The Longest Twelve Minutes

ON 2 SEPTEMBER 2017, A NEW WORLD SPEED RECORD FOR PISTON-ENGINE PROPELLER-DRIVEN AIRCRAFT WAS SET BY STEVEN HINTON

BY SCOTT GERMAIN

"Here he comes!" With a sound never heard before, the roar of the highly-modified Vintage V-12s' Merlin propels *Voodoo* and Steven on the first run. (Scott Germain)

"Okay, here's what we are going to do… " Before each flight, Steven would carefully explain to crew and spectators his goals and expectations. (MOL)

Flying the highly modified North American P-51D *Voodoo*, Hinton made four passes over the 3Km course near May, Idaho, and shattered the existing record of 413-mph, raising the bar to an impressive 531.53-mph.

In doing so, Hinton followed in his father's footsteps. In 1979, Hinton Sr. broke the 3Km record in the RB-51 *The Red Baron* at 499.018-mph. Lyle Shelton upped the record again in 1989; he and Grumman F8F-2 *Rare Bear* blazed through the timing gates for an average speed of 528.330-mph. When the *Fédération Aéronautique Internationale* changed the rules governing aircraft speed records, Shelton's record was retired.

The new record makes *Voodoo* the world's fastest piston-engined aircraft. When asked about the record run, how the engine performed, and how intense the flying was, Hinton said, "It's the longest twelve-minutes. Ever."

The story leading up to the speed record was secretive, dramatic, and fast-paced. Time was very short, there was a lot of work to accomplish, and answers to engineering questions were yet to be delivered. With a goal of setting the record in July or August, the program was finally green-lighted in late February 2017. This meant there were five-months to engineer, design, produce, install, and test some very advanced modifications to the airplane.

It also had to come together and work the first time.

Even with the daring new modifications, an age-old question remained… assuming the new mods worked, would the

Vintage V-12 power at its best. Steven Hinton runs up the highly-modified Merlin during a night test on the Utah ramp. (Scott Germain)