



P-51 OPS CORNER HAVE A SEAT.....

BY: Lee Lauderback

Next time you strap on your Mustang, take a moment to consider your seat.

North American Aviation utilized two different seat manufacturers in the production P-51's, the Schick-Johnson, and the Warren McArthur. Although similar in many ways, you can easily tell the difference as the Schick-Johnson has side fairings, while the Warren McArthur just has a brace from the seat pan to the seat back. In my world of Mustangs, the Warren McArthur seems to be the most common.



Example of a Warren McArthur seat with seatbelt attach points.



Both seats have the seat belts attached to their structure and the structure is attached to the airframe. So why is this important? Consider crashworthiness. If your seat has 75 years of abuse and exposed to the elements, is it as strong as originally designed? When was your seat last inspected with a critical eye? Is the seat still attached to the airframe in a secure and crashworthy manner?

And how about seatbelts and shoulder harness? Are your belts in good condition or are they sun-faded and worn? Have you upgraded your seatbelts with a crotch strap? If not, it is a great addition to your seat security, not only in turbulence and maneuvering but also helps prevent your lower torso from sliding forward underneath the lap belt in the event of a forward impact such as an off-field landing. Additionally, I check the lap-belt attachment hardware by visual inspection or by reaching down and feeling the attach bolts before any advanced maneuvering work. It gives me a warm-fuzzy feeling that I am part of the airframe.

Are you aware that some early model P-51's do not have shoulder harness inertial reels, but rather just a take-up reel with a locking assembly selected by the pilot? They are either locked or unlocked, but do not function as an inertial lock on impact. Later model Mustangs incorporated inertial reels that do lock with a 2-3 G impact even though the part label just reads, "Reel Shoulder Harness, Take-up." Do you know what you are sitting on?

While on the subject of seats, what about your seating position. Are you sitting as high as possible while still being able to reach the landing gear and fuel selector? If not, then you are giving up visibility which can be a safety issue. I'm 6-1... sitting on a parachute and still fly with the seat adjusted to the full up position; admittedly I have long arms.



Late model P-51 inertial reel part label.

Speaking of parachutes, your seat was designed to accommodate a seat-pack parachute, not seat cushions. Do you wear a "current-repack" parachute? I have yet to fly a Mustang without wearing a parachute, in addition to a helmet. Both are a critical piece of safety equipment and an option that you should never leave at home!

So next time you park your butt in the seat of this iconic fighter, remember you are flying a piece of history and you should have some good answers to these questions.

Fly safely!

Mustangs Forever,