



Speed Bump - Slow Down For Some Automotive Tales

A Monthly Column By Hal Tretbar

Airplanes by Auto Manufacturers

Going back to the start of the 20th century, quite a few automobile manufacturers also built airplanes. I will try to hit the high points on a number of interesting companies in upcoming columns.

Ford

Most of us know that Henry Ford, who flooded the market with Model Ts, also was an aviation enthusiast. Starting in 1926, he built nearly 200 of the famous Ford TriMotor passenger and transport planes. They were in service worldwide because they were so sturdy. About eight are still flying today.

During World War II Ford's Willow Run plant in Michigan was producing one new B24 bomber every hour. 8,685 had been built when production ended June 28, 1945.



The 6,000th B24 built at Ford's Willow Run plant
Credit: Wikipedia

But did you know Ford made a small plane for private use? In 1926 he introduced the Flivver, a counterpart to the ubiquitous Model T. It was a small, open cockpit model with a wooden body and wing. The Flivver was powered by a radial, three cylinder, 35 hp, air cooled engine.

The test pilot, Harry Brooks, was a personal friend of Henry Ford. Brooks used the Flivver as daily transportation to his job at the plant. In 1928 he set a

record for a nonstop flight of 927 miles from Dearborn, Michigan to Florida. He had to land on the beach, just short of Miami. After several days Brooks took off to finish the flight. He died when the plane crashed into the ocean, probably from engine failure.

Henry Ford was so distraught that he stopped development of the Flivver, a personal plane for the masses.



Test pilot Harry Brooks in the Ford Flivver
Credit Ford Motor Company

Honda

It took Honda Motors 10 years of development to get their business jet certified by the FAA in 2015. The Hondajet is a compact jet powered by twin engines of unusual design. The designer awoke one night and put his idea to paper. The sketch placed the engines on pylons above the wings and has proven to give the Hondajet outstanding performance. It is fast, fuel efficient, and comfortable.

The spacious cabin has room for the pilot and five passengers. There is a lavatory and considerable space in the luggage compartments. As of 2017, 40 Hondajets had been delivered at about \$4,500,000 per plane.



The innovative HondaJet with pylon mounted engines - Credit: Blog.privatefly.com (noted in references)

Mitsubishi

Today's Mitsubishi Motor Corporation has descended from a shipping firm, started in 1870 at Osaka, Japan that quickly diversified. The first cars were built by the Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Co. in 1928. They were a limited edition luxury model for government officials. Currently Mitsubishi makes sedans, SUVs, and electric hybrids for a world-wide market.

In 1927 the Mitsubishi Aircraft Company was founded to build fighter planes for the Japanese military. In 1937 The Imperial Navy asked Mitsubishi to design an aircraft to fly from aircraft-carriers. The new design



A Mitsubishi Zero leaving an aircraft-carrier for Pearl Harbor - Credit: unknown

was based on the Imperial Army's successful A5M fighter.

The Navy required that the plane be capable of 310 mph at 13,000 feet and able to fly two hours at normal speed. To meet these demands the plane would need to be very light. A new type of aluminum was used.

Protection of the pilot and fuel tanks was sacrificed in favor of speed and maneuverability.

The new fighter entered service in 1940. It was designated the A6M. It became known as the Mitsubishi Zero as its official designation was Type O Carrier Fighter. The A6M had two 7.7 mm machine guns. It could be fitted with extra fuel tanks and carry several different types of bombs. It had a range of 1,929 miles, a maximum speed of 331 mph and could reach 33,000 feet in altitude.

The Zero was able to out maneuver the enemy and was superior in a dog fight. Allied pilots began working in tandem to develop new tactics with their P-40 Warhawks and the F4F Wildcats. The American planes were very rugged and more difficult to bring down.

By the end of WWII Mitsubishi had built over 11,000 Zeros. Between 1941 and 1945 the Zero had destroyed at least 1,550 American aircraft.



The Mitsubishi Regional Jet or MRJ is now called the SpaceJet 90 Credit: Wikipedia

In recent years Mitsubishi has again taken to the skies. After building some business jets they have introduced the twin engine Mitsubishi Regional Jet or MRJ. It comes in either a 70 or 90 seat configuration.

In June of 2019 the name was changed to SpaceJet M90. It is expected to pass certification shortly and be available for regional airlines in the near future.

References:

<https://blog.privatefly.com/car-brands-who-also-make-private-jets>