

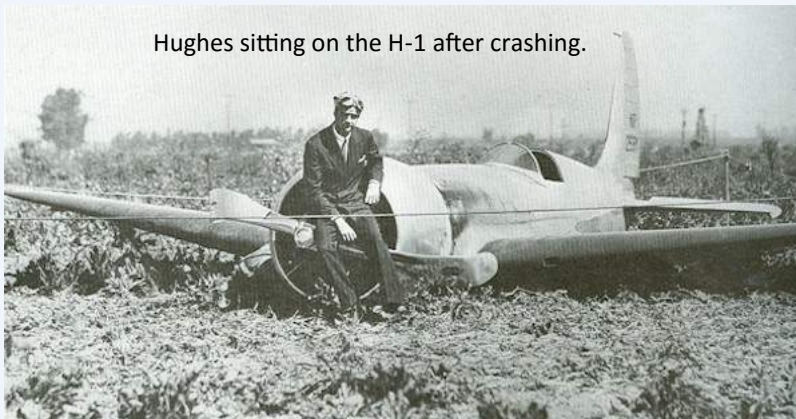
## The H-1 Racer

The eccentric Howard Hughes won several air races but he always wanted to go faster. In the 1930's, he asked Glenn Odekirk, an aeronautical engineer who worked with Hughes on many projects, to build him the fastest airplane in the world.

His team succeeded and the final aircraft was called the H-1 Racer.



The aircraft was designed to reduce as much drag as possible. It had a polished aluminum exterior and was the first to feature a retractable landing gear with both main and tail wheel. It was the first to use flush rivets, split flaps and a special engine cowling built to reduce drag.



Hughes sitting on the H-1 after crashing.

On the day of the test flight, Hughes was told that since this was a short test flight, he only had about an hour and a half of fuel on board. He took off and hit speeds of over 350 MPH and became so excited that he forgot about the limited fuel and ran out of gas, crashing in a beet field...but not before setting a world speed record.

On January 18, 1937, Hughes flew the aircraft from Burbank California to Newark, New Jersey setting a new speed record that lasted for 7 years.

Although the US Army Air Corps was not overly interested in the design (more than likely for political reasons) the Japanese were very interested. Unknown to the US, Japan was able to get enough details about the design to build the Zero based on the H-1 design. No one else had the aircraft to examine so it was assumed that they did it through spies and photographs of the aircraft that appeared all over the world when Hughes was flying.

The H-1 is now at home in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum.



Photo from National Air and Space Museum