

H-1 replica destroyed in Wyoming

■ Hughes racer constructor Jim Wright killed on way back from Oshkosh

HUGHES RACER replica NX258Y crashed in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, USA, on August 4, killing its pilot/constructor James Wright.

The sleek machine was en route from Oshkosh, Wisconsin — where it had been one of the stars of the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture gathering — to Wright's base at Cottage Grove, central Oregon. Wright was about halfway home when NX258Y came down five miles north of the famous "Old Faithful" geyser, about 90min after a refuelling stop at Gilette Campbell County airport.

Eyewitnesses reported that Wright appeared to be trying to put the racer down on to a road, but hit some trees. The machine broke up on impact.

The replica project was initiated in 1998 by Wright,

owner of a machine-tool company in Cottage Grove. It took Wright, five employees of his company and seven major subcontractors a total of 35,000hr to build the racer, at a reported cost of \$2 million (£1¼ million).

No original drawings for the H-1 survive, so the builders studied photographs and visited the National Air and Space Museum in Washington to make detailed measurements of the original, built in 1934 for Howard Hughes to try for the world speed record.

The wooden wing was built by Steve Wolf, maker of Delmar Benjamin's famous Gee Bee Model R replica, and a very rare 14-cylinder Pratt & Whitney R-1535 Twin Wasp Junior engine was traced and rebuilt to become the only working example of its type.

The highly-polished racer



Jim Wright's Hughes H-1 Racer replica at Oshkosh in early August.

MIKE LIVERMORE

made its maiden flight on July 9, 2002, from Cottage Grove with Jim Wright — who had 30 years' flying experience — at the helm. When Wright was asked why he went to so much effort to build the replica, he replied,

"Because it's the best 'plane that's ever been built."

Howard Hughes flew the original H-1 to a new world speed record of 352.3 m.p.h. on September 13, 1935, at Santa Ana, California; and to a transcontinental record (Los

Angeles—New York) in 7hr 28mins on January 7, 1937. A film about Howard Hughes, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, is soon to go into production in Hollywood, and Jim Wright's Hughes H-1 was expected to have played a starring role.