

# ART CHESTER'S RACERS

THIS SKILLED "BACKYARD" DESIGNER HELPED FORGE THE GOLDEN AGE OF AIR RACING WITH HIS THE JEEP, THE GOON, AND SWEET PEAS RACERS WHILE ALSO HELPING TO CREATE THE PROTOTYPE NORTH AMERICAN MUSTANG

BY TIM WEINSCHENKER



Whenever they could, the Chester brothers would make their way to Cicero Field where they got to see early aviators and their flying machines.



Sneaking in, the boys watched early aerial displays with a growing sense of awe.

The air racing community was shocked by the appearance of Frenchman Michel Detroyat and his sleek Caudron C.460 racer at the 1936 Thompson race. America was still in the depths of the Great Depression and many American race pilots were literally living hand to mouth. The Thompson, with its large prize money, could be a pot of gold for these aviators but the performance of the Caudron was far superior to the domestic entries and the US pilots viewed the deep blue race plane with hostility. Detroyat definitely did not "feel the love" and rules were later reworked to virtually ban these foreign racers. However, some pilots responded to the stellar performance of the Caudron as a challenge to raise their game by creating a new generation of racing plane. One such pilot was Art Chester.

Art was born on 15 December 1899 in Downers Grove, Illinois, a city a few miles west of Chicago. The family name (of Czech origin) was Czechowski, which was shortened to Chester near the turn of the century for obvious practical reasons. From a very young age, Art was fascinated by all things mechanical. He had an immense interest in the "horseless carriage" and at the tender age of 13, Art, along with his brother Ed, worked together to construct their first racing machine, which was a midget roadster. A second-hand cycle motor provided the power and was mated to a wooden body. The citizens of Downers Grove considered it to be a mechanical marvel but it would not be long before another mechanical creation attracted Art's undivided attention.

A trip to Cicero Field in Chicago brought the brothers Chester in contact with their first glimpse of a real flying machine. Seeing this craft in person and having the opportunity to speak to the pilot soon had Art professing that he intended to make airplanes on a smaller scale by building scale models. As he built his wooden models, Art said to anyone who would listen that he wanted to go full time into the field of aeronautics. However, he needed an opportunity.

Before that opportunity presented itself, another challenge came about — motorcycles. Art and Ed began riding in 1915 and it did not take long before



Classic image of Art Chester with the just-completed *The Goon*. As can be seen, the plane was designed for just one thing: Speed. Handling characteristics were not pleasant and *The Goon* was disassembled and trucked to the events in which it would participate. The Menasco Super Buccaneer was ideal for the long, slim fuselage while the rather clever retract system brought the short gear legs directly into the fuselage.

