

SUDDENLY, PILOT NICK GREY AVOIDS A POTENTIAL DISASTER WITH BERLIN EXPRESS A CONVERTIBLE!

BY DOUG FISHER

For the aviation enthusiast, the Flying Legends airshow at the historic Imperial War Museum Duxford Airfield is one of the year's highpoints. For the Mustang enthusiast, some of Duxford's highlights included the debut of the recently restored P-51D *Frenesi* (see elsewhere in this issue) along with the spectacular arrival of Lee Lauderback in P-51B *Berlin Express* — after flying the Atlantic. This daring adventure will be covered in an upcoming issue.

The complete story of *Berlin Express* (along with Scott Slocom's great photographs) is told in the Fall 2015 issue of *Mustangs International*.

Berlin Express would not have existed if it were not for the vision and financial commitment of Max Chapman combined with the skill and dedication of Pacific Fighters.

After its completion and test flying by Pacific Fighters at the company's Idaho Falls, Idaho, headquarters, the aircraft put on a number of hours and was flown to the Stallion 51 headquarters in Florida, where Lee Lauderback had the chance

to fly the fighter and pronounced it to be not only a great flying airplane, but also a work of the restorer's art.

As time went by, a decision was made to put *Berlin Express* up for sale. Obviously, the price was going to be steep but even so the fighter attracted considerable attention from several big name collectors.

Amongst the Warbird community there was considerable debate on to whom *Berlin Express* would go. Would it stay in the United States? Would it go overseas? Would the new owner keep it as *Berlin Express*? The answer to the last question would certainly seem to be an affirmative "yes," but stranger things have happened.

It did not take that long before the new owner was announced — Dan Friedkin of Comanche Fighters, Texas. Dan's father Tom was an early collector of Warbirds. His father started PSA Airlines and upon the elder Friedkin's death, Tom utilized some of his inheritance to found Gulf States Toyota Distributors when that company was beginning to import cars into the USA.

When Tom became ill, Dan took over the business but he had also inherited his father's interest in Warbirds.

As noted in the article on *Frenesi*, Dan purchased the aircraft as it was going through the Midwest restoration



While coming down for the second act of Saturday's show in a dive at approximately 360-mph, the Malcolm Hood canopy explodes.

process. Over the years, the Friedkins had become known for bringing interesting and unusual Warbirds to the Duxford show. This year it would be *Frenesi* (crated and shipped) and *Berlin Express* (as noted earlier, flown across The Pond by Lee Lauderback).

Once *Frenesi* was assembled and test flown, the two mint Olive Drab/Neutral Gray camouflage fighters with their distinctive personal markings looked right at home on the Duxford grass.

Both aircraft were extensively flown before the show and Nick Grey got the thrill of being checked out in *Berlin Express*, an aircraft he was scheduled to fly as part of the popular Horsemen aerobatic routine.

Combining three Mustangs in close aerobatic formation is a big deal for the Duxford spectators, but they had even more of a thrill on Saturday afternoon.



Gear coming up and throttle all the way forward, Nick Grey blasts off on his first flight in *Berlin Express* on Thursday, 6 July.