

What's the Difference?

P-51 transition training

BY NATHAN HARNAGEL



Safety, training, fun. Safety, fun, training. What's the difference? You have probably read numerous articles over the years about "the flight of a lifetime" or "that first Mustang flight, what it's really like!" What could I contribute that might be different from what you've already read?

As a graduate of the Stallion 51 transition-training program for the P-51 Mustang, I first thought back to the preflight briefings. Before any flight at Stallion 51 there will be a discussion of the priorities for that flight. Safety is always a priority. The relative priority for fun compared to training marks the big leap from the intro fun ride to serious training to proficiency for a full checkout.

In my case, the leap from "once in a lifetime" to betting my life, fortune, and dignity on a checkout in an airplane I could never afford to own and had no immediate prospects of borrowing happened after 30 years of civilian airplane flying, a thorough T-6 Texan checkout, and one back seat Stallion 51 orientation flight. I had "the discussion" with my loving wife and told her that Lee Lauderback, the most experienced Mustang instructor pilot in history, had been right.

As we stood next to the famous *Crazy Horse* TF-51 Mustang, having completed a week's T-6 training and a thorough briefing on the first orientation flight he shocked me.

"Don't do it. Don't take this flight." My mouth hung open in dazed amazement as my mind went into overdrive. I might have

said "What?" or "Huh?" or something equally unmemorable. Lee concluded: "Don't take this flight because the Mustang will forever ruin you for any other airplane." He was right, and I had to come back and complete the full checkout.

With all my savings in hand and a MasterCard in my wallet I came back to Stallion 51 to complete the full checkout. There are lessons that must be completed to standard, but no specified number of hours for the checkout. Everyone starts out in the back seat at Stallion. The TF-51 back seat is actually not at all bad compared to landing a T-6 from the back seat. Nonetheless, the dream is to fly from the front seat looking out over that beautiful nose, not from the back seat looking at Lee's "Bodney Blue" helmet.

The Mustangs are all customized these days, and *Crazy Horse* is no exception. There is generally a sort of North American Aviation logic to their aircrafts' cockpits, and the Mustang is actually not too bad in this regard. The real trick is the need for three or four simultaneous hands to start the engine due to the necessary switches being scattered about the cockpit. The technique and hand positions you use for *Crazy Horse* will not work for *Crazy Horse 2*. Pay attention to this part of your instruction since the mighty Merlin engine is probably worth more than the airplane you usually fly.

This brings us to the first psychological hurdle you must jump in order to train as opposed to joyride in the Mustang. You don't want to look like a dweeb to your ground crew and you tried so hard to impress Lee with all the study you did of the aircraft manuals before you came down for training.

Now if you fumble up the start,

what will they all think? Well, fear not. Lee will tell you every single thing you have done at a less than optimum technique for the rest of the week, so you might as well get used to it. For instance, you know where the canopy crank is and about where the canopy goes so you just roll it up and go on with the checklist, right? Wrong-o, Ace. There is an exactly correct position for both the canopy and the canopy handle, and Lee will expect it there and not one notch above or below. Get used to it.

Having started the engine for the first time you are ready to taxi yourself on out to the runway. Again, the visibility out of the Mustang is so much better than the T-6 you think this should be easy, right? Wrong again, Rookie. The Mustang has a longer wheelbase and wider gear than you are used to in the T-6 and you must anticipate the turns more. You can brute force it by taxiing up to the intersection, unlocking the tail wheel, and turning with the brakes. This is not the optimum way, though, and you may struggle with this. You really learn to appreciate a wide taxiway!

How to line up in the run-up area is another trade between getting good airflow through the radiators and not blowing over something expensive or living behind you. There will be one optimal answer, and you will get immediate feedback if you get it wrong. You did the run-up before from the back seat, and it's just a matter of finding and poking at all the new things there are to find and poke at in the front pit.

If your heart isn't beating a little faster when you pull out on the runway for your first take-off, either you don't understand the gravity of your situation, or



Good start.

Serious student, happy instructor.



Counting blades.

Dream shot.

MATT GENAURDI



Two stars, Harnagel and Lauderback.

there is no poetry in your soul. The phased approach to adding power taught by Stallion 51 makes a very safe balance between acceleration and control. You don't get thrown back in the seat by the acceleration, but as the noise level grows to the mind-numbing level, you know the power is coming in.

The control feel in the front cockpit is very close to that in the back. I have been told that the airplanes with primitive jump-seat controls have much different control forces in the back due to short lever arms on the control-stick connections. The TF-51 with its expanded rear-cockpit area does not suffer this complication.

Climbing out there are power settings to change, temps and pressures to monitor, frequencies to change, and oh, by the way, other traffic out there to watch for. And yes, like they say in *Top Gun*, "...as of now we are keeping score." Lee will wager your beverage of choice that he will spot more traffic than you from his restricted viewpoint in the back over the course of your training.

Out in the practice area you do a little warm-up to check your *g* tolerance and then get down to business. The business is "tracking the buffet," and business is good. You will learn to track the prestall buffet in straight and level unaccelerated flight, then in turns, then in tight turns. With and without flaps and gear, then rolling the flaps in to tighten a turn like a fighter pilot, but wait! As of today you are

a beginner fighter pilot! Next you go to the vertical and track the buffet in looping maneuvers. Fast to slow and slow to fast progression. Pull up 45 degrees, half-roll inverted, pull immediately to the buffet, and track it through all the way around. But don't "depart" the airplane until you are told! Any fool can pull the stick back and "depart from controlled flight" into some very unusual rotating attitude. Many fools have. The trick is in developing that Jedi sense that the airplane is about to depart and holding it right there indefinitely.

Now let's have some fun! Loops that just go on and on compared to a Pitts or Stearman. Aileron and barrel rolls and the combinations of Immelmann turns and Cuban eights. Don't try and jerk this five-ton airplane around like you would a tube-and-fabric biplane. Lee says to "let the airplane do the work." This will take some time to learn.

Okay, let's do some landings. Are you going to do a 360-degree-overhead entry or some version of the standard civilian traffic pattern? You best be thinking ahead going four miles a minute or you'll be hopelessly out of position. Dual controls does not mean Lee can bail you out of every possible dumb move. In particular, there are strict rules about use of the landing gear handle and brakes.

Actually, the rule is simple. Keep off those controls unless you have received prior permission from Lee. Makes sense and you already

briefed the pattern and how you will be doing touch-and-goes or full-stop landings, so there should be no surprises. If you haven't been flying something this fast, you'll overshoot your turns. Don't fret about it; just fix it in smooth coordinated control movements. Turning final, you make your last configuration changes, check airspeed, confirm gear down, and get ready for a passenger- and instructor-pleasing touchdown.

Well, maybe not. The Mustang is truly easier to land than a T-6, and in the pantheon of taildraggers, one of the better designs. You will find a variety of not unsafe but rather unsatisfying ways to dribble, bounce, plant, or float the airplane onto the pavement. This is the part where I must insert that the airplane has lots of control authority in these circumstances, and there is no need to try and slam in the power and execute the infamous go-around. You will already have practiced the go-around at altitude, and I never felt like I was in a scary situation requiring superhuman piloting skill. Balance your power application in phase with your airspeed and configuration, and the Mustang go-around is no scarier than any other airplane. In fact it is a lot easier than a single engine go-around in any light twin-engine propeller airplane.

There is also ground and flight training including short/soft field landings, aborted takeoffs, high-altitude supercharger and oxygen use, and more that I don't have space to go over. I tend to be hard on myself, and Lee has high standards of procedure and maneuver that are difficult to perfect on the first try.

It's expensive, hot, challenging, and yes, flight training in the Mustang is *fun*. And by the way, Lee Lauderback is a great guy to fly with and a lot of fun to hang out with for the week. Make sure you tell him I said so when you go down to train in the Mustang at Stallion 51!





Stallion 51

Mustangs and more

BY KT BUDDE-JONES

PAUL BOWEN

STALLION 51 IS KNOWN WORLDWIDE FOR AVIATION excellence, making Mustang memories, and fulfilling flying dreams for more than 25 years. An aviation business that specializes in rare expensive vintage aircraft built on the dream and passion of the Lauderback brothers. Lee, Peter, Richard, and John are the cornerstone of the Mustang world—restoring, operating, and marketing the rarest of the breed.

Stallion 51 has a large presence on the Kissimmee airport with its three hangars, encompassing the flight operations for its two dual-cockpit, dual-control P-51 Mustangs and T-6 Texan orientation flights and transition-training program, including VFR unusual attitude training in the P-51.

The addition of AvDoc 51 makes the Stallion 51 campus truly a unique aviation destination. Where else can you fly in for your FAA medical? Senior AME Dr. William Busch believes the ability to fly in this day and age is dependent on desire, training, skill, and financial and physical ability. These are all replenishable resources except one, physical ability or health. “Without good health and the ability to pass an FAA medical exam all the dough, desire, and skill in the world will not get or keep you in the cockpit.” “Doc Busch” is an integral part of the team at Stallion as an instructor pilot and teaching the aeromedical aspects of unusual attitude training in the new UAT program, a division of Stallion 51.

Stallion 51 recently launched its new UAT program that offers real-time real-life advanced IFR upset training in a specially modified L-39 Turbojet. The UAT pro-

gram’s purpose is to familiarize pilots with the recognition and recovery from unusual attitudes and in-flight upsets. The program is structured to train pilots to recognize and respond accurately and quickly before the situation progresses into one from which they are unable to recover. This type of comprehensive aerodynamic training combined with aeromedical training has not been available to civilian pilots in corporate and business aviation departments until the launch of the new comprehensive UAT program, www.JetUAT.com.

Pilots from all over the world enroll in Stallion 51’s transition and checkout training programs, both in the T-6 Texan and the P-51 Mustang. Insurance companies recognize that Stallion 51’s checkout program is the gold standard in training for those who want to own and operate their own Texan or Mustang.

John Lauderback assists the transition-training clients further by helping them to find the perfect vintage plane to match their dreams of owning one. Through Stallion’s many warbird connections, the Lauderback family virtually knows every Mustang flying or project available in the world. John helps connect those who want to find a good home for their Mustang with the perfect new owner who is looking for a P-51 through GroupP51.

Stallion has grown from a “one-room schoolhouse” to a multi-dimensional international university of higher learning for pilots from all over the world.

For more detailed information about Stallion 51, contact KT Budde-Jones at 407-846-4400 or kt@Stallion51.com.