

## Bell's racy royalty: the P-63 *Kingcobra*

By Mike Burton

A fine pursuit, the *Kingcobra* gained only a small following within the U.S. military, and seemed destined to die unloved in undeserved obscurity. But Bell Aircraft's P-63 left the shadows of that dark cloud on a postwar race day in 1946.

The *Kingcobra* may never have gotten top billing, but it didn't go unnoticed. In the 1946 Thompson Trophy Race (the first to be run after the war's end), Charlie Tucker's P-63C, at

392 mph, was the third fastest qualifier and a favorite to win. Three other P-63s would finish in that race, but a stuck set of landing gear forced poor Charlie out on the first lap.

However, a modified P-39 *Airacobra*

with a *Kingcobra* propeller and engine would win that day, so the family honor was upheld. Those racer *Mustangs* had to eat exhaust!

First flight for the XP-63 was December 7, 1942. Derived from experience gained with its P-39, Bell's design evolution produced a superior craft. The USAAF saw this, and awarded contracts even after both prototypes crashed soon after their first flights.

XP-63 No. 1 lasted less than two months, and No. 2 less than three months. Nonetheless, over 3300 were built and flown by the U.S., France, the Soviet Union and the RAF. The major models were the A and C, with 13 Es being built, and one-offs models D and F completing the family. A P-63B model intended for the Merlin powerplant (Allisons powered all the rest) never saw metal.

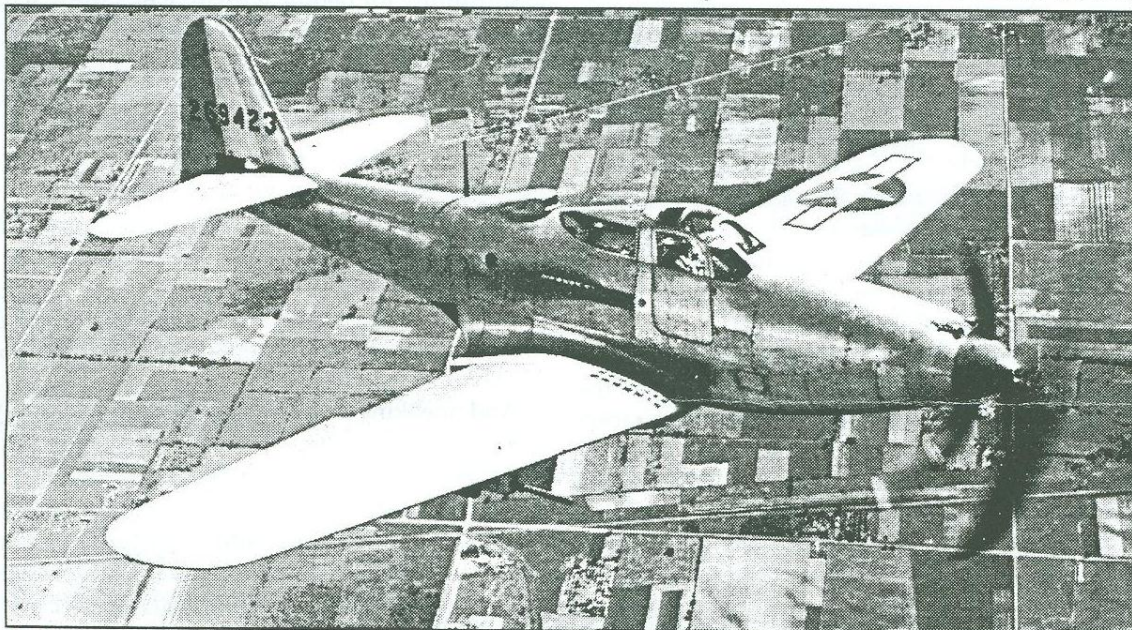
The P-63A was the *Kingcobra* model that most resembled

the *Airacobra*, but up close one could see the larger, more lethal lines and laminar flow wing of this big brother.

The P-63C which followed had a distinctive ventral fin that gave the *Kingcobra* a look all its own. Only the single F with its taller vertical fin could show the stretch left in the original P-39 lines. The E model, the fastest of the breed (439 mph), was essentially a boosted C. Externally, the P-63E was the same as the C except for an additional 10 inches of wingspan and a

larger engine.

The engine and wingspan size increases were carried over from one-off D which had A body lines and a "blown bubble" sliding canopy instead of the car door cockpit. This



Fresh from Bell's Buffalo factory, this P-63 displays both the Cobra family lines and the distinctive laminar flow wing. This example uses a three-bladed propeller.

was not the only bubbletopped *Kingcobra*. The RAF had a P-63A which they converted with an E-style sliding canopy, but the lower part of the car doors remained.

The Soviets appear to have left little clue as to the fate of the nearly 2000 P-63s the U.S. supplied to them. Writers all seem to comment vaguely that the USSR loved them and used them as close air support/anti-tank aircraft, but never add a great deal of detail beyond that. France employed a good number in Indochina after the war.

Although the P-63 was never to see combat in American markings, the *Kingcobra's* finest hour came while wearing USAAF colors, albeit under strange circumstances.

Outside of being remembered as a Lend Lease bird, or as the follow on to the *Airacobra*, or maybe as a hot-looking racer, the "Pinball" program RP-63s always will ensure some sort of

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*The Styrene Sheet* is a monthly publication of the Silicon Valley Chapter of the International Plastic Model Society (IPMS). Articles and comments should be submitted to Chris Bucholtz, Editor, P.O. Box 361644, Milpitas, CA 95036, or by E-mail at 207-3426@mcimail.com. Excerpts may be published only with the written permission of the editor.

# EDITOR'S BRIEF

This issue of the Styrene Sheet highlights the P-63 and air racing, through happy coincidence, making it our first "themed" issue.

An important and overlooked plane, the P-63 *Kingcobra*. Many aviation fans have never heard of this important and successful aircraft, but thanks to the new MPM and Eduard kits in 1:48 of the *Kingcobra*, it seems to be the hot American fighter among modelers.

While not without its problems (as so eloquently explained in Mike Meek's article), the new, short-run P-63 shows that there are still many subjects that model manufacturers have yet to touch upon. With future releases from *Tamiya* in 1:48 that include the G4M Betty and the A-1E *Skyraider*, the *Airfix Spitfire 22* and *Seafire 47* selling out quickly, an F8F *Bearcat* from *Hobbycraft* in the pipeline and kits of the Heinkel He 219 and Messerschmitt Me 410 coming from *Monogram*, it should be clear that there are plenty of subjects to be done and plenty of modelers willing to pay for them.

But, hopefully, the *Kingcobra* will draw further attention from a major manufacturer. Serving as a flying target, a trainer and a ground attack machine, the P-63 was Bell's final attempt to create a "flying cannon," and was given consideration against the legendary Mustang as the USAAF's premiere fighter. Serving over Russia, Algeria and Indochina, the plane was rugged and dependable, and delivered a heavy punch as one of the first true fighter bombers.

Then, after its war service, the *Kingcobra* began a second career as an air racer. Mike documents the most radical of the P-63 racers in his article; at least four other *Kingcobra* racers competed at Cleveland, Reno and Mojave over the years.

When it comes to racers, and models of racers, Mike Meek is a true authority. Not only has Mike built a number of racing planes in kit form (including "Strega" and "Red Baron"), but he's worked on a number of aircraft. This year, he did body work on "Dago Red," and his name was painted on the side of the second-place winner. Mike's conversion of the MPM kit is thorough and complete, and should serve as inspiration for any of you who are going to participate in our Unlimited

Racers contest at this coming meeting.

Since last month, we've had two contests, one in Redding and the bi-annual event at HobbyTownUSA. The Redding contest was fairly well-attended, and, although the atmosphere was friendly and the quality of the entries was high, there was an evident lack of planning that caused confusion during the judging and the award ceremony. Still that didn't spoil things for SVSM members—Jim Lewis, Bill Ferrante, Larry Roberts, Milt Poulos and the Editor all took home awards.

HobbyTownUSA's event was pleasant, low key and, again, well-stocked with automobile modelers. While the quality level may not have been up to that of an IPMS event, it did introduce many modelers to contests and helped some of them understand what judges look for. It also provides an opportunity for people who may not appreciate modeling to see what can be done when people combine skill and creativity.

Rodney Williams, Jim Lewis and the Editor were at HobbyTown's grand opening two weekends earlier for a display of models and modeling skills. We got a great response from the folks who came into the store, and it provided us with an opportunity to encourage people to try the hobby. These are the sorts of events we should try to do more often—the people there don't care about seams, alignment or blemishes on canopies, but instead marvel at the quality of the work, and from these events come new members of Silicon Valley Scale Modelers.

And speaking of events... The date for our club contest is March 9, at the Milpitas Community Center. We've expanded the categories for this year's Kickoff Classic, adding railroad categories and new divisions for figures, sci-fi and fantasy, automobiles and armor, and including categories for racing planes, missiles and firebombers. Our special awards will include special awards for the best *Monogram* 1:48 P-47 *Thunderbolt*, best wheeled armored vehicle, best detailed 1:48 cockpit, and many others. Gee—I'd better get to work!

—The Editor

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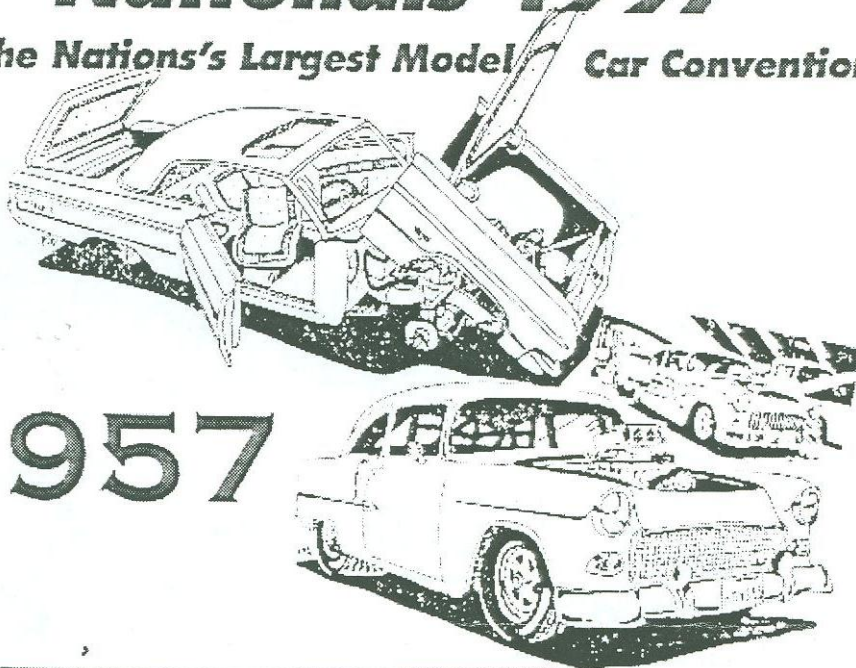
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# A real swinger: Messerschmitt's P. 1101

By Jim Gordon

A late war project intended to study the effects of wing sweep and compressibility, the Messerschmitt P. 1101 played an important role in the advancement of aerodynamics.

A single jet engine fighter design, the wing was designed to sweep back into one of three settings from 35 to 45 degrees, the setting determined and locked into place on the ground.

The Luftwaffe ordered the P.1101 as a production fighter even before testing began. One example was under construction and nearly complete before the war ended. The U.S. Army Air Force shipped the plane back to America for study, where it was examined and stored. Some suggested that the P1101 be made airworthy, but it was no longer in flyable condition.

In 1949, two slightly oversized replicas were built with the unique feature of in-flight adjustable wing sweep, from 20 degrees to 60 degrees. These planes were known as the Bell X-5, the world's first sweep wing jet.

Through 1955, the X-5

went on to prove the worthiness of the idea, and proved to be an able design, except for its fatal spin characteristics. The Me 1101 could be said to have paved the way for the first production swing wing fighter/bomber, the F-111, many years later.

DML's 1:72 kit is of a hypothetical version of the P1101, a missile-equipped nightfighter. DML also makes this plane available in the day fighter version. The main differences between the two are the tail and radar- the day fighter has standard tail layout, but the nightfighter has a T-tail arrangement and the nose mounted stag antler antennae. I liked the looks of the T tail version, so I chose this over the more conventional day fighter. The nightfighter comes equipped with two X-4 wire guided missiles, and two drop tanks.

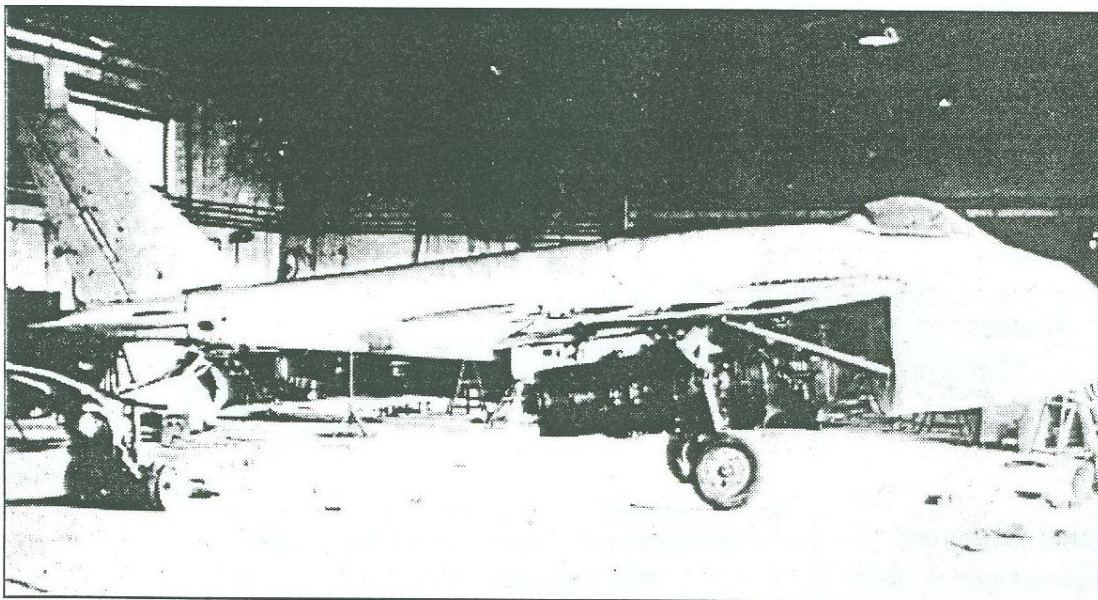
Some good reasons to build this model:

1. The kit is very good, a real pleasure to build.
2. It's a fascinating subject. The plane looks like a small F-86 *Saber* jet, with swept back wings and tail, the horizontal stab sitting very high on top of the slanted rudder. The fuselage is slim and bulbous at the same time, with a sleek bubble canopy.
3. There are nice interior details, such as the combined jet engine and main landing gear bay, that are ripe for extra detailing.

4. The subject is hypothetical, so you can exercise creative and artistic license to your brain's desire.

The kit contains 74 parts in light gray, with delicate panel scribing. Dry fitting of the parts reveals a high level of accuracy in design- this kit is almost as good as *Hasegawa's* best. Included is some of DML's legendary steel alloy photoetched parts. Whoa baby! This stuff will demolish your regular cutters- use only hardware store dykes to nip it off its sheet. Files seemingly have no effect on it.

A nice plus is the decal sheet with four rows of numerals, with red numbers outlined in white, and black numbers outlined in white. These could mark a whole air wing of hypothetical fighters.



The real Messerschmitt P.1101 after its capture, with the engine access panels removed.

Construction of the kit is straightforward, with only a few snafus. Just follow the directions with this kit. I will only talk about areas that require extra care and attention.

In step 1, the assembly of the cockpit de-

tails, it is unclear just where the photoetched side panels go. There are only vague verticals on the cockpit sidewalls- just glue the panels onto these at a slight downward angle. Part 13, the instrument panel, is a bit too wide for proper closure of the fuselage halves. I dremeled out the plastic where the panel meets the fuse halves and this solved the problem.

In step 2, the jet engine/intake manifold construction poses a hairy problem. You are to place the intake cone in the middle of a long tube, and glue the halves together. How do you deal with the two long interior seams that result? I wrapped 320 sandpaper around a drill bit and inserted it into the tube, and turned it around, for quite a while. This does the job.

Part 26, the gear bulkhead, is an easy part to reverse. Both sides of it look nearly the same. I made this mistake and did not realize it until it was too late. Oh, well, it does not show in the end, and it is an easy thing to work around.

Step 3, the construction of the fuselage, is a bit tricky. You must install the jet engine, gear bay, and cockpit while buttoning up the fuselage halves. These subassemblies have all been finished and painted at this point. I was worried about the engine alignment since there is some play in its mounting, but this turned out to be a good thing. Just place the engine in its mounting, and do not glue the engine in place until you are

satisfied with the fuselage fit. The fuselage halves are nearly perfect matches, and the gear bay fits as advertised.

Very mild sanding is all that is needed to finish the fuselage. However, you will notice a thick seam running down the middle of the cockpit floor. The pilot's seat covers half the seam, but some seam must either be filled or covered by something very thin like resin flash.

Because the curvature of the canopy distorts the view of the cockpit, a perfect interior need not be attempted. But do add seat belts, gun sight, and pretty instruments because these are magnified by the canopy!

When the cockpit was completely finished and painted up, I brushed Future onto the inside of the canopy, and once it was dry glued it on with *Testors* liquid cement.

Steps 4 and 5, the wing and tail assembly, present no problems. In fact, because the wings are molded solid, you save a lot of time sanding. There is only a microseam on the leading edges, and nothing on the trailing edges. Nice!

Step 6, the landing gear, presents a painting problem. The main gear would stick out, creating a difficult masking problem. I left off the gear while painting the model and added it later.

In step 9, the radar details, I replaced the photoetched aeriels with thin brass wire. The steel kit parts are way too thick, and they have a seam too!(!?)

To prep for painting, I masked the canopy with thin strips of masking tape around the framing, and the large curved areas I covered with two coats of Micro Mask. I use two coats because this stuff is so invisible it is hard to see missed spots, until after the model has been painted! I stuffed toilet paper into the engine bay and nose areas.

I mixed a shade of RLM 76, a light blue with a touch of gray-green, and sprayed this overall. For RLM 75, gray-violet, I mixed up a batch of pastel chalk dust. I used black, white, red, and blue, mixed well and adjusted until I had the right shade. I applied the dust with a worn down #1 brush, cut off 1/8" above the nub. No need to rub hard with it, just gently scrub in the mottle pattern, and blow off the excess. When the entire model had been mottled, I sprayed a mist coat of acrylic Varathane over the model and quickly dried with a hairdryer. If you spray a heavy coat you run the risk of melting the pastel spots. A mist coat seals and protects the pastel, and when dry, you can spray your heavier pre-decal gloss coats.

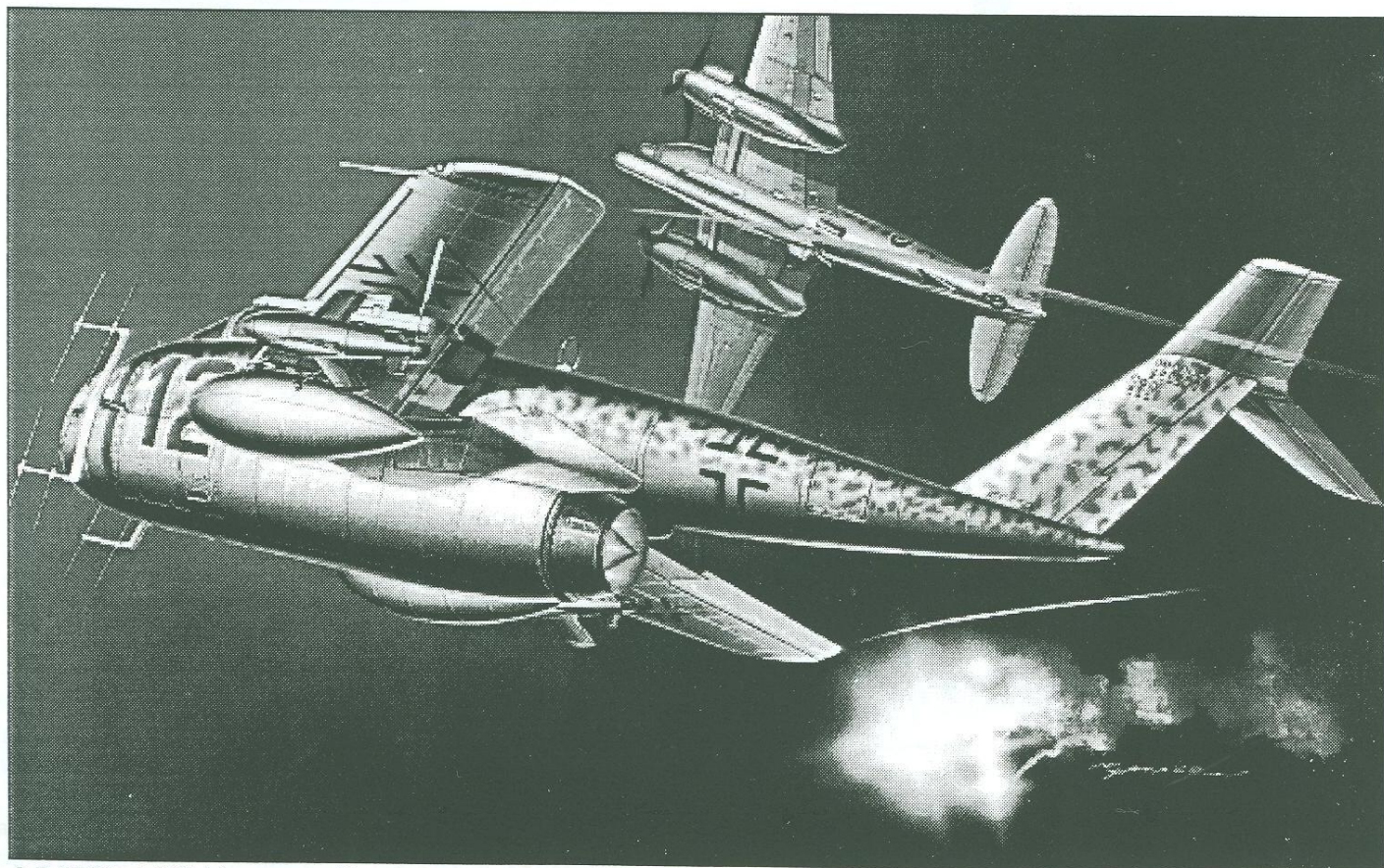
The kit decals went on as well as you could hope for, except they take an exceptionally long time to release from their backing paper.

After decaling, I applied a brown-black watercolor wash to all the panel lines with a 0 brush. I clean up the excess wash with a #1 brush dipped in acrylic extender. The extender pushes the watercolor around without letting it bleed into surrounding areas. It is a fun technique to work with. You could use plain water, but it is more difficult and easier to wreck the wash.

Decals and wash complete, I again sprayed the mist coat of acrylic gloss, and dried it quickly. The same problem of a bleeding wash can occur if too thick a gloss coat is applied. (If you use enamels, you may not have these conflicts, but you may create new ones I don't even know about)

Finally, spray a finish coat of matte. I used Pactra acrylic clear flat, slightly thinned with water. I dipped a Q-tip in gray green and swabbed the intake tube down to the cone, twice.

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**A P.1101 nightfighter spars with a *Sea Mosquito* in this DML artist's conception. Neither aircraft took part in World War II.**

# A more capable cobra: Bell's P-63

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immortality for the *Kingcobra*. The Pinball RP-63s were specially-armored, brightly-painted USAAF *Kingcobras* that served as flying targets in a short-lived program to improve training for gunners aboard bombers. *Kingcobras* were flown as if they were an attacking Messerschmitt or Focke-Wulfs in one-on-one combat with the bomber, and the gunners fired directly at the plane as in combat. The secret to it all was a special "frangible" bullet, which ballistically acted like the real and lethal item but would shatter upon striking the armor of the RP-63.

The "Pinball" reference came from the name of first prototype vehicle, which had been inspired by the light mounted in the nose where the cannon barrel normally appeared. The light was supposed to flash when practicing gunners scored hits, but references I have read make it clear this was more marketing hype than of any real use.

Still, the RP-63 proved to be a realistic modern fighter opponent, and served with distinction in its only USAAF "combat" role. So, even if it hadn't seen another life as a hot civilian competitor, Bell's last snake did earn its own unique niche in history.

Amazingly, the P-63 has long suffered at the modeling community's hands. It was offered for the longest time only as an outrageously overpriced and hard to get resin kit in various scales, or as a poorly-rendered injection kit, or in badly done vacuforms.

Thankfully now there are better choices today.

1:72 Bell P-63 *Kingcobra* by Aoshima

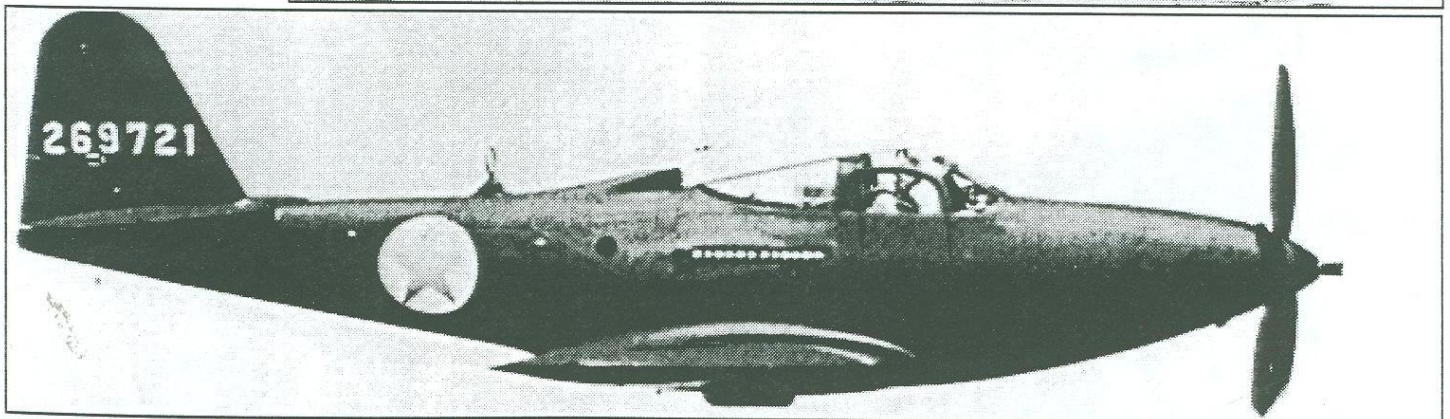
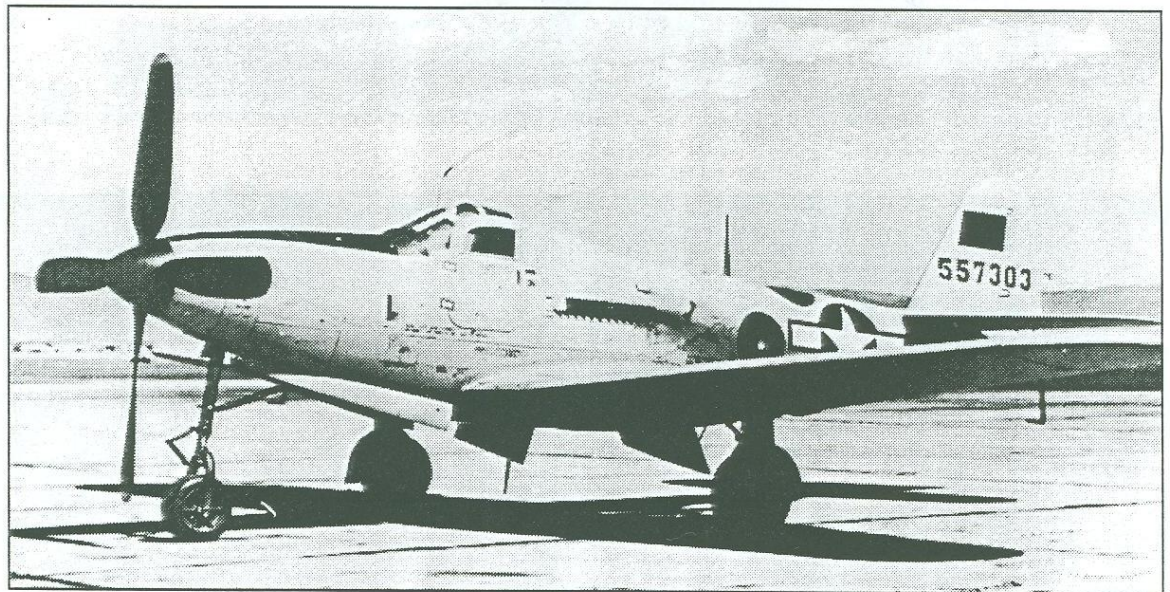
I included this kit solely so I might beat it up. This is the poorly-

rendered injection kit to which I referred, available off and on for many years. To me, the closest resemblance to a *Kingcobra* comes when the box art spells it correctly. There is a Model Master among us who has made this kit do his bidding and considers my opinion of it too harsh, but he is a rare bird indeed. For us mere mortals, believe me: this kit SUCKS.

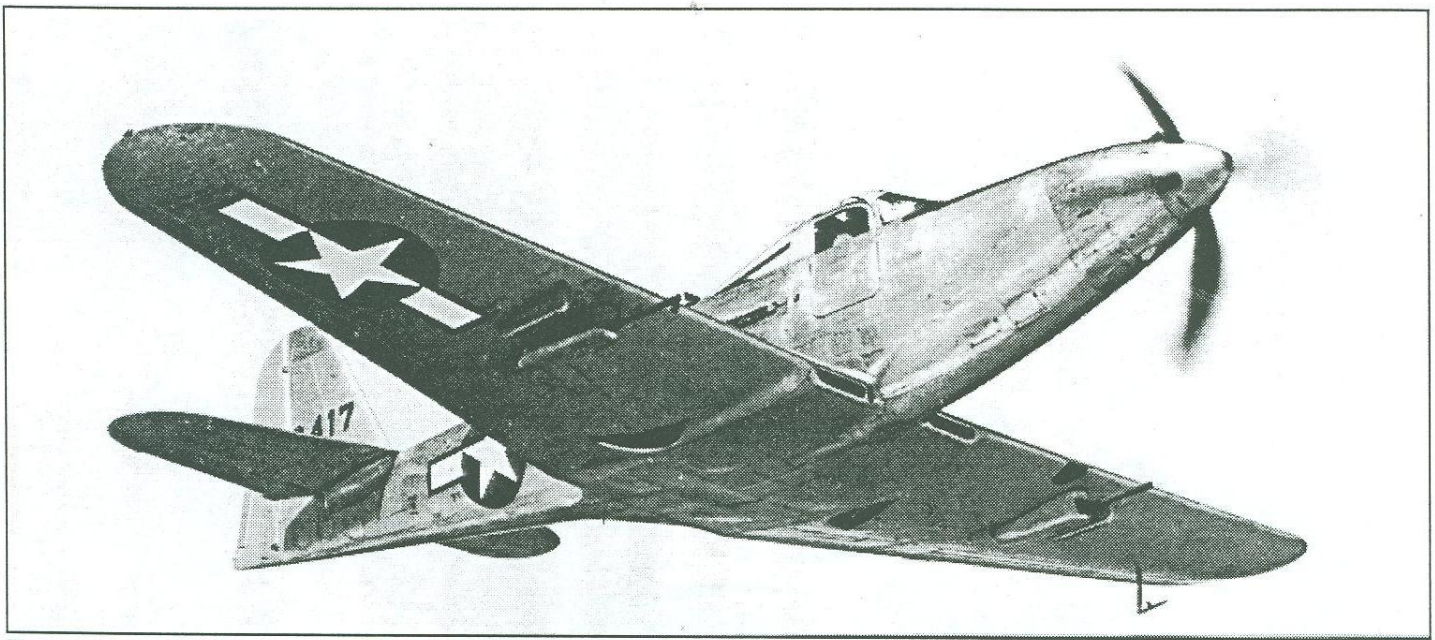
1:72 Bell P-63A *Kingcobra* by MPM (kit 72021)

At around \$16, it is a bit steep in price, but it is truly a *Kingcobra*! Limited run injection-molded kits can be tricky, but this one is well behaved. You get a simple seven-piece cockpit assembly, which includes a clear film negative of the instruments that serves as a backing for the etched brass instrument panel.

The laminar flow wing is a three-piece molding with light recessed panel details and thin trailing edges and wing tips. The wing underside is one piece with the proper dihedral molded in, and the upper wings only require minor sanding to fit, though it would be best to tape up the fuselage halves to use as a fitting jig to get the wing roots right. If you go ahead and build the fuselage first, you might find the fit of the wings a bit difficult to manage. There is a small gap which allows the radiator intakes at the leading edge wing roots to be molded as a delicate separate part, and this can cause you fits if you



Few P-63s served in the markings of their native country, and none saw combat wearing the stars and bars the P-63 at top is sporting. However, the Soviet Union received 2,000 *Kingcobras*, and put them to good use as ground attack machines and low-level fighters.



**This study of a P-63C shows the underwing gun mounts to good effect. This addition increased the *Kingcobra's* ground attack ability.**

don't build the fuselage after the wings.

The horizontal tail planes are tricky, too. They won't faze veteran vacuform builders, but if you are used to tongue-in-slot or pin-in-hole assemblies, you might be frustrated by the butt joints provided here. The tail planes are thin, single-piece molds that don't lend themselves to drilling out, nor can you sandwich in a tongue. The *MPM XP-47H* presented similar problem, and I can testify that superglues work well in these situations.

The rest of fuselage assembly is fairly easy, but watch for one other tricky area before joining the wings. Step four of the instructions shows you the template that you use to cut your own nose wheel well bay floor. If you actually wait until then to make and install this, you are making yourself work too hard.

This fine kit offers you the chance to display one or both of the "car doors" open. They are molded as one-piece clear vacuformed pieces, as is the main canopy. To utilize the car door option, it is best to cut away the fuselage moldings for the door outline before final assembly, but leave the main canopy whole until it is sealed onto the finished fuselage. If you cut this earlier the canopy will be too flimsy to work with later.

A separate mold is given for the air scoop, so you get a simpler seam to fill than you would if the scoop was molded to the fuselage halves. The part is small, so you'll have to be careful during installation.

The propeller assembly is three pieces, with two backing plates and the four blades molded to the spinner front. The entire subassembly requires a bit of magic to make into a rotating assembly. Glue it in place and skip the hassle.

The landing gear legs are injection molded, with oleo scissors in brass detail. The wheels and tires are made as solid halves; they are well molded, but this is a tough assembly to get to look right. Your rewards for fighting with the wheels are the beautiful, thin brass gear doors.

The underwing stores are two cannon mounts with barrels, and pylons for wing tanks. The box illustration shows tanks, but the kit does not include them. Look for tanks like those on

the *Monogram P-51B* (75 gallon early AAF) and you will be fine.

The decals are all for green/gray schemes for P-63As. Your options are a 1943 USAAF plane, a Soviet P-63 with the red star on a white disk from 1944 or a Soviet plane in 1945 with a red star with white trim. The sheet is a very nice *PropagTeam* effort, and includes prop and airframe incidental markings (maintenance, fuel, etc.). You will have to supply your own material if you want a natural metal *Kingcobra*. I would recommend this kit to anyone seeking to get hold of a *Kingcobra*, and is worth getting more than one.

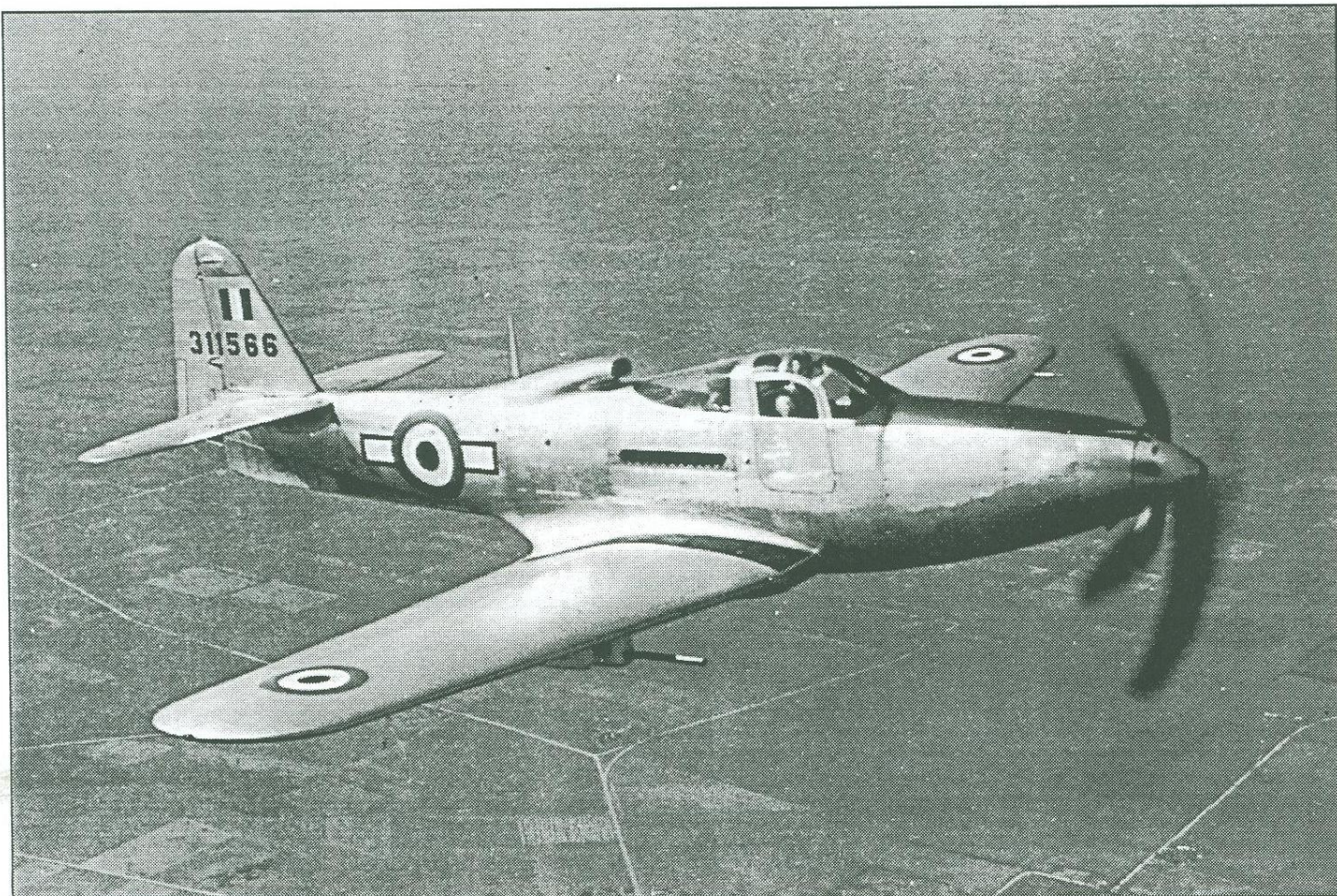
**1:72 Bell P-63A *Kingcobra* by VacWings 72 (Kit 7253) and Bell P-63D *Kingcobra* by VacWings 72 (Kit 7254)**

These two kits are sold separately, but other than the instruction illustrations, fuselages and canopies, the kits are identical.

Why bother with the vacuform if *MPM's* P-63A is available? Well, for one, it is the only easy way to get a P-63D built up in 1:72, either by using the *MPM* kit with the VW7254 kit canopy only, or the VW fuselage as well. The D kit offers an accurate fuselage without the doors, and the wings are the same as those provided in the A kit with a note in the instructions that the 10" extension of wings is insignificant in 1:72 (and thus is not provided in the kit). VW molds its wings the opposite of the *MPM* kit, by the way, with the upper half as one piece with molded-in dihedral.

Another reason to acquire the VW "D" kit is the bubble canopy, as it easily grafts to the *MPM* or VW "A" kit to create that RAF P-63A with the cut down car doors and bubble top. Now, if only someone had a reference for the color scheme!

One other incentive is the fine detail parts in the VW kits. VW kits offer fine white metal gear legs, wheels, and a propeller spinner and blade assembly that is just the right weight for a nose balance. The main gear doors are white metal with some interior detail, and they maintain a scale thickness. The nose gear doors are best used only with VW kit. You get a white metal dorsal air scoop to simplify what would be a nasty vacuform problem, so all that metal up front



A P-63C-5 *Kingcobra* in French markings over Buffalo before its delivery. Notice how the French roundel is painted over the U.S. star.

definitely comes in handy if you build the vacuform kit straight from the bag. The exhaust stacks, seat and underwing gun pods in white metal are also useful in either building the vacuform model or bashing with the MPM kit.

All the vacuformed parts feature decent recessed panel lines, but the finest features of these two *Kingcobras* are now best shared with MPM's kit to get the "killer" 1:72 edition.

Recommended as great kits for parting out, and good kits for die hard vacuform builders

**1:48 Bell P-63C *Kingcobra*, by MPM (kit 48022)**

This kit may be a little higher in price (about \$34) and less detailed than the current crop of *Tamiya* and *Hasegawa* quarter scale warbird kits, but since it's unlikely that even *Hobbycraft* or *Minicraft* will do a *Kingcobra*, I see this kit as good value. This is a limited edition kit, and MPM kits never seem to be in abundance around here. If you can get one at a discount, go for it!

If you've never built an MPM kit before, this is a good starter. The instruction sheet shows the layout of all the trees, provides a guide to numbers on the detail steps and serves as a good checker for kit completeness. The model features very fine recessed panel detail on the fuselage, wings and tail planes, and the overall molding quality is quite high.

Sometimes upon opening a limited run injection molded kit, you might get the feeling that if the kit is left on your shelf for too long the sprues will engulf the attached parts. Why? The point where a detail piece and sprue part company isn't

as clear as it is in high-pressure injection molded kits. Instead, a huge blob, which is nearly impossible to cut cleanly away from the part, joins the components to the tree. But not with this kit! Clean, sharp mold parting is the norm.

The resin cockpit parts are numerous and fine. The instructions have a single shot of the interior, although it appears to be same as in *P-39 Airacobra In Action* No. 43. Some plastic cockpit parts are included as well. The overall detail level is high and the fact that the car doors are supplied separately begs you to pose them open to show the interior off. Individual rudder pedals, levers, wheels and even two interior ribs are among the pieces.

The propeller is comprised of a hub, backplate, spinner cap and four blades. These parts require a little cleanup but are quite good. As in the 1:72 MPM P-63, a filler part is included for the root intakes. Simple ribbing in each upper wing supplies a bit of wheel well detail when the wings are assembled. The leading and trailing edges are thin and the laminar flow wing seems right to me, although a SVSMM Model Master who also has kit tells me the kit wing is too thin. We won't be sure until we can measure a real one, so I'm not going to worry about it.

A nice touch here is the small, cropped triangular piece which fills in the underside of the wing and fuselage joint. This area might have become nasty as the kit molds wore down through use. Again, as with the 1:72 MPM kit, the horizontal tail planes butt-joint to the fuselage.

The landing gear is injection molded except for the resin



wheels and tires. The nose gear is assembled from several pieces and fits into the simply-detailed nose gear bay (again, the extended floor of the cockpit). The main gear is somewhat simpler, but so were the actual items. All the landing gear doors are thin, although the main gear doors need to be cut apart to show the usual extended pose. The underwing gun mounts, barrels and wing tank pylons are separate items molded in plastic.

The fuselage car doors are also plastic. The realistic, thin vacuformed windows and the plastic inner door walls need to be fitted to the doors before final installation. The vacuform canopy needs to have the doors cut away to display them in the open position, but the kit provides two canopies in case your first effort goes amiss.

The decals by *PropagTeam* give you a choice of either a 1949 French Air Force *Kingcobra* serving in Indo-china (overall aluminum with olive glare panel) or the 1944 Alaskan delivery to USSR scheme (green and gray, with outlined red stars).

The final product definitely does the P-63C *Kingcobra* proud. *MPM* gives you perfect companion to the *Monogram* P-39 *Airacobra*. It would build into a very fine air racing P-63 (either historical or a might-have-been).

**Some references that might prove useful for 1:72 or 1:48 P-63 fans:**

*P-39 Airacobra in Action*, by Ernie Mc Dowell; Squadron/Signal No. 43, 1980

If you read my "P for Pursuit" series, you know I recommended this highly for the P-39. Well, 17 of the last 19 pages in this book cover

the P-63 in all of her glory. Shown here are the RAF bubbletop, V-tailed testbed and L-39 (*Kingcobra* with swept wings for Navy!) one-offs.

Also included are side profiles of all the major P-63 variants and sketch details of the A, C, and F tails and "Pinball" intakes. Three photos of the E, four of the F and three of the XP-39E testbeds that led to XP-63 make this a tasty bite. The normal *Kingcobras*, of course, receive excellent coverage in the photos, and even the Pinball program material has data on the P-39 "Zebra" precursors. Get this!

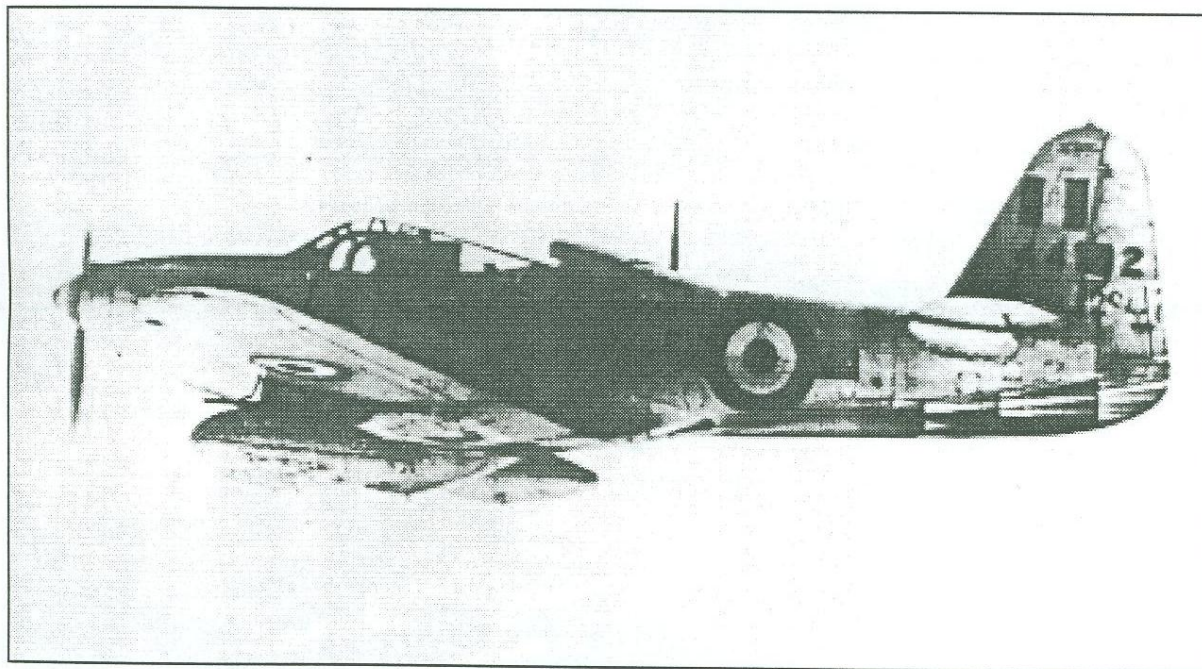
*Operation Pinball*, by Ivan Hickman; Motorbooks International, 1990

Subtitled "The USAAF's secret aerial gunnery program in WWII, the book features a colorful cover photo of orange-yellow RP-63s on the flight line. You're excused for assuming this 96-page tome would be focused primarily on *Kingcobras*

and the Pinball idea. Sorry!

It's a very good book overall, and the author participated at the line level in the P-63 portion of the program, but as his preface makes clear, this was the tail end of the story. The genesis of the "frangible bullet gunnery training program" is covered from its very early days to its culmination in Nevada in 1945 with P-63s vs. B-17s/24s (score bombers 6, P-63s 0). While the book is full of intrigue, governmental infighting and visionary personalities, the part most useful for a modeler begins at page 58. There is a detailed closeup of the P-63A cockpit, and on the next page there's a clear head-on photo of the Pinball nose with a man pointing out the light.

Pages 60-64 (a chapter entitled "We're airborne!") are the first detailed text and photos on the RP-63 program. The next chapter is on the P-39 *Airacobra*. Two-thirds of this material deals with the Pinball birds and makes for an interesting read, plus all models of the RP-63 are given photo coverage. If you are looking for supplemental material on a RP-63, this book will be an asset. But if you can only pick one, *P-39 In Action* is the better all-around bet for the modeler, and costs less.



**A P-63C equipped with two drop tanks in flight over Indochina. This *Kingcobra* belongs to the CG I/5 Ile de France**

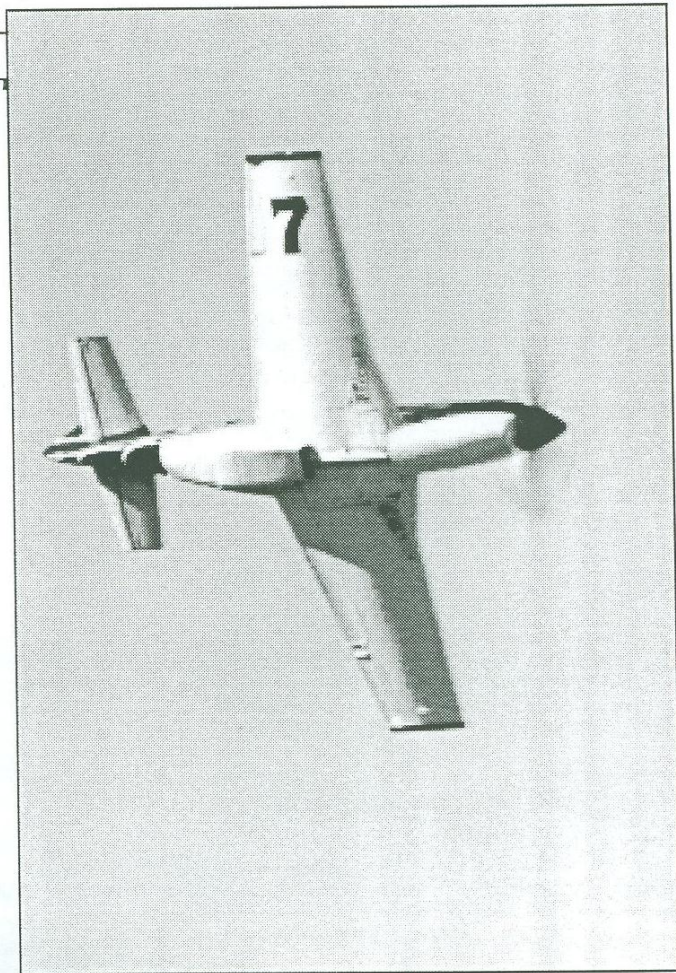
*Thompson Trophy Racers*, by Roger Huntington; Motorbooks International, 1989

This book covers the pilots and planes for the Air Racing years spanning 1929 to 1949, and offers a well-written read by an experienced motor racing author. It's not until chapter 10 (Making racers out of fighters) that a P-63 makes an appearance, but on page 55 a *Kingcobra* is featured in a photo (captioned as an example of a \$750 postwar racing starter kit). Close-ups of Charlie Tucker's famous no. 28 P-63 from 1946, with 6.5 feet clipped from each wing, are numerous, but the text includes data on other P-63s. In the race results at the back of the book, the 1946 through 1949 Thompsons list P-63s in every race, with some years having several placing contenders. There's not a lot for a modeler unless he's doing a racer, but this book does much to make the *Kingcobra* look like a winner after all.

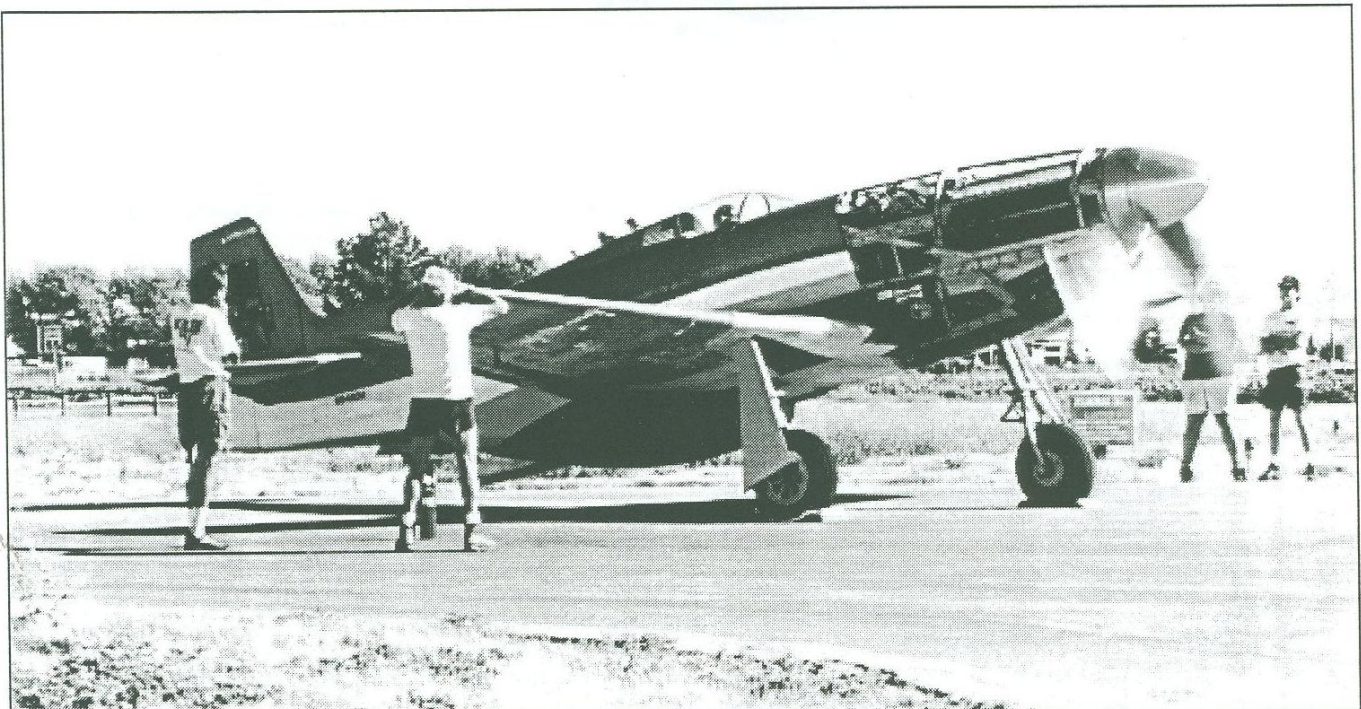
# Thunder in the Desert

**Reno Air Races 1996**

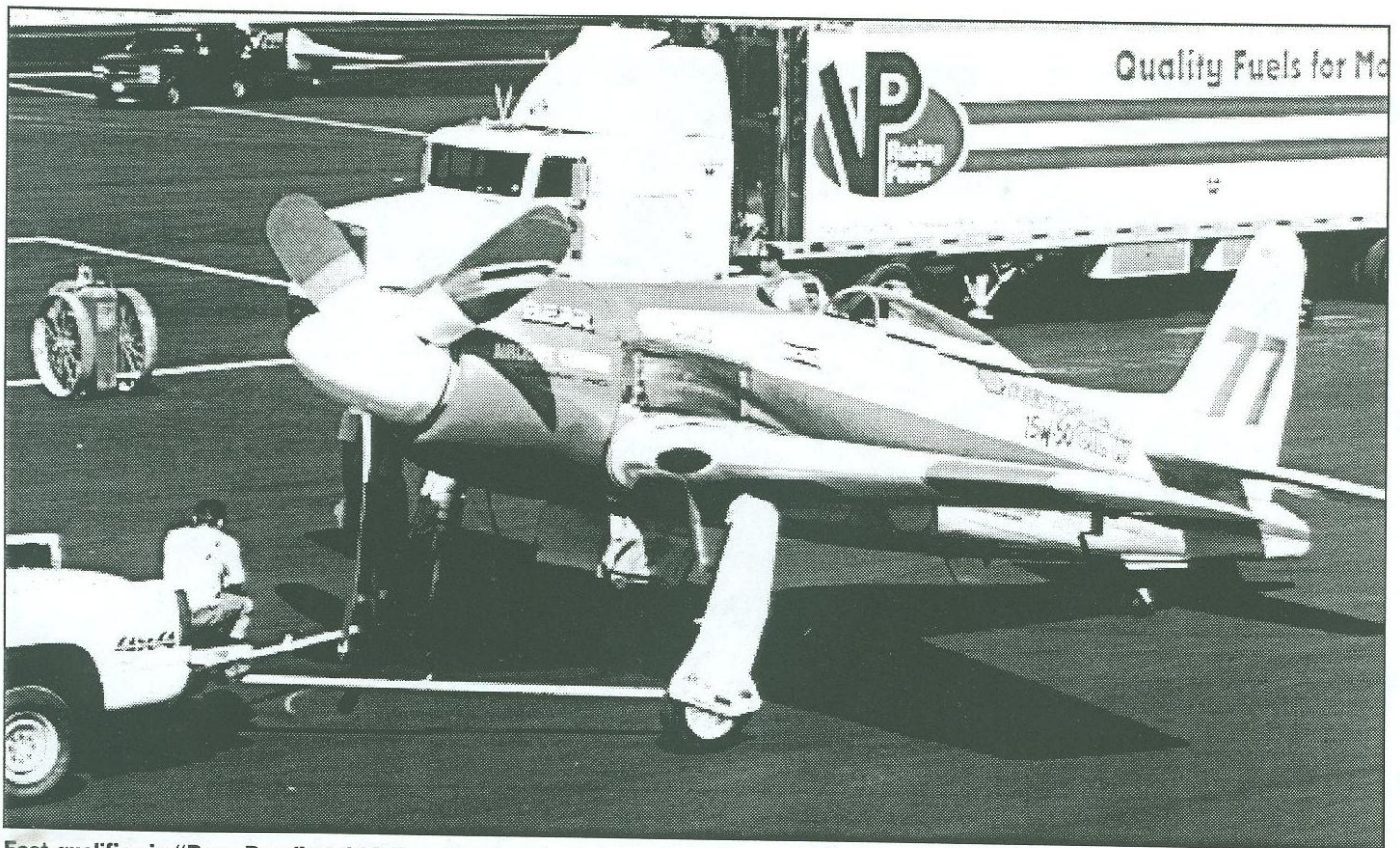
Photos by Mike Meek



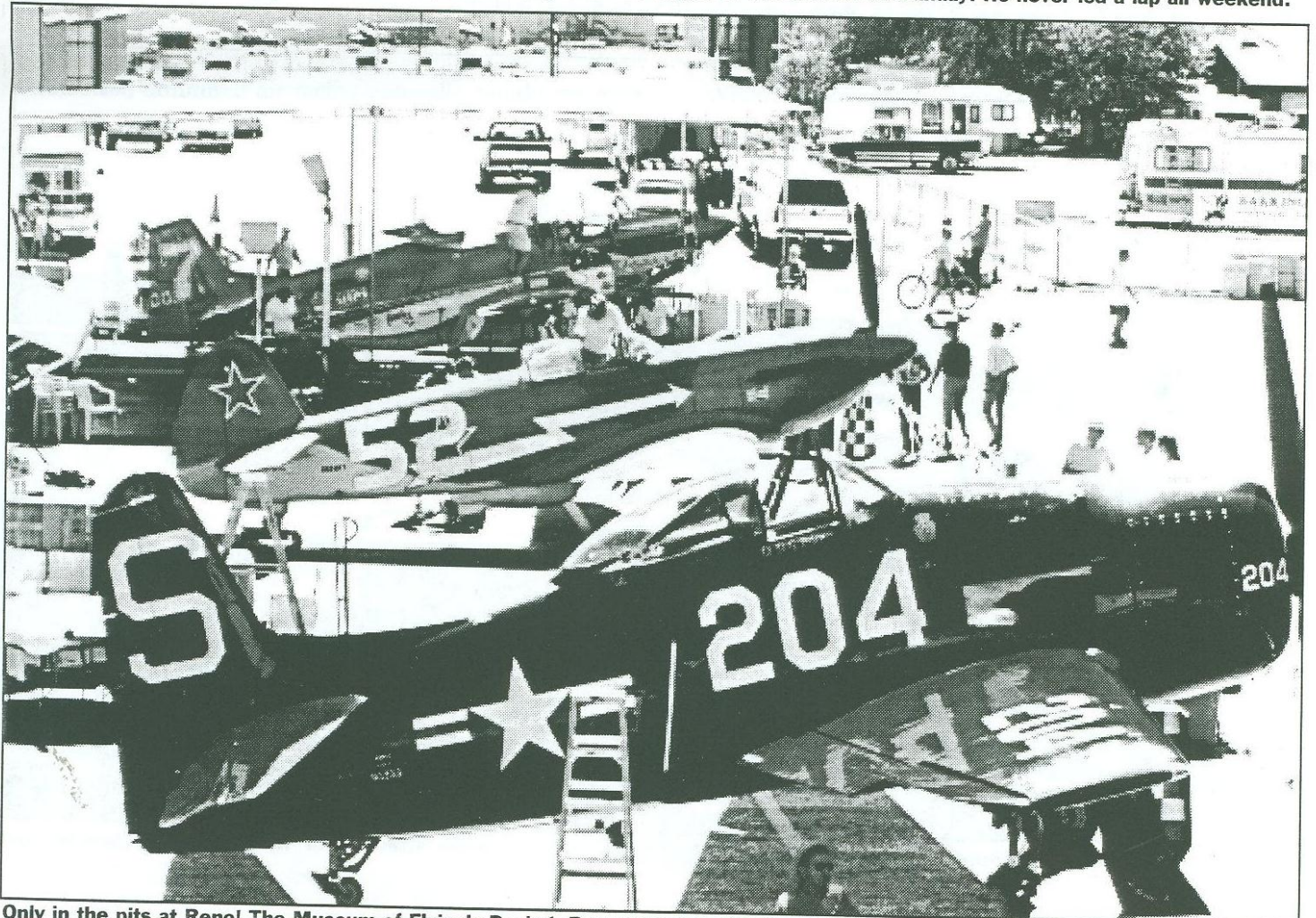
Bill Destefani in "Strega" (left and above) won the Gold after David Price cut a pylon. Both *Mustangs* had highly modified Merlin engines built by Dwight Thorn.



David Price qualified "Dago Red" at 490+ mph and led every lap of Gold competition, only to cut a pylon on Sunday and finish second. Here, the crew watch the first engine runs at Hollister, California.



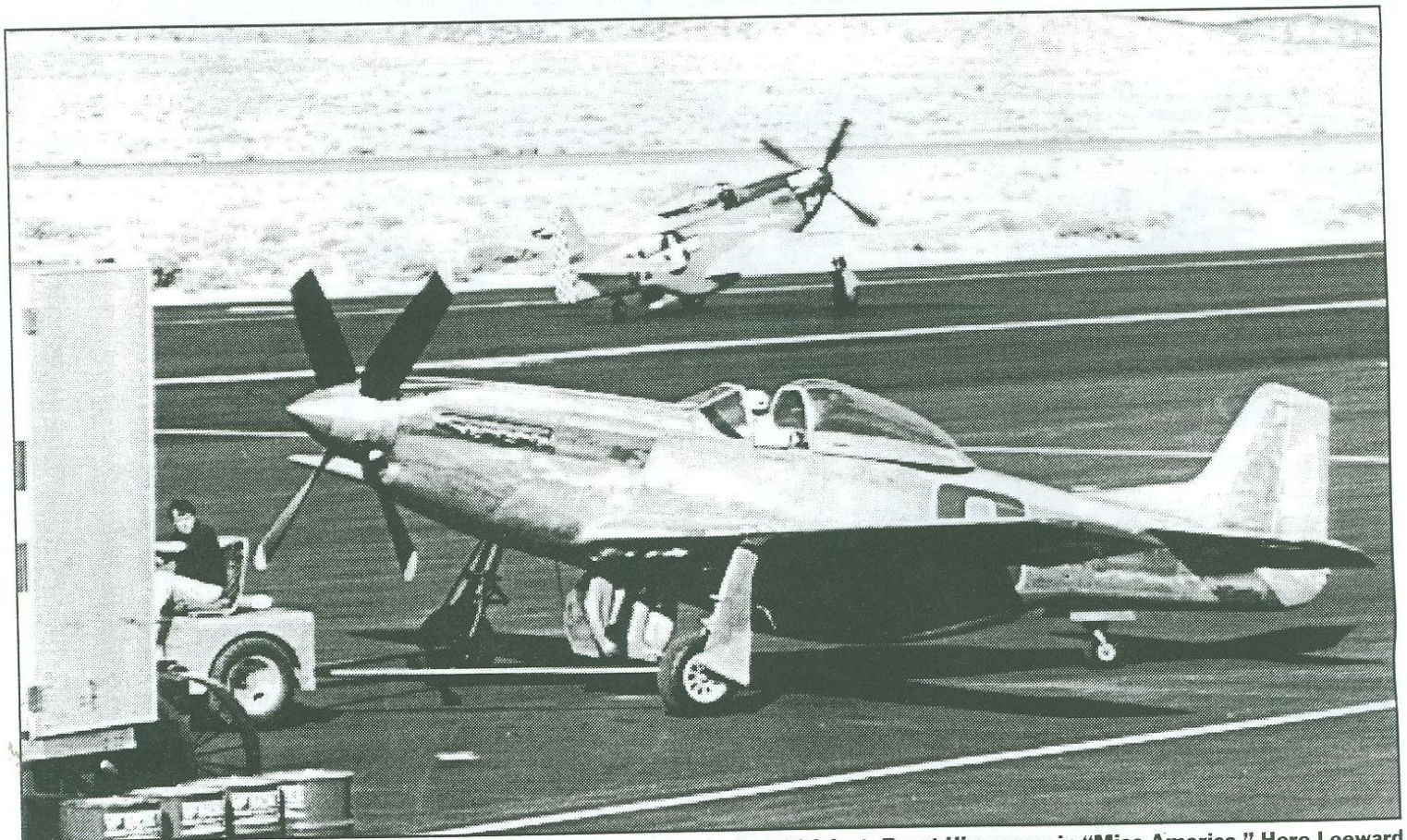
Fast qualifier in "Rare Bear" at 419.2 mph, John Penny blew the engine in the *Bearcat* on Sunday. He never led a lap all weekend.



Only in the pits at Reno! The Museum of Flying's Dash 1 *Bearcat* next to Bill Destefani's Yak 3 and "Strega"



Stu Eberhardt of Danville, California, in "Merlin Magic," won the Silver race at 375 mph.



Jimmy Leeward led every bit of Sunday's Bronze race—except for the last 200 feet. Brent Hisey won in "Miss America." Here Leeward waits to gas up.



Larry Havens' P-63 racer finished in natural metal in 1972. The next year, it received a white paint scheme with red trim.

## Molding MPM's P-63 into a radical racer

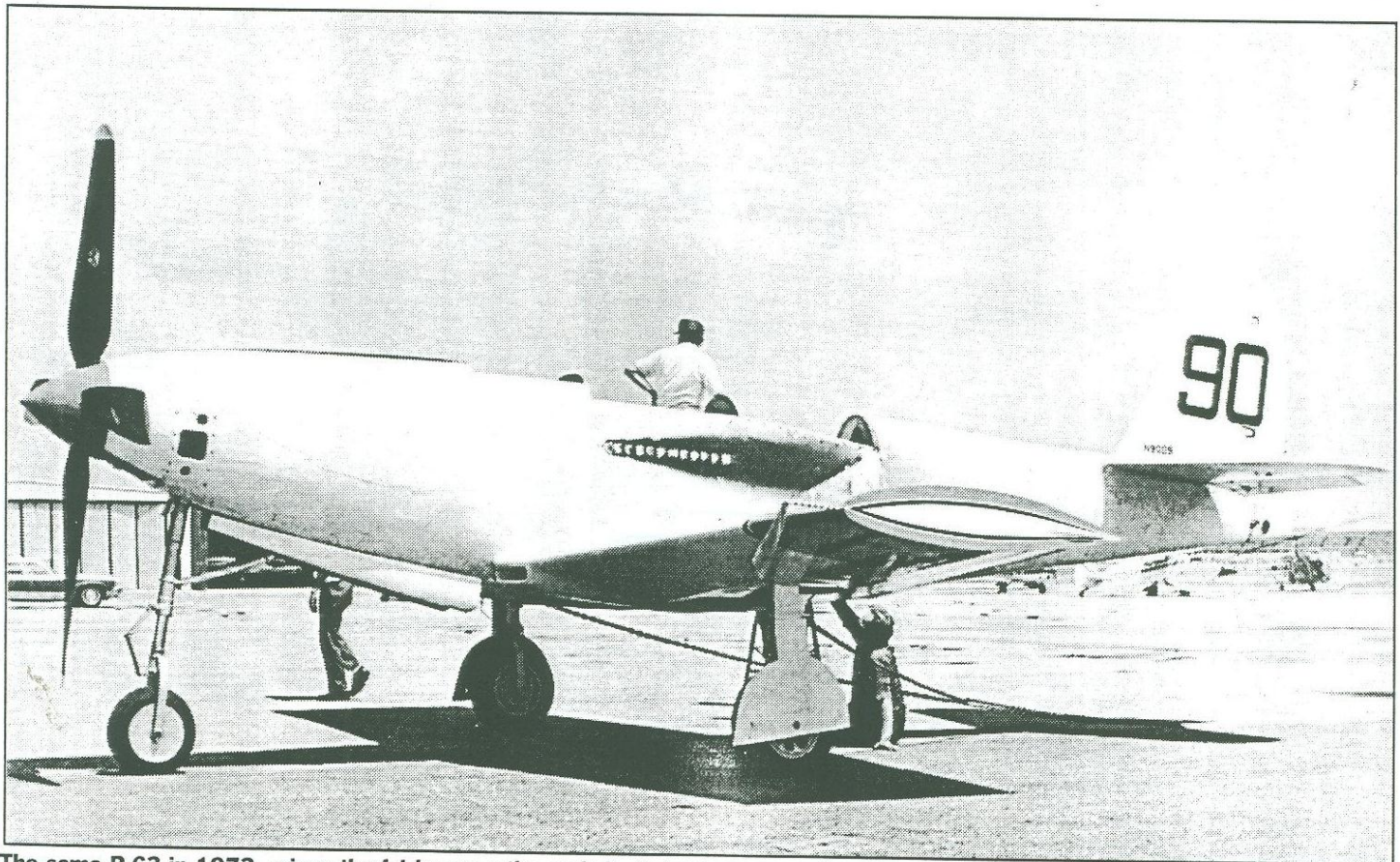
By Mike Meek

•Part 1 of 2•

Having long been an auto racing nut and a vintage aircraft enthusiast, unlimited air racing naturally caught my atten-

tion. Through the years, I've gathered a lot of reference material on post-WWII air races, including "Racing Planes and Air Races," a series of annuals by the late Reed Kinert.

When I began contemplating building a P-63 racer, I chose



The same P-63 in 1973, minus the fairing over the cockpit. Note the caps on the clipped wing tips and the heavy exhaust stains

Larry Havens' P-63C, which appeared at Reno in 1972 and 1973. It had a short racing career of only a few years before being lost off the coast of Long Beach during a test flight. Pilot Havens was forced to bail out after control problems when the engine induction system blew.

When I heard about the MPM/Hitech 1:48 scale P-63 release, I couldn't wait to do a model of this aircraft. I decided to build it as it appeared in 1973 because it really looked the part in its white and red paint scheme.

The MPM kit is molded in light grey plastic like their 1:72 scale version. Included are resin parts for the cockpit and wheels and vacuformed parts for the canopy and door windows.

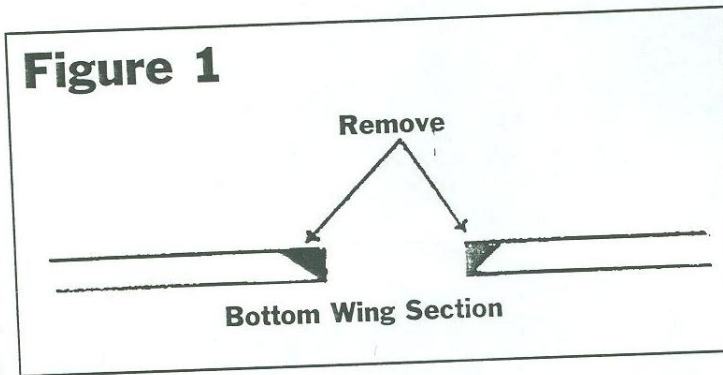
Like most limited run kits, the parts are very thick and don't really fit together all that well, but it's the only game in town, so I won't say that it sucks. The first thing I did was to remove all the

locator pins from the wings and fuselage halves. I then tried up the mating surfaces using 150 grit sandpaper wrapped around an automotive paint stirring stick. If you take your time and do a lot of test fitting you can get some good results and avoid a lot of sanding and filling later.

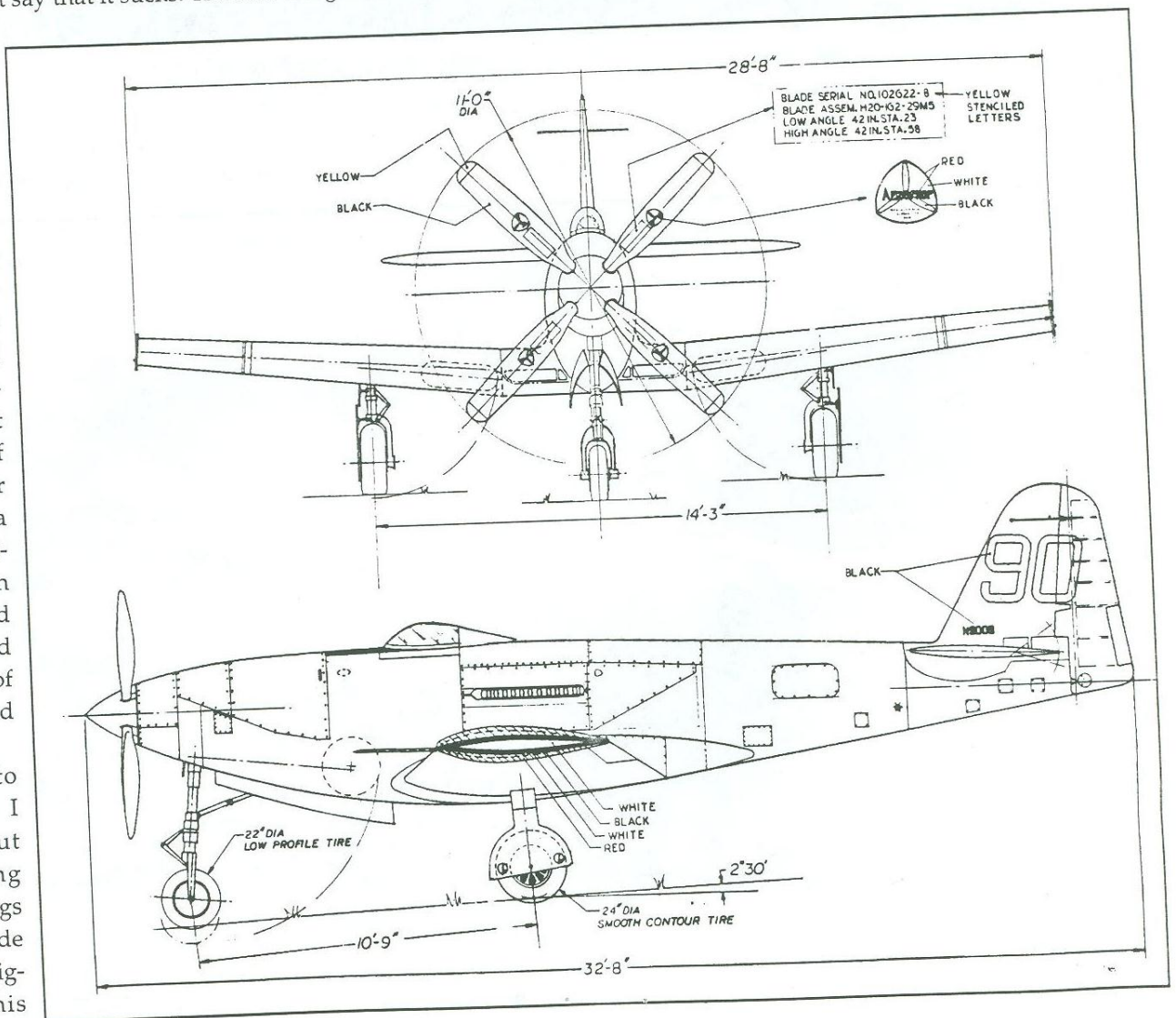
Turning to the wings, I thinned out the landing gear openings on the inside edges (See Figure 1).

improves the appearance of the openings.

On my model the outer three-quarters of an inch on one of the wing halves was deformed, but it didn't matter, because I reduced the span to a scale 28'8". For this I used my X-Acto saw, I just love hot rod planes! I did some sanding on the two ribs to make them fit better, at the same time checking the fit of the top wing half as well. The kit provides a piece for the front of the wing that



incorporates the openings for the radiators/coolers. These openings did not appear correct to me, so I took some .060 styrene and made a new piece that goes on the front of the wing between the wing halves. This allowed me to make the inner two holes without the interference of the wing-to-fuselage joint (See Figure 2). This is the way MPM treated this area in their 1:72 kit. I used a small drill in a pin vice for the corners of the new openings, then cut between them with an



X-Actoblade. After cutting them a little undersize, I cleaned them up with a rat tail file.

I glued the wing halves together with super glue, added the new front piece and sanded and filled with super glue until the entire assembly blended together.

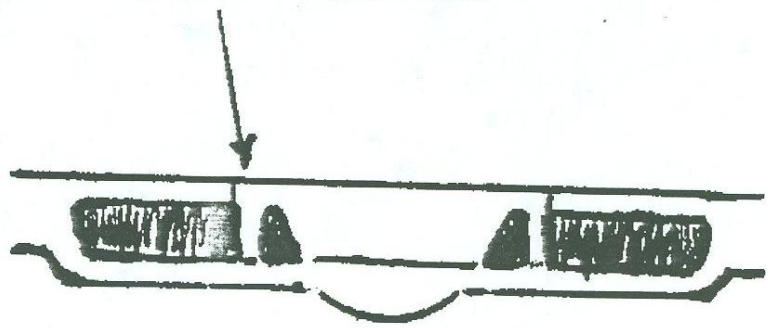
A notch had to be cut in the fuselage to clear the new front piece. At this time I also added a main spar and ribs in the center of the wing so there wasn't just a big void inside.

I used a black decal sheet to simulate the openings in the main spar that lead to the radiators, and used pieces of styrene strip to simulate the complex ducting.

When the wings are glued together, it becomes apparent that there is no laminar flow shape to the kit's wing at all. It

**Figure 2**

Added piece with new holes



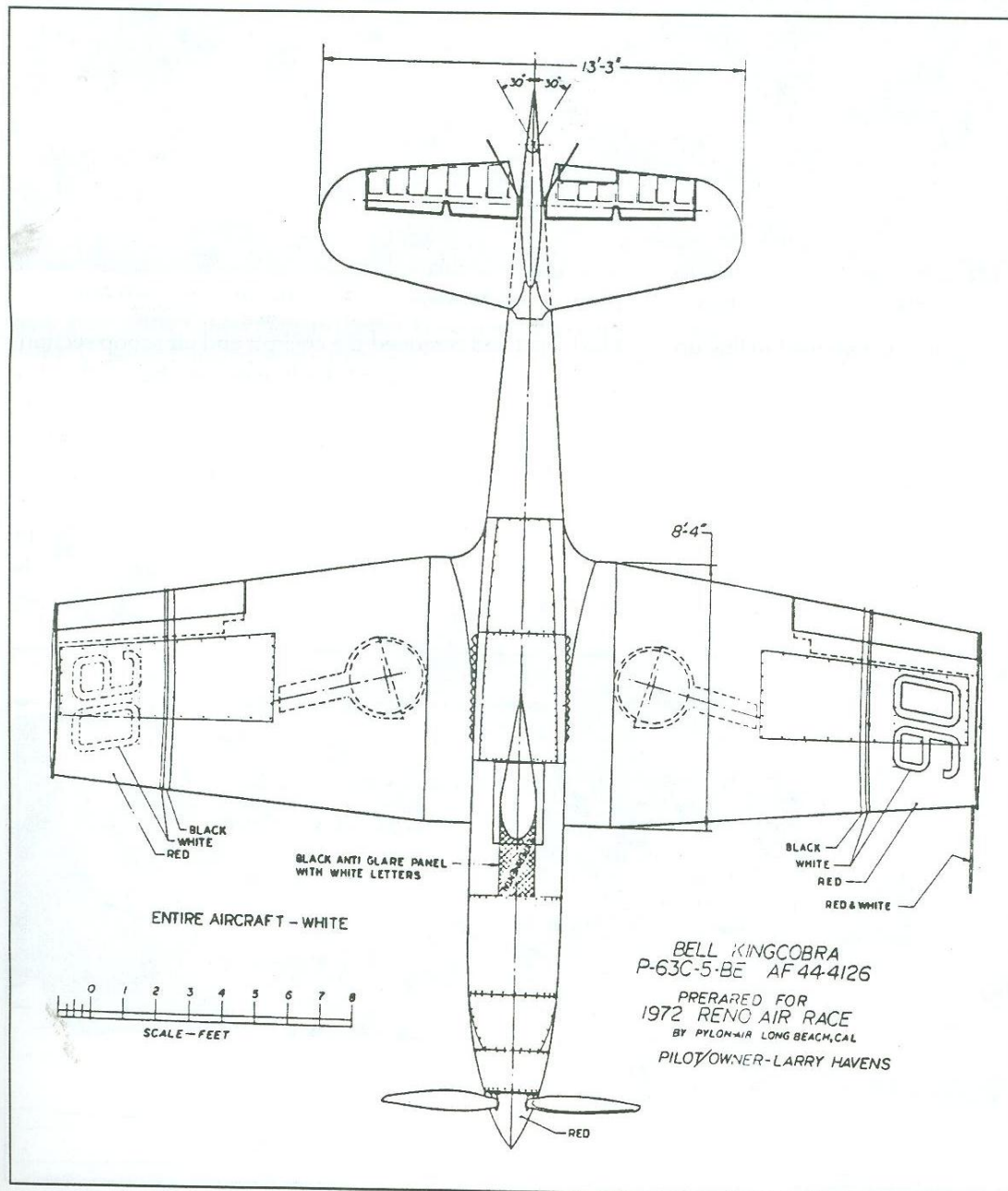
Front view of wing

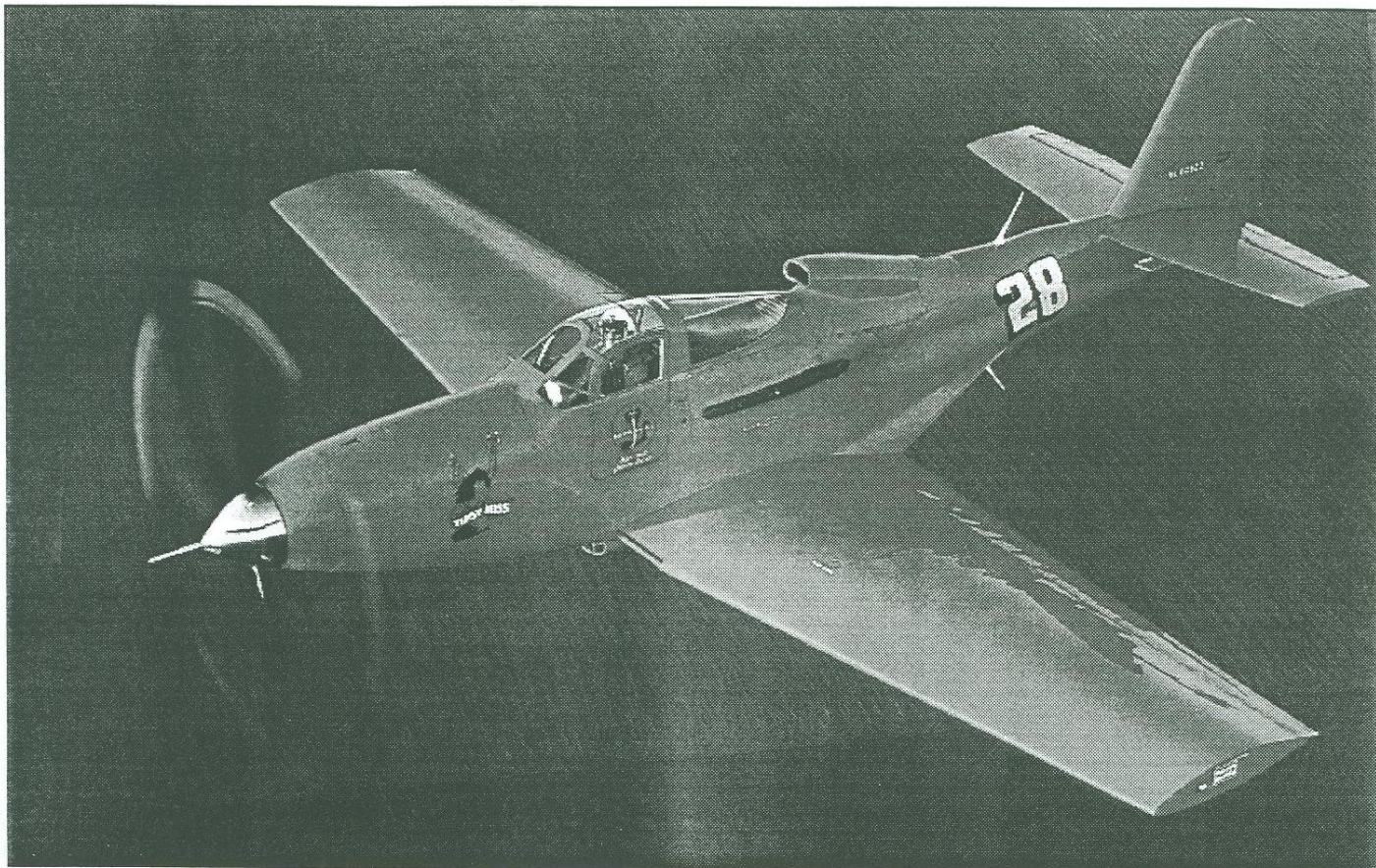
also appears to be a little on the thin side, as the *Kingcobra* had a thick wing. It would take some filler and a lot of sanding to

correct this. Since this model has a reduced span and end plates on the wing, it's not so visible on this racer.

Next, I noticed that the aileron span is too long to match up to the drawings. I checked this on some pictures of a recently dismantled P-63 and reduced the span accordingly. Using my *Airwaves* razor saw I separated the aileron/flap joint as well as the elevator line. To true up the wing, I sanded and shaped it with 150 grit sandpaper wrapped around a stir stick. I then filled the leftover flap lines with super glue and sanded this area smooth so it would appear to have sealed flaps. The last step was to rescribe the lost panel lines.

Now for some real fun: the fuselage. After I trued up the mating surfaces and got the halves to fit together, I cut off the ventral fin on the bottom of the fuselage. The plastic is thick enough that this caused no problem where the halves joined together.





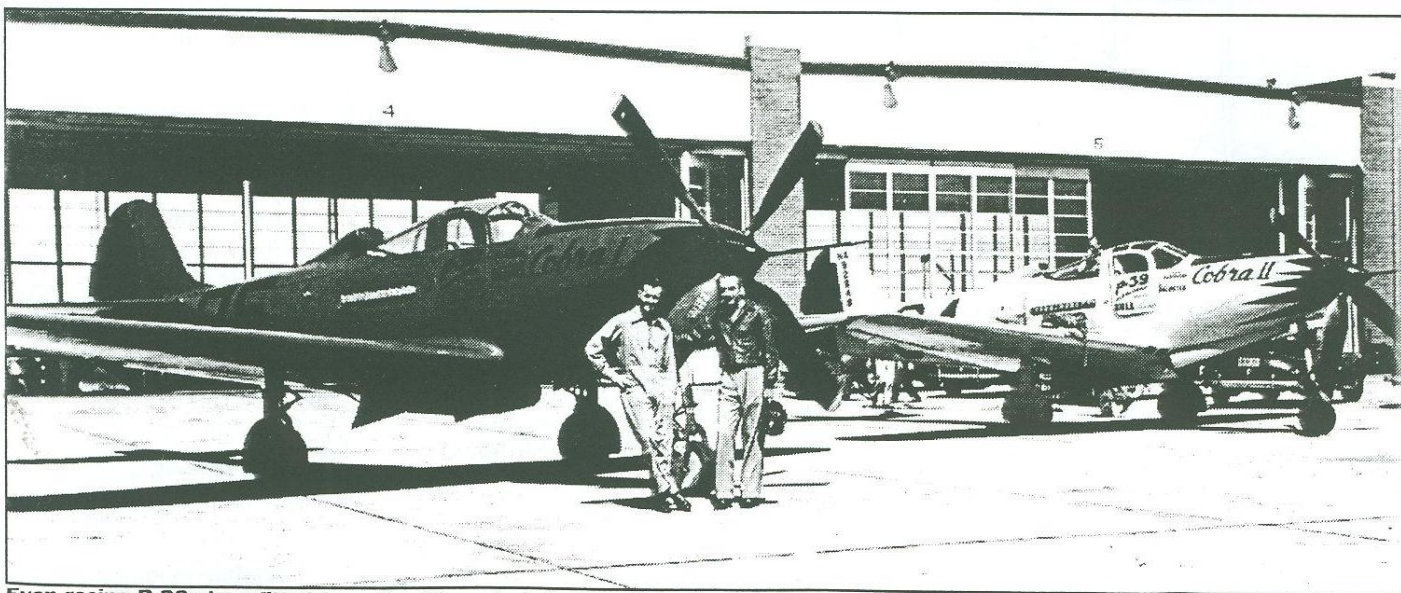
Another racing P-63 *Kingcobra* was "Topsy Miss," a much less radically altered Bell fighter.

Setting the fuselage half on the drawing, it seemed to line up fairly well and have a pretty accurate shape. I'm not concerned with thousands of an inch "'cause this is suppose to be fun!"

The worst problem was the thrust line of the prop. It appears to be angled upwards too much. I compared the kit drawings to the racers and the drawings in the Squadron/Signal No. 43 as well as the *Vac Wings* drawings and I think the *MPM* drawings are the most inaccurate of all of them.

Next, I cut and removed the cockpit and air scoop sections (see Figure 3). I then tacked the halves together with a few drops of super glue, cut the doors a little on the long side, glued them in place and trued up the cut out area. Using bass wood, I carved forms for these new sections and whipped out the old Mattel Vac machine.

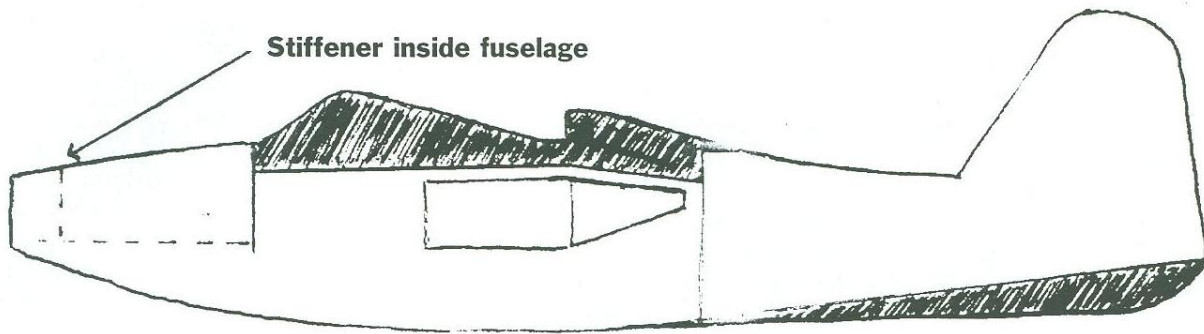
While I had the halves together, I also test fit the cockpit floor through the opening in the top. The edges needed to be sanded a little. I also installed an additional piece of styrene in



Even racing P-39s benefitted from the *Kingcobra's* legacy. Note the P-63-style four-bladed props on these 1950s Cleveland racers.



**Figure 3**



**Remove shaded areas around canopy, air scoop and ventral fin**

the forward fuselage to act as a stiffener above the nose wheel (see Figure 3).

Next, I figured out the weight needed to make the model sit on its nose wheel. I put half the weight under the seat on the bottom of the cockpit floor and half in the forward nose. Before gluing the halves together, I removed the ejector pins that showed inside the cockpit/wheel wells. After joining the halves it was more sanding and more super glue. Did someone say this was fun?

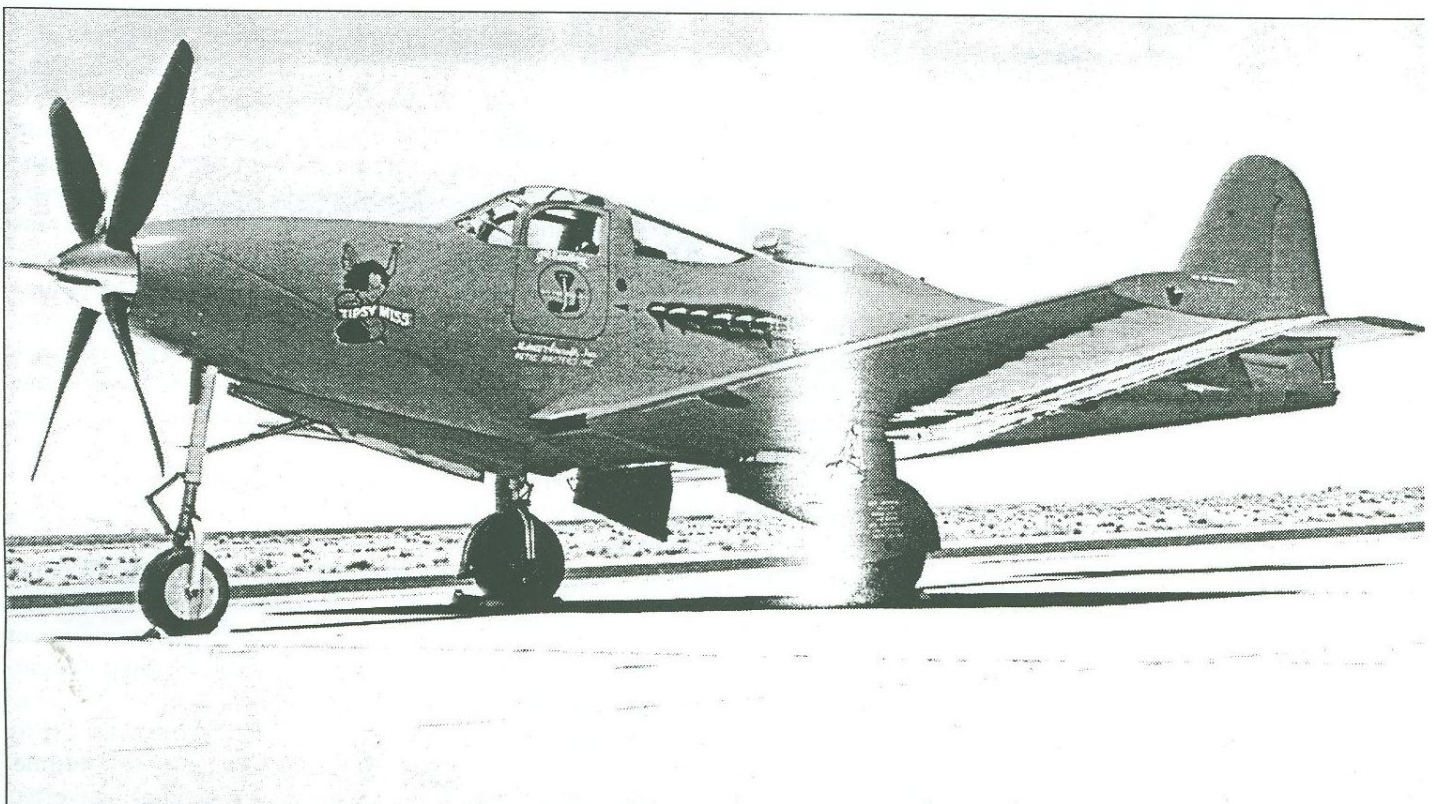
I added the rest of the interior at this point and sprayed it light grey using *Gunze Sangyo* (better known as "Ben Pada's Paint"). After I added some photo-etched seat belts, I was ready to install the new vacuformed sections. More super

glue, more sanding, more super glue, a little *Squadron* white putty, and of course, more super glue.

Before going over the whole model with some 320 grit paper, I corrected the panel lines. I also carved a bass wood form for the tiny cosmic wind-type canopy. The wing to fuselage fit, to put it mildly, sucks!

I added thin styrene strip to the wing mating edge and then sanded the edge on the fuselage until I got a decent fit. I attached the wing and the tail assemblies, doing my best to ensure they were properly aligned. Next I primed the whole model. Now I'm having a Miller; why do I feel like DILBERT?

**Next month: the finishing details-prop, landing gear, wheels and paint.**



**Another view of "Topsy Miss." An accident spelled the end of this *Kingcobra's* racing days. Note the wingtip caps on this P-63.**

# OCTOBER MINUTES

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At October's meeting, Bruce McBride picked up where he left off last year by quickly moving to organize this year's Veterans Administration Hospital Model Drive. To help us surpass our impressive totals from last year, Bruce recruited a group of volunteers—Brian Sakai, Richard Pedro, Brian Smith, James Rasp, Jim Priete, Matt Reich and Brad Chun—to help coordinate our drive efforts with local hobby shops and to transport and store the models. With a bigger crew and an established track record, last year's total of 477 models collected seems sure to fall.

In model talk, Tom Bush is doing some major surgery on a 1:8 Jaguar, grafting in a V8 engine and building up the area ahead of the fire wall. Tom Bush Jr. is also working on automotive subjects, as his silver "armored" funny car attests. He's also converting a "Sea Quest" Stinger into a helicopter! Richard Pedro displayed a pair of RC car bodies, which he airbrushed "inside out" to preserve to super-glossy exterior appearance. Kent McClure is working on a racing project for November's "Unlimited Air Racers" contest, clipping and snipping a twin-boomed Saab J 21 from the *Heller* kit. Never one to be pigeonholed, Kent's also hard at work on his *Zvesda* M13/40 Italian tank and a Robotech figure. One of Hubert Chan's first armor efforts was his *Tamiya* M5A4 Stuart, but you'd never know it by looking at the detailed model; the camouflage netting on the helmet came from some nylon panty hose, by the way! Chris Bucholtz has the wings on his F-6D *Mustang* and is getting ready to paint his recon bird. Roy Sorensen has finished his *Tamiya* Bradley AFV and has moved back to the open road, building a Ford panel truck and an roadster that's entirely composed of aftermarket parts. Mike Burton's 1:48 *Monogram* P-51B is painted in the markings of a captured *Mustang*; his natural metal plane now has the yellow undersides common to German-operated allied aircraft. Rodney Williams' latest mega project is the upgrading of a 1:32 P-40; he showed the horizontal stabilizers, the hinges for the trim tabs and the oil coolers from the project. Kelly Avery has been a busy guy, judging by his *Tamiya* Dinah, his *Hobbycraft* Sea Fury, his *Tamiya* Zero and his *Otaki* Frank! Rick Yokogawa's among the early devotees of the *Tamiya* F4U-1 *Corsair* kit; he says the highly-detailed cockpit is a kit by itself. Eric McClure's figure in 1:35 of a female member of the Royal Artillery Corps is checking her alignment, so to speak. Eric painted this figure with oils. Frank Babbitt is getting close to completing his Dominican Republic P-51, built from the *Hasegawa* kit., and his South Vietnamese Air Force A-37 by *Monogram* is done and sports a scratch-built radio shelf behind the pilots' seats. Shane Johnson's *Tamiya* Castrol Celica is now a radical off-road racer, with a home-made brush guard and vinyl race numbers. Brian Sakai says that most of the parts in *MPM's* XP-55 *Ascender* kit are misaligned, and that lots of sanding and trimming are required. Nevertheless, his example is looking wonderful, as is his out-of-the-box *Minicraft* F4F-4 Wildcat and the two "superdeformed" figures from the Japanese cartoon "Dragon Ball 2" Brian artfully painted. Al Gonzalez' latest diorama would appeal to our Vice President: A *Minicraft* Hummer on a U.S. Air Force security detail. Al dressed up his diorama with *Verlinden* details and *DML* figures. Ken Miller, in the Halloween spirit,

adorned the table with his *Lindberg* glow-in-the-dark skull. Ken also showed his neat Mexican DC-8, built from the *Revell* kit. Joel Rojas proudly displayed the completed Chevrolet Caprices he's been working on; now, they'll probably be converted to police cars. Matt Reich used *Floquil* paints to finish his Fw 190 and has a *Monogram* Mustang GT94 and a Cobra in progress. Ben Pada's *Hasegawa* Macchi MC. 202 is in its finishing stages; Ben detailed the cockpit with *Jaguar* resin parts. Ben also showed off the "cover boy" from last month, the *Tamiya* P-51D, which survived a modeling scare. Ben said he thought he was spraying metallizer sealer; instead, he accidentally airbrushed two coats of thinner over the finished model! Luckily, the paint failed to react to this assault! Also new to Ben's growing air force: a *Hobbycraft* Bf 109, finished in the markings of Erich Hartmann. Ralph Patino is cutting into the world sheet plastic supply again, scratch-building a 1950's Texaco tanker truck and converting *Revell's* Diamond Rio to an Autocar gravel hauler, complete with hand-made fenders. Ralph also scratch-built a hauler for one of his many earth mover models! Brad Chun's F7F Firebomber, with its *Lone Star Models* belly pack, is ready for painting, as is his *Monogram* P-47, which he's converted to an "N" model. Brad's also working in a COIN FG-1D *Corsair* from the *Hobbycraft* kit, with a *True Details* cockpit added to spruce up the sparse interior. Dave Balderrama applied static modeling know-how to his RC Hummer body, airbrushing a Desert Storm scheme for his 1:8 car. And the Model of the Month goes to... Hubert Chan's Panzer II, which he's outfitted with accessories from *DML* and *Italeri* and additional scratchbuilt wire parts and clear lenses!

BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE! We also held the "Missiles of October" contest at the meeting, and turnout was great! Cliff Kranz used the *Condor* kit to build the grand-daddy of all big missiles, the V-2, in 1:72; he says the base of this little kit is exquisite. Dave Balderrama entered a little *Heller* Natter and a couple of arrows (true missiles). Kent McClure also displayed some 1:72 German ordnance in the form of an Enzian, a Bv146 and another Nazi glide bomb, all built from the same *Condor* kit. Frank Babbitt took his time in aligning the many guidance fins on *Airfix's* 1:72 Bloodhound ground-to-air missile. Mark Hernandez built a not-so-hypothetical German aircraft in the form of a *Mauve* 1:48 V-2. Mike Burton took *Revell's* *Regulus* kit and built it into a destructive-looking naval projectile, and got a good head start on *Revell's* Aerobee sounding rocket and trailer.

And the winners were... In the winged category: Third place went to Ben Pada's 1:48 *Pacific Monograph* V-1 buzz bomb, the first jet we've seen from Ben in a while! Second place went to Chris Bucholtz' 1:72 *Hasegawa* MX7 Ohka suicide bomb. And first place went to Mike Burton's "Missile with a Man in it," a TF-104G *Starfighter* in the markings of Lockheed's technology demonstrator. In the non-winged category, third place went to Cliff Kranz' 1:35 scale V-2 vengeance missile. Second went to Ken Miller's impressive *Airfix* 1:144 Saturn V, complete with LEM and Command Module. And first place went to Jim Priete's *Hawk* Corporal, converted from a cheesy glow-in-the-dark kit with a nice coat of *Floquil* white. Congratulations to all the winners!

# DML's P.1101 hypothetical nächtjager

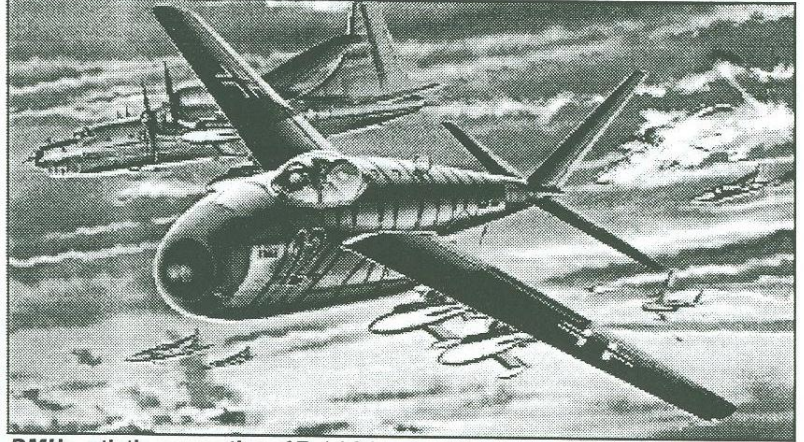
Continued from page 5

Next, I added the landing gear and doors, wheels, drop tanks and missiles. I added the radar aerials last due to their delicate nature, and brush painted them. There are eight aerials to be aligned in three planes of view, front, side, and top. I calculate about 24 different ways to screw up the alignment here! It just takes patience.

I had some trouble aligning the wheels and the stance of the aircraft, but it was nothing a good plastic surgeon can't fix. Finally, I brushed on a little gray pastel dust here and there for extra weathering. I applied a coat of Future to the outside of the canopy to brighten it. The curved glass really reflects light in a pleasing way. I also bolted on an auxiliary rocket booster pack to the fuselage bottom, for those short runway takeoffs.

At this point, the Seven Dwarves started singing "Leave well enough alone..." in the dank caverns of my mind, and I declared the project finished.

I spent about 15 hours on this model, and it was a pleasure.



DML's artist's conception of P.1101s attacking a group of B-32 Dominators.

References:

*Warplanes of the Third Reich*, by William Green

*The X-Planes*, by Jay Miller

*German Secret Weapons*, by Brian Ford

*Coming in November:*

**"Gentlemen, you have a really, really wild model contest!"**

## UNLIMITED AIR RACERS 2

**If it turns a prop and is NOT regularly seen at Reno or Chino, it's eligible at SVSM!  
Racing rarities limited only by your imagination!**

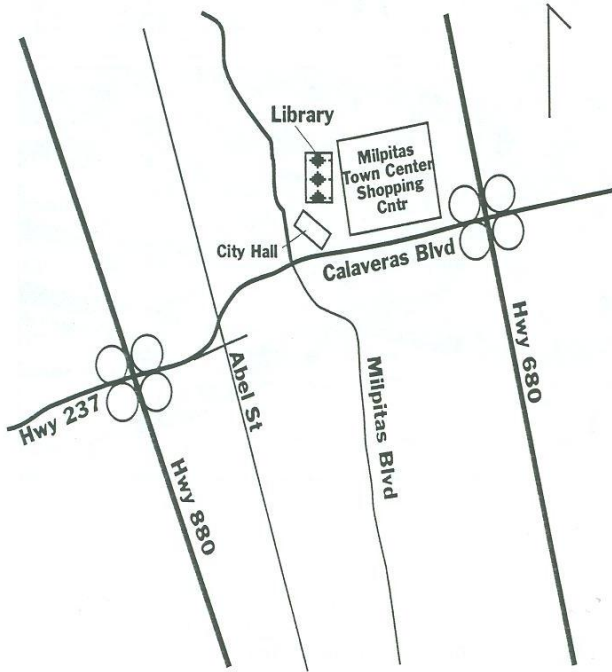
**•November 15•**

*Coming in December:*

**The third annual Holiday Pizza Pig-Out  
and Gift Theft Party  
And special bonus event**

## World War II Thunderbolts CONTEST

**•December 20•**



Next meeting:  
**7:30 p.m.,  
Friday,  
November 15**

**at the Milpitas  
Public Library,  
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**For more information, call the  
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