

WARBIRDS

WORLDWIDE



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As I strapped into the dual control TF51 in the winter sunshine at Kissimmee, Florida several things flashed through my mind. My lust affair with the P-51 began in 1970 and I've been lucky to fly in several since. However, here we are, in the latter part of the 20th Century and I'm about to undergo the experience of a lifetime. Needless to say the beautiful form, the appropriate, purposeful, almost art deco design appeals as much to me now as it did in 1970. The North American Mustang

looks right from every angle. And I was about to fly one.

Nothing could have prepared me for this experience. I'm not a pilot. O.K., engineering power and acceleration has always managed to get the adrenaline flowing - I've been amused by relatively powerful cars before but this was to be something else.

I'd already spent several hours with Lee getting the feel of the new operation at 3951 Merlin Drive. Much different to the modest, but effective operation on Hoagland Boulevard where Stallion 51 Corporation was born. The early years meant hard work for partners Lee Lauderback and Doug Schultz. Long hours reputation building not only with a close knit warbird fraternity but with financial institutions as well, for we all know they view specialist 'odd ball' operations with some suspicion. The hangar come office accommodation at Merlin Drive is impressive, custom designed by the Stallion team to facilitate and totally support the smooth operation of the money earner sat on the immaculate aculate hangar floor below. Crazy Horse is the most utilized, but carefully maintained Mustang on the planet and rightly deserves such accommodations. Who could fail to look down the aircraft from the hangar window and fail to be impressed.

Recently, Crazy Horse has been joined by another TF-51D newly rebuilt by John Dilleys Fort Wayne Air Service and leased from owner Max Chapman. Now named Mad Max, the aircraft is painted in a startling overall silver with red tail stripes a la 15th Air Force. The eventual aim is to have a third pilot instructor, Eliot Cross, up and running as part of the Stallion operation. The ultimate aim is to make Merlin Drive the home of several Mustangs

(up to nine in fact) and a place where owners can house their aeroplane have it annual checked or whatever by the Lauderback Brothers (who have recently completed two superb looking single place Mustangs for owners Selby Burch and Dick Thurman the latter of which won Best Mustang' at E A A Oshkosh in 1996. The owners fly their aeroplanes as often as they like in friendly Florida airspace or even winter their aircraft here instead of 'grounding' them for the winter as the snow piles up outside the hangar doors. This would also give them the opportunity of undertaking continuation training at Stallion 51 where they can operate 365 days a year.

We last covered Stallion's operations in Warbirds Worldwide 17 (November 1990) and though some things have changed (like Lee and Doug's Mustang experience!) their basic raison detre remains the same. Stallion operates in four closely related spheres, with a 5th, that of high quality corporate entertainment for blue chip companies like Rolls Royce and Cessna, coming on line more recently. One of the factors throughout the equation remains constant the Stallion team actually get a buzz from flying people, from helping them to fly Crazy Horse and contributing (in very real terms) to flight safety in the warbird fraternity. Stallion 51 is a very professional company with a corporate feel and a great deal of pride in demonstrating their abilities and passing on their expertise. Whilst the aircraft is 'hired out' at a flat rate, even if you paid ten times that rate you would not come anywhere near the worth of all that knowledge and experience available to you. Lee flies Crazy Horse so much I suspect his rear end is moulded to fit the aeroplane and yet, in an almost bizarre kind of way, his wry grin indicates he wants more, and above all is willing to teach more. Above all, value for money for the customer is unrivalled and the clients come in all shapes and sizes, characters and ability.

To fly with Lee is an experience in itself. When he looked me straight in the eye and said "you will fly Crazy Horse today" I began to get a little nervous. We walked around the aircraft which had been towed out of the hangar, and once into the thorough pre-flight brief (tailored no doubt to my non-pilot pilot status but delivered in a friendly and non patronising way) I was strapped in for a cockpit and emergency egress procedure brief (with an emphasis on bail outs being rare!) I was ready to fly having been suitably kitted out earlier (which made me feel good) and given a relaxed but serious tour of the cockpit - my cockpit in this case - and shown what to press pull and monitor and what results to expect. I was then given some ear plugs to insert underneath the headset given a final look over to make sure I was properly secure and Lee grinned again, almost knowingly before climbing in up front.

One thing quickly became obvious I was going to fly Crazy Horse. Lee began his calm encouraging banter which is skillfully unobtrusive, as a narrative throughout the flight. It is intelligent in a reassuring pitch. A quick lesson in how to taxi a Mustang was to be followed by a thorough but easy to understand brief on high power take off and departure from Kissimmee. Lee had briefed earlier by telephone with Eliot Cross who was flying out of Bartow with a two seat Spitfire and a much better looking passenger than me. I leaned over to make sure my camera was secure and that I wasn't about to embarrass myself by scattering any loose items into the cockpit, and settled in to the seat ready for the

forthcoming detail Over the intercom and with meaningful looks outside the cockpit towards Richard on the ground Lee began the pre take off I checks..."flaps up, carb air controls cold and rudder trim six right, elevator zero, aileron zero, mixtures idle cut off, prop full forward, throttle cracked one inch. On he continued until finishing the before start checks with 'All circuit breakers in'. Then a pause. This is the business! If your clear of the canopy Paul, I m going close it a little bit And we'll wake up the Merlin " CLEAR was the cry from the front, and echoed from Richard who was thumbs up outside. Pulsing the aircraft into life, Lee enquired of my welfare. "You all set?" came the question from the front. "Sure am!" was the reply I felt as relaxed as I'd ever been - little did I realise that this was to be about as much fun as you can have with your clothes on. The Merlin crackled.. started without without hesitation, and earned praise from Lee " she says Let Me Run! Then into another banter of checks...radios on nav lights on and nav mas- on Crazy Horse was raring to gallop. A quick conversation with the tower, clearance to taxi off the ramp and Lee lines her up ready to let me attempt the famous weaving taxi to runway at Kissimmee. "O.K. Paul, taxi strictly with your feet. Give some pressure with the left foot and she comes left...then go with the right foot - as she swings to one side you look straight down the opposite side of the airplane." We took a right turn and I Lee demonstrated the maximum turn radius available on the TF-51. The next exercise was interesting. "Now, Paul, I want you to find the brakes up on the toe pedal (Coggan envisages the headline Editor Noses over Mustang on First Flight L..), and push the stick forward, push push,, PUSH! Now give me right brake and we make a turn here. Hold it there. Stick back to central position, and advance the throttle forward to 1500rpm Paul..." I did so obediently and with pride.

"Canopy forward...good oil and and pressures, everything's looking really good, so I'm going take the brakes and you can advance the throttle forward to 2300rpm Paul..." By now I was starting to feel a real part of what was going on rather than merely a passenger. "O.K. Paul, with the small black round prop control, underhand with your finger tips pull it all the way back to you. Now quickly push it all the way forward - good, checks prop pitch is good and functional. Check left mag, 90 drop, right mag 80 drop back to the boost...good ...27.9, boost induction carb air good, oil, engine pressures and temps good, hydraulic pressure thousand.... Back to 1500 to get the checklist stuff out of the way...flap handles verified up and visually checked (swift visual check) front and rear harnesses locked (thumbs up from me)..elevator trim zero,



The author about to get "Stallionised"

aileron trim zero and prop control full forward. Fuel boost pumps confirmed on. Fuel check full left, full right, no fuel venting left or right... set compass to 060 if you'd do that Paul..



The author gets the preflight brief from pilot Lee Lauderback

I fiddled a little. . . Parking brake in, transponder to ELT, Hydraulic T handles confirmed down. Fuel pressures good, mags are both ...strobe lights coming on and circuit breakers rechecked. The tempo increased...the anticipation was mounting. But I'd done this before. . . . NO I hadn't!

Ready to go?

I'd seen Lee's now famous high power departure from the taxiway many times before, but to actually experience it from the cockpit was a thrill indeed. I did one last check of my harness and indicated to Lee verbally and physically (thumbs up) that I was ready to be Stallionised. Last brief on the take off and an instruction to follow Lee through on the controls. Lee visually checked finals and base legs to runway 6 and radioed Crazy Horse was departing. The aircraft was nicely lined up on the centre line with the tail wheel straight and locked. Up on the brakes, once last check on the canopy.

Lee instructed me to push up the power to 2300rpm, and he pushed the boost to 40 inches of manifold pressure. As the Mustang tracked down the runway on three points I felt the solid acceleration build - at 50 knots Lee flew the tail up with forward elevator as it came up and all was revealed ahead of the nose... power increase to 46 inches, and, Merlin singing smoothly through 100 knots...let's hope Mike Nixon did a good job flashes through my mind...and more acceleration as Lee seems to hold the aircraft down before flying Crazy Horse very deliberately off the runway and into a steep angle skywards, as the gear comes up and the nose rotates all the way up. Oh boy. Power back to high cruise and as we gained height the power was pulled back a little to reduce local noise and as the green Florida scenery fell away I felt that silly grin spreading across my face.

My first lesson was how to trim the aero plane... "O.K. Paul, we're at 2500 feet and I just want you to drive straight ahead." Lee gave me some basic instructions and allowed me to feel the aircraft, to fly it, sense its reactions to my inputs and corrections. After the first successful lesson (more grinning) Lee instructed a power increase and a climb up to 7500 feet to wait for the two seat Spitfire out of Bartow. "2700rpm Paul, manifold up to 46 inches, and raise the nose slightly. Go on little bit more...we're passing through 3500 feet at 205 knots....that's great..O.K., rotate the nose up more and slight right hand turn as we pass 4500 feet at 2000 feet a minute climb and 180 knots.."

Eliot Cross radioed in and joined up for the photographic sortie.

What a unique pair! The camera felt like a lump of gold as we did various manoeuvres to get some interesting photographs, pulling about 2.5 to 3G's. As Lee asked me how I felt I was unable to reply with a handful of heavy camera and deep concentration. The Mustang canopy is not an ideal layer to shoot through but, much to my surprise the pictures came out well. We dropped back in formation with the Spitfire for the wide angle on board video to get some footage of the formation, and after a couple more manoeuvres Lee called it off and we parted company.

Right. Back to training. After passing the camera to Lee I was briefed on how I was going to do a basic loop in the Mustang. Now I figured how on earth is Lee going to take the pictures and fly the TF-51 Simple. He was going to take the pictures, and I was going to fly the Mustang!

"Right Paul, turn left 90 degrees, push to 37 inches of manifold pressure and roll wings level, put the nose down, little more.... now pull really hard, come on, pull, pull, PULLLLLL!!!" ...the nose came up into the vertical as I was instructed to feed in some right rudder....I felt heavier in the seat as the Mustang pulled over.... pulled my head back instinctively as Lee pointed the camera at me. Posers Paradise. Power coming back, throttle back. I repeated the experience, but being the gentle person I am really didn't get aggressive enough on the controls. Nevertheless, I looped the aeroplane, and have the video to prove it. After a few more manoeuvres, this time expertly performed by Captain Lauderback we headed back towards the field. I relaxed, and began to savour the moment just as the intercom crackled into life...."Paul, were five minutes out of Kissimmee and I want you to do an overhead join and then land on runway 6. I'll be here to help if you need me.." WHAT? If I need him? All right!

"Aircraft systems looking good... O.K."

Paul let's head for home for a nice overhead and full stop... little bumpy underneath the cloud deck here which is perfectly normal...use the stick more aggressively than you have been doing.... raise the nose a little, and you're doing fine. Just relax - wooah - right turn here underneath the birds... the stationary birds are the problem!" Lee had spotted some buzzards, known in the past (this is not a joke) to mob the Mustang - then we were back on track after some fine adjustments....we were at 1000 feet and six miles SW of the airport. "Boost pumps on...gentle right hand turn Paul.... and we'll overfly the airport at 1000 feet and make a left turn for an overhead approach..." I listened and moved the controls. "Run the prop up to 2700 rpm and throttle back to 26" manifold, now make a hard left turn....go on Paul, hard left...harder! Ease out of the turn, right stick and back, that's it, to 190 knots... drop off another 20 knots and we'll get the gear down here...level wings, nose up a little and aim for the threshold Paul....nice..170 kts, gear coming down, slight left turn ease the nose up a little....Lee radioed Kissimmee Crazy Horse three greens finals for runway six... after checking gear down and locked...130 knots....line Up with the centre line make teeny corrections, and power back, relax...hey PAUL!!! Back pressure on stick, go on pull some more, pull, pull... NICE JOB!" We were on the deck, more by Lee's inputs than mine I'm sure.

To give me a break, Lee taxied in with a few apologies for what he felt was a little bullying during the flight as he firmly instructed



Close in on the dual control Spitfire

me what to do. Not the case - for me, Lee had struck the perfect balance with his instruction, and I hadn't even broke into a sweat it was so enjoyable. That was a day to remember. The debrief with the video was interesting, and I've almost worn it out playing it since my return home. The certificate is a valued possession. So where is Stallion 51 compared to when we last reported on its activities seven years ago? The new facility which is the result of some long tedious hours of planning and projecting "...is a spring board towards where we want to be with Stallion 51, to reinforce our professionalism. Tied in with some of the things that we are doing, and have on the burner for the future with some of the corporate work we are undertaking with people like Rolls-Royce, who have been very good to us - we've done airshow work for them and flown some of their key people which is big business for them. We currently have Cessna Aircraft Corporation looking at doing a similar programme. So the corporate approach to this coupled with the professionalism made the new facility a real must to make it happen. Our big goal here is a total Mustang facility to try and become the Mustang Centre of the United States which becomes a clearing house not only for training but for maintenance and safety issues affecting these aeroplanes - almost a state of the art information clearing house". Stallion 51 clearly want to see owners operate the aircraft to the full potential and in the safest manner. A major plan is to do a Mustang Safety Seminar, "In April 1998 Stallion 51 wants to bring in as many aircraft and as much 'talent' in the Mustang community as we can." adds Lee. There are already some major corporations ready to work with Stallion 51 and take on the sponsorship of such an event - and provide much that is needed to bring it together. The idea is to promote a three or four day event into which every aspect of Mustang operations is focused upon including operating and maintenance procedures, spinning regimes etc. all tackled by top people. There is a lot of support locally and nationally for such an event.

To date Stallion 51 have worked with approximately 80 people with the intention of them flying their own Mustang in the future, or building their experience to a more proficient level. The full training programme does not have a set number of hours - as you would expect it all depends on pilot proficiency, the individuals background and talents and how each person handles different situations. On the other hand the company want to see a potential Mustang pilot progress through the process at his own speed. "We are not here to try and extend the programme but to do our very best to make the guy a safe Mustang pilot." Stallion have seen some people, like Bill Anders, an astronaut go through the

course in less than ten hours. He was very impressed with the programme and found it extremely valuable. For the average trainee (a commercial multi engine instrument pilot with 25 hours of T-6 time and perhaps a hundred hours of total tail wheel time), approximately 15 hours are needed to go through the whole training syllabus. We consider that a student is the person working through the syllabus and the graduate is the person that has completed the syllabus" says Doug. They make a major distinction, quite rightly between the two. It would be easy, for instance, for someone to do five hours and profess to have completed the programme but, Lee clarifies "...the real heart of the Mustang is the last 20% where we go really deep into the envelope, (such as loss of controlled flight), and deep into the emergency procedures, (where the pilot has time spinning the aeroplane left and right) and has learned the recovery techniques, in the high performance role at least, that could cause some major grief".

Consequently, the insurance companies are also recognising the difference between the student and the graduate to the point where they are saying "if you are a graduate of the Stallion 51 programme we will insure you." This is not, Lee is anxious to point out, a method of featherbedding their business or getting as many hours out of someone as possible, and the feedback we've had at Warbirds Worldwide over the years has reinforced this. Stallion wants to see Mustang pilots who are proficient in every way. Additionally the new facility allows the crew to present information in a much better environment with visual aids, for Lee tells us that a lot of the programme covers the maintenance side which is obviously key to the safe operation of the P-51. For example the majority of pilots come in and will do a pilots pre flight with Lee or Doug and then Richard or Peter Lauderback will do a maintenance pre flight, providing a different focus. An entire day can be taken with the brothers covering do's and don'ts of maintenance, tips on what to watch for and how to accomplish various tasks. Undoubtedly this enhances the safety aspect. At the time of our visit some of the teaching aids were being prepared and this includes a Merlin engine being sectioned for display in the main hangar and for use as a teaching aid.

Doug Schultz and Lee Lauderback are currently examining the opportunities provided by potential syndication of the business and are seeking a number of interested parties. The company has a proven track record and with an appreciating asset in the form of Crazy Horse with an established business and some exciting opportunities in prospect. They are confident they will attract the right investors to participate.

For some time now the company have been doing research, based on NTSB records (since 1962), on Mustang accidents. Their data is in the final stages of compilation and when the final report is output it will give them an accurate indication of trends with regard to Mustang accidents. Stallion 51 have been in the business since 1987 - the previous year had seen 12 accidents relating to P51s though the trend is currently downward, due in no small measure we suspect to their input in the training arena. Recently Lee states that accidents due to high performance maneuvering (such as repositioning turns at airshows, overhead breaks etc.) continue to give cause for concern. The high energy accelerated manoeuvre is something that is given great emphasis in the training programme.



Elliot Cross and Brad Lauderback in close formation with Lee Lauderback

What is the best preparation for entering the Stallion 51 training programme? Doug elaborates "We take each pilot on a one on one basis. We have people come to us that have as little as 300 hours total time and already own a Mustang, to the experienced commercial pilot we talked about earlier with 2000 hours and taildragger experience. There really is no set experience level. We do recommend that people get some concentrated, high quality T-6 time at checkout level for five or ten hours which gives a better foundation to walk into the programme and makes sense on a cost basis".

The company philosophy is that the Mustang is a serious aeroplane, in a serious business and it needs to be treated with a professional approach. Such are the excellent maintenance levels at Stallion 51 administered by Richard and Pete that rarely is Crazy Horse 'down' and unserviceable, apart from the planned inspections and checks. When the second Mustang comes on line it will allow Crazy Horse to be taken offline for more than about two days at a time so the aeroplane can be improved (I found myself asking what could be improved, but the twins know best!), and also for the company to extend the training syllabus and incorporate high quality formation training at a realistic cost level, including the augmentation of a third pilot instructor, Elliot Cross, who flew the Spitfire Tr.9 mentioned earlier. It will also permit more airshow work to be taken on as an attractive live dual pair formation team performing precision aerobatics.

Though I had been for a closely monitored and tightly controlled flight as a non-pilot, Stallion 51 had treated me courteously seriously and very professionally. With guys like this around willing to impart their knowledge at a relatively reasonable cost and with such enthusiasm, the future of the Mustang is in safe hands. And for the record the only thing that is Crazy about all this are the pilots that don't go through the full course!- WW Paul Coggan.