The Story of the
Johnson Rocket 185 - 09/22/99
By Larry Westin - Rev. E - 11/22/14 - Page 1 of 3

If your not familiar with this airplane let me provide a little history. "Pop" Johnson built a prototype Rocket "125" during 1942. The airplane has a tail wheel layout, low wing and a Lycoming O-290 engine. It was never awarded an Approved Type Certificate but has always been an amateur built airplane. That airplane, registered N41674, is still on the register today. Some sources indicate that Johnson also helped design both the Culver Cadet and the Globe Swift, both of which have similar configurations.

Johnson announced the Rocket 185 in Aug 1945. Design and manufacture of the Rocket took place at Fort Worth, Texas.

A two place, low wing monoplane, it is equipped with a retractable tri-cycle landing gear. Designed and built by Johnson Aircraft, Fort Worth, Texas. The wing is of primarily wood construction, the fuselage being built with 4130 steel tubing covered with plywood. The airplane is stressed for 9G loads; aerobatic strength. Appearing just after World War II, the airplane provided excellent performance with a top speed of almost 200 m.p.h. using a 6 cylinder Lycoming O-435A engine of 190 HP. Price - $5,000 dollars in 1946, much higher today!

Statistics:
Length 21 feet 10 inches
Wing span 30 feet 10 inches
Height to top of the rudder 8 feet 5 inches
Wing area 141 square feet
Empty weight from the factory 1650 pounds
Gross weight 2400 pounds
Believe these were later increased to 1775 and 2550 pounds respectively.

Performance:
Top Speed 180 m.p.h. at sea level
Stall speed about 68 m.p.h.
Cruise speed 160 m.p.h. at 8,000 feet
Climb 950 feet first minute
Range about 650 miles
Red line speed 230 m.p.h.

Mr. Fairbairn, owner/pilot of Rocket sn 11, shown in the image right, provides the following pilot's insight into what it is like to fly the Johnson Rocket 185.

It flies as good as it looks - like a WW-II fighter. An old P-47 pilot friend says that it handles just like one. A former CBI pilot, who used to own #7, said that it flew like a P-39 and still had a few tricks for him left up its sleeve.

I find it handles similar to a T-34, but with a much higher sink rate with full flaps, gear down and power off. I think it has somewhat better feel than a T-34, too.

I find my #11 to be an honest airplane, with fingertip response and good hands off flying, as it has 3-axis trim. The only thing to remember is that it will slow down in a hurry if you pull G's. Approach is 80 mph, with glide angle about like a space shuttle. The large split flaps and draggy extended gear really kill L/D.

If you approach at 70 mph, you won't have enough energy to flare and will make a hard landing, although the plane is generally easy to grease on.

On takeoff, you have to give it a positive rotation. As soon as the nose wheel is off, however, the CG goes aft of the mains, so you have to relax back pressure, otherwise one can get into PIO on takeoff. This is easily handled simply by relaxing stick back pressure - not by pushing the stick forward.

Otherwise, takeoff is a simple proposition of keeping it straight with rudder until 60 mph, rotation and fly off. I usually climb at 100 mph, cruise at 160-170 (indicated) at 23/23.

Recently, I have had to break in a cylinder. At 25/25 it indicated 180 mph and 14.5 gph.

Only 18 or 19 Johnson Rockets were built at Fort Worth, Texas. They are licensed with full approved type certificate, number 776 issued September 10, 1946. Like many aircraft companies there were more good ideas than money. About the time of certification, the national distributor, Rocket Aircraft Sales Corp., purchased controlling interest and changed the name to Rocket Aircraft, Inc. One problem with sales was the Rocket was a two place airplane and was competing against the 4 place Beech Bonanza and Ryan Navion, both of which have similar performance, and both were of all metal construction.

See page 3 for a synopsis chart of the Johnson Rocket aircraft I have information about.

Surviving Johnson Rockets
Condition, If Known, on 11/22/14

Model	Serial Number	Reg	Condition
Johnson Rocket 125	101	N41674	Airworthy since 4/99

Model	Serial Number	Reg	Condition
Johnson Rocket 185	5	N33343	Unknown
Johnson Rocket 185	6	N32R	Registration now N33341
Johnson Rocket 185	6	N33341	Currently being Restored
Johnson Rocket 185	7	N90200	**Airworthy**
Johnson Rocket 185	8	N90201	Badly Damaged, parts only
Johnson Rocket 185	9	N90202	**Airworthy**
Johnson Rocket 185	10	N9020	Awaiting Restoration - See Note 1 Below
Johnson Rocket 185	11	N90204	**Airworthy**
Johnson Rocket 185	12	N90205	Being Restored, may now be airworthy
Johnson Rocket 185	14	N90207	Unknown

Note 1 - This airplane originally registered NC90203. When the registration lapsed the number 90203 was reissued to another airplane.

Bibliography - Juptner, Joseph P., U.S. Civil Aircraft, Vol. 8, ATC Numbers - 701-800, see ATC #776.

If you have corrections or additions to points I've missed please contact me.

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