

RETURN OF

# Race 64

VICKY BENZING AND FIGHTER REBUILDERS HAVE PUT AN HISTORIC MUSTANG BACK IN THE SKY

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



Vicky on the takeoff roll at Chino. As can be seen, Vicky decided to retain Clay's famous purple paint scheme although she added the new name Plum Crazy.

The 4th of September was a blazing hot day at Chino Airport. While a good portion of the nation gears up for fall weather, September is always hot in southern California. I was in the back seat of Steve Hinton's P-51D *Wee Willy II* as we lifted off from Chino and began to head south toward Lake Elsinore. Up front, Rob Patterson was doing the driving and we were on a very special flight — to get some aerial photographs of Vicky Benzing her brilliantly purple P-51D named *Plum Crazy*.

Unstrapping, I began the laborious process of turning around in the very limited space and then getting on my knees in order to face to the sides and rear. This is the

best position in a Mustang for taking photos but to say it is uncomfortable in an understatement. Combined with the heat coming through the bubble canopy and the fact the second seat is located over the radiator, I was beginning to “enjoy” the sauna effect. “You okay?” came Rob over the intercom. I gave him a thumbs up that he could see in his rear facing mirror.

Looking back as we climbed out, I spotted Vicky in Race 64 as she lifted off and began a tight left turn to catch up with us. Race 64 and I go back a long, long time and I must admit it was sort of emotional seeing the plane in the air once again. I had flown in Race 64 several times courtesy of Clay Lacy and had done aerial shots of it on numerous occasions.

Vicky smoothly brought N64CL into formation on the right side of the *Wee Willy II* and I began snapping away. The

whole point of the flight was for Vicky to get some more time in the Mustang prior to heading to the final air race at Reno. Taking photos was the secondary part of the mission.

Over the intercom I heard Rob calling Elsinore. The large lake has an airfield on the south end that is home to a skydiving enterprise. “Mustang N7715C, be advised we will have skydivers in the air in three minutes,” came the reply from Elsinore unicom. “Roger that,” said Rob. “Vicky, we are going to Plan B.” Turning to the east, we headed to another remote area that would not be encumbered with skydivers or other aircraft. Traveling at 250-mph and locked in a tight formation, Vicky decided to break away to do some

Vicky Benzing and the Mustang near Chino Airport. Steven Hinton took the aircraft aloft for its first post-restoration flight on 31 August after a four-year rebuild by Fighter Rebuilders.