

Fire Her Up!

THE WORLD'S ONLY NORTH AMERICAN XP-82 HAS PASSED A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE

BY WEEZIE BARENDSE

On 14 October, Operation *Twin Mustang* made a very significant leap forward. The restoration that many people said “could never be done” had a very satisfying moment when master restorer Tom Reilly got into the left cockpit and fired up both Packard Merlin V-1650s that had been overhauled to zero-time by Vintage V-12s. The ramp at Douglas, Georgia, reverberated with the distinctive sound that only those magnificent Merlins can make.

Readers of this publication are well aware of the XP-82 restoration and are also well aware that it is a project that only Tom Reilly and his skilled crew could complete. The damaged airframe had been recovered from Walter Soplata’s farm in Newbury, Ohio. Walter, a man of vision, realized that airframes needed to be saved for future generations — airframes that he could see being scrapped on a regular basis. Through his foresight, he saved not only the XP-82 but also F-82E USAAF 46-256 that is with C&P Aviation and well advanced in its restoration program.

The XP-82, USAAF 44-83887, had a successful life with NAA and was used to verify the Twin Mustang’s mission. After USAAF testing, the plane was transferred to NACA where it was utilized for a variety of test work. After an accident, it was pushed into the weeds and left until a date with the scrapman could be set.

Walter heard about the imminent scrapping of the aircraft. Walter was not a man of means, but somehow he put the money and resources together to transport the plane to his property where it would remain until acquired by Tom. In 2008, Tom took several trucks to Ohio and moved his prize back home.

Then started the incredibly hard work of bringing the XP-82 back to life. As can be seen in the photographs, the workmanship is magnificent and a first flight will be taking place in the not too distant future.

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Tom brings the left Merlin to life on the Douglas ramp. The quality of the restoration is evident, as is Reilly’s demand for absolutely perfect sheet metal work.



After Tom gave the Twin Mustang a thorough look-over, he got into the left cockpit for the first engine runs. Note that the custom-made propellers are in the feather position.



Something that has not been seen — or heard — since 10 October 1987 (the date the then-Confederate Air Force wrecked their F-82B 44-65162/N12102) and, oddly, just over 30-years from this event.

