

Known as "The Blackbird," the SR-71 remains the fastest plane which ever flew. Flying at speeds exceeding Mach 3.2, and reaching a height of 85,000 feet, it first entered service in 1966. Only 150 aviators ever qualified to fly her.

Built by Lockheed, the SR-71 traveled faster than a speeding bullet, leaving shock diamonds in her wake. Because of her maximum-attainable speed, the Blackbird was made of a material able to handle extreme in-flight temperatures.

She was operated by a two-man crew who served as "the brains" of the plane. As one pilot observed, the flight of an SR-71 required a "total man and machine integration."

A fully fueled Blackbird, still on the ground just before take-off, leaked fuel during its start-up process. Because of this phenomenon, the plane had to join with a waiting tanker - soon after take-off - in order to stay aloft.

Traveling at 3,200 feet per second, the SR-71 had a top speed of 2,268 miles per hour and could reach an altitude of 16 miles above ground.

In this NASA photo, we see an SR-71 in flight.



NASA tells us more about this picture:

The NASA SR-71A successfully completed its first cold flow flight as part of the NASA / Rocketdyne / Lockheed Martin Linear Aerospike SR-71 Experiment (LASRE) at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center, Edwards, California on March 4, 1998.

Most Blackbirds were powered by Pratt & Whitney J58 engines - the first designed to operate, for long periods, in afterburner mode - and her Flight Manual was more than 1,000 pages.

This video clip, from a documentary on the Blackbird, demonstrates (and explains) some of this famous plane's most extraordinary features.

One of the SR-71s - #61-7973 - broke the U.S. transcontinental airspeed record when it flew 2,404 miles in 67 minutes and 54 seconds. On its way to retirement - flying to Dulles Airport on March 6, 1990 - the plane averaged 2,124 miles per hour during the trip.

Credits:

Clip from "SR-71: The Blackbird," online courtesy YouTube.

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