

Ground School

by sick

It's important to set up any plane before take-off, and the Pony is no exception. The important things that have to get done are fuel, convergence, and your stick setup. Fuel and convergence can be set up on a plane by plane basis, but your stick configuration will change the way you fly all planes, so it is perhaps the most tricky.

Fuel is easy. When you start flying the Pony, you need the most performance possible, and just enough fuel to fight a little and go home. For this, 25% will be plenty. That gives you more endurance than most planes have with 35%, but also lightens your bird up a bit. As you become more expert, you will find yourself running out of gas before you run out of ammo. At this point, start adding gas until you reach a happy medium. These days I fly with a 50% load for most missions, just to make sure that fuel load is never a problem.

Convergence is another issue. I use to think a 200 yard convergence was good for all kinds of shooting, at that the key was always to hold your fire. Recently I've changed my mind about that. I use 200 yards only in aircraft where I expect closing velocities to be relatively low, for example when I'm flying one of the Spitfire marks. On the other hand, I use 300 yards when I'm flying the P-47 or the P-51. The reason for this is that it's important to have as long a firing window as possible. Your firing window is the time you have from when you reach effective range until when you overshoot the target. In a P-51 or a P-47, your time inside that margin can be damn low, due to very high closing speeds. With a 300 yard convergence, I find that I'm able to open up at longer ranges, D4 and even as high as D5 on occasion if I've got a really good shot, and still stand a good chance of doing damage.

Stick configuration is also something I've recently changed my mind about. One thing stays the same: no dampener! If you are having trouble with stick sensitivity, use no-6's excellent WBStick instead of dampening input. This will keep your bird as responsive as possible. As for stick scaling, I use to be a firm believer in a low scale that geometrically increased. However, I've changed my mind on that one. I now use a flat 10, 20, 30...90 scaling. Using WBStick, I have the correct deadzone and max inputs for my stick, so I find that smooth scaling allows for more precise control throughout the range. Basically, my stick advice comes down to: use WBStick! You will love it! (This advertisement provided at no charge ;).

Ground school doesn't end with being ready for takeoff, though. It also includes taking off at the right place. The main thing is to never ever take off at a field that is under attack. Now that I've said that, I break this rule all the time, but when I do it's because I know that I can egress from the field and come back with altitude before anyone can catch me. Don't try this at home, heheh. Instead, pick a field where there are no enemies, maybe even no enemies within a sector, so that you can arrive at your destination with 15k to 20k of altitude. Always pick a destination before you take off. Know where you will go, who you will fight, and where you expect to go home to when you're done. This way, if you have to tuck tail and run, you'll run in the right direction ;)

The final piece of ground school is knowing how you will fly to the target. If you have plenty of fuel for the mission, use full throttle. If you are concerned about fuel usage, fly at military power, which is when you put the throttle needle right at the point where the red zone starts. In the P-51, this is at about 85% throttle. This will give you great fuel efficiency, and plenty of power. I have often found myself fighting at this throttle setting, and not even realizing I was selling myself short. Next up, use auto trim on speed (shift-x) to climb at a constant speed, and use ".speed 180" to set that speed to 180 knots. This gives you a good climb rate, but preserves your roll rate in case you are bounced inbound to the target.

Now you're ready to fly!