse-cum-Sopwith Camel. But, save for joining an air force, the closest most of us get to flying a fighter plane is on a simulator. But now there's a path to such glory through flight schools that specialize in old-fashioned dogfighting—without the weaponry, of course.

The fighter of choice is the WWII era P-51 Mustang. So prepare to spend a few days at Stallion 51 in Kissimmee, Florida, the fighter training school. "Virtually all I've done for the last 29 years is fly the Mustang," says Stallion 51 owner and chief pilot Lee Lauderback. Lauderback owns two special Mustangs: TF-51s, two of only 10 Mustang pilot trainers outfitted with two seats and two sets of controls, built specially for the Air Force. "If you can fly the Mustang, you've got the majority of the fighter handling qualities captured," he explains. "If you can fly the Mustang, you can fly the Spitfire." Or the Corsair or the Thunderbolt or any rare old airplane with one seat and a huge engine. And Lauderback, who has logged 9,000 hours in the Mustang—more than any pilot in the world—says it takes the average private pilot just 10 to 12 hours to master the machine. We're talking real stick-and-rudder stuff here: aerobatics, advanced maneuvers, landings, and other stuff that has nothing to do

with autopilots and navigational computers. The course is not just for new warbird owners, either. Stallion 51 has trained corporate pilots who have thousands of hours flying corporate jets—but who've never flown upside-down in their lives. "Once you get them out of that box most don't have the skill set to recover that airplane," he says. And he offers orientation flights, and the bragging rights of having flown a Mustang.

Buying into the hobby can run you some serious cash. Today's antique warbird collector will happily fork over \$2.2 million for a sleek, 70-year-old, P-51 Mustang fighter plane—which comes with a top speed around 450 mph and a guarantee to generate palpable envy from your friends (and rivals). And according to the Federal Aviation Administration, if you're pilot enough to handle a slow and steady 230-horsepower Cessna 180 with room to take the whole family out for a ride, you can handle one of these single-seat, 1,500-horse World War II fighter planes. "It's absolutely insane what you don't need to do," says Simon Brown of Platinum Fighter Sales, the world's leading dealer in the Greatest Generation's good used fighters. But here's the kick: "Your insurance company is not going to certify you," Brown says.

Visit [stallion51.com](http://stallion51.com) and [platinumfighters.com](http://platinumfighters.com)

—Phil Scott