Northrop N-9MB

Honoring a legacy of ingenious design

In October 1941, Northrop was contracted to develop a radical new bomber, the XB-35, based on Jack Northrop’s flying wing concept. To refine the design, the contract included provisions for three 1/3-scale manned, flying “mockups,” designated N-9M. Eventually, a fourth “B” model was also built.

These small flying wings were built primarily of plywood over a steel frame and powered by a pair of general aviation engines. Over the next three years, the N-9M fleet flew hundreds of hours of flight testing and pilot training, and contributed greatly to the progress of the bomber program.

When the XB-35 and subsequent YB-49 flying wing bombers were cancelled in 1950 and cut up for scrap metal, the remaining N-9Ms were donated to an aircraft technician school to be used as training articles. Only one has survived, and was acquired by the Planes of Fame Museum in Chino, Calif. A 13-year restoration effort culminated in the bright yellow wing returning to the air in November 1994.

The N-9MB incorporates a number of innovations that were far ahead of its time:

- Tailless design, which lowers radar signature and results in greatly reduced pilot workload in cross-wind landing conditions.
- Split ailerons for yaw control instead of a rudder, an innovation carried over to the B-2A Spirit.
- “B” model was first aircraft in history to use hydraulically-boosted flight controls, a standard feature in modern aircraft.
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