TECHNICAL NOTES

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR AERONAUTICS

No. 446

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WITH AIR SPEED

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Washington
February, 1933

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The purpose of this note is to present a method of estimating the variation of thrust horsepower with air speed, when the power unit consists of a conventional, thin, metal, fixed-pitch propeller driven by an internal-combustion engine. Such a curve is needed for the estimation of airplane performance in conjunction with a curve of horsepower required for maintaining level flight. The method is intended to be used in conjunction with data on families of propellers tested with airplane and engine, given in the form of selection charts of V/nD and propulsive efficiency plotted against C_s, the speed power coefficient. Complete familiarity with the use of such charts (reference 1) is presupposed, as well as an understanding of the adaptation of them to the determination of approximate characteristics of other propellers (reference 2, Ch. XVII); so this note may be considered an addition to those references. As far as possible standard symbols are used and will not be defined.

The nature of the problem is this. With a definite propeller whose characteristics are known or can be estimated, and which has been selected to fit an airplane having a certain engine and a certain maximum speed, the thrust horsepower is known for one air speed. With a change in air speed due to a modification of the attitude of the airplane without a change in the throttle setting there will usually be a change in revolution speed. The brake horsepower of the engine at constant throttle is a direct function of the revolution speed. Since the propulsive efficiency depends only on the ratio of the air speed to the revolution speed, both the brake horsepower and the propulsive efficiency can be found if the variation of the revolution speed with the air speed is known. The thrust horsepower is then the product of the brake horsepower and the propulsive efficiency.

The known characteristics of the propeller selected (or those of an equivalent propeller if it is necessary to estimate the propeller characteristics) consist of a

curve J, that is, V/nD, against C_s, and a curve of
η, the propulsive efficiency, also against C_s. To be of
any value these curves must have been derived from full-
scale tests in conjunction with an airplane form not too
different from the one in which we are interested.

At a given altitude the brake horsepower of a conven-
tional modern aircraft engine is almost directly propor-
tional to the revolution speed at least for the range of
revolution speeds from the rated value down to the full
throttle static value. The assumption will be made that
the power is directly proportional to the revolution speed
at full throttle or any fixed throttle setting. The power
of the engine is adversely affected by an increase in al-
titude; that is, by a decrease in density. The exact va-
riation of engine power with altitude is complicated.
(Reference 3.) At constant revolution speed the power or
torque at any altitude may be expressed as a constant times
the sea-level power. This constant, to be called f, is
assumed to be a function of air conditions only and inde-
pendent of the revolution speed. This assumption is jus-
tified by altitude-chamber tests, at least over the range
of revolution speed likely to be experienced. The effect
of a supercharger on an engine modifies its value of f
and, on most air-cooled radial engines, requires a change
in permissible throttle opening with altitude.

These relations are put into mathematical form in the
following equations:

$$t.hp = b.hp \times \eta \qquad (1)$$

$$b.hp_0 = K N \qquad (2)$$

where N is revolution speed in revolutions per minute,
subscript zero indicates sea level, and K is computed
from the rated values of revolution speed and brake horse-
power. This equation defines K.

$$b.hp = f \times b.hp_0 = f K N \qquad (3)$$

$$J = V/nD$$

where V is the air speed in feet per second, n is the
revolution speed in revolutions per second, and D is
the propeller diameter in feet. In engineering units this
equation becomes

$$J = 88 \, V/ND \qquad \text{\_\_(4)}$$

or
$$V = J \, N \, D/88 \qquad \text{\_\_(5)}$$

where V is expressed in terms of miles per hour and N in terms of revolutions per minute. Equations (3) and (5) express the velocity and the brake horsepower in terms of constants and the revolution speed. The speed-power coefficient is expressed by the equation

$$C_s = V \sqrt[5]{\frac{\rho}{P \, n^2}}$$

with consistent units. With engineering units this becomes

$$C_s = \frac{0.638 \, V}{b.hp^{1/5} \times N^{2/5}} \times \sigma^{1/5} \qquad \text{\_\_(6)}$$

where V is in miles per hour and σ is ρ/ρ_0.

Substituting the values of V and b.hp from equations (3) and (5)

$$C_s = \frac{0.638 \, J \, D \, N}{88 \left(\frac{f \, K \, N}{\sigma}\right)^{1/5} N^{2/5}} = \frac{0.638 \, J \, D}{88 \left(\frac{f \, K}{\sigma}\right)^{1/5}} \times N^{2/5}$$

$$N^{2/5} = \frac{C_s}{J} \times \frac{88}{0.638 \, D} \times K^{1/5} \times \left(\frac{f}{\sigma}\right)^{1/5} \qquad (7)$$

At sea level by definition, f and σ are 1, so equation (7) may be written:

At sea level $\quad N^{2/5} = C \times \dfrac{C_s}{J} \qquad C = \dfrac{88 \, K^{1/5}}{0.638 \, D} \qquad (8)$

The value of $N^{2/5}$ may be left without further solution, as scales giving values of $N^{2/5}$ and N are to be found in references 1 and 2. The value of C is constant for a given engine at a constant throttle opening and a given propeller. The value may be calculated, but it is more conveniently found by making use of the known factors relating to the high-speed level flight condition, those being the solution of equation (8) and the values of C_s and J. The solution of equation (8) for other air speeds

at sea level may be performed as follows, the prime mark
being used to indicate corresponding values of the varia-
bles:

From the curves of J and η against C_s select C_s',
J', and η'. From $N'^{2/5} = C \times \dfrac{C_s'}{J'}$, find N'. It then
follows that $V' = J' N' \dfrac{D}{88}$, b.hp' $= K N'$ (sea level),
and t.hp' $=$ b.hp' $\eta' = K N' \eta'$.

Thus is obtained one value of V with the correspond-
ing thrust horsepower, or horsepower available. If a
slight amount of discretion is used in choosing the values
of C_s' repetition of the procedure for five or six points
will permit the drawing of a satisfactory curve of thrust
horsepower against velocity. This curve can be drawn for
any fixed throttle setting, but will usually be of interest
for the maximum throttle setting only.

The accuracy of the resultant curve can, of course,
be no better than that of the test data used, that of the
suitability of the test data to the airplane for which it
is used, or that of the plots of propeller characteristics.
It is usually not possible to find N closer than 2 to 3
per cent.

At low values of C_s the curve of V/nD against C_s
becomes nearly straight; it must pass through the origin.
Equation (8) indicates that the revolution speed tends to
a constant value at low air speed.

In order to find the variation of thrust horsepower
with forward speed at other altitudes, the procedure may
be repeated, reverting to equation (7) and inserting the
proper values of f and σ for the altitude in question.
The values of C_s and J would be found on the charts
used previously. It is much simpler, however, to find
the effect of altitude on the sea-level curve assuming, as
will usually be the case, that such a curve has already
been drawn. The method of finding this effect is a gen-
eral one and is in no way limited to cases in which the
sea-level curve has been found as outlined above.

Starting with equation (7),

$$N^{2/5} = \frac{C_s}{J} \times \frac{88}{0.638\,D} \times K^{1/5}\left(\frac{f}{\sigma}\right)^{1/5} \tag{7}$$

in transferring the curve of t.hp against V to another
altitude, we maintain a constant V/nD (a procedure
similar to the maintenance of constant angle of attack
when transferring a curve of horsepower required for lev-
el flight from sea level to some altitude). With J con-
stant, C_s and η are fixed, and the only variables in
equation (7) are N, f, and σ, or

$$N^{2/5} = \text{constant} \times \left(\frac{f}{\sigma}\right)^{1/5} \tag{9}$$

$$N = \text{constant} \times \sqrt{\frac{f}{\sigma}} \tag{10}$$

When both f and σ are 1, N is constant, which is then
the sea-level revolution speed, N_0. This fact, together
with the constant value of J, permits the following
equations:

$$N/N_0 = V/V_0 = \sqrt{\frac{f}{\sigma}} \tag{11}$$

$$t.hp = f \, K \, N \, \eta \tag{12}$$

$$t.hp_0 = K \, N_0 \, \eta \tag{13}$$

The values of η are the same since J is constant.

$$t.hp/t.hp_0 = f \times N/N_0 = f\sqrt{\frac{f}{\sigma}} \tag{14}$$

Equations (11) and (14) give the factors by which the co-
ordinates $(V, t.hp)$ of any point on the sea-level curve
must be multiplied, respectively, to obtain the curve at
an altitude corresponding to the values of f and σ.
With the usual unsupercharged engine, f decreases with
altitude somewhat more rapidly than σ; hence the revo-
lution speed at the same V/nD decreases slowly with al-
titude (the reduction is about 6 per cent at 15,000 feet).

The method tacitly assumes that the characteristics
of the propeller are independent of the absolute value
of the power it is absorbing and that the efficiency is a
function of V/nD alone. The first assumption requires
for its justification that the propeller should not twist
to change effective blade angles with varying loads. Pro-
pellers of the usual thin metal type are known to twist
somewhat under load so some error, not exactly determina-
ble but surely small, will be caused in revolution speed
(the error would be to underestimate), so in thrust horse-

power. The second assumption requires that the propeller characteristics be independent of the angle of the shaft to the flight path, at least for the variations of angle of attack encountered with change of altitude. The independence of propeller characteristics of the angle of inclination of the shaft, at least up to 10°, has been so well established by tests in the N.A.C.A. propeller research tunnel that it is standard practice to omit tests at other than 0° inclination. This change of inclination with altitude arises from the fact that the speed at the same V/nD is less at altitude, while the true speed at the same angle of attack of the airplane increases $(V = V_0/\sigma)$. The change in attitude of the airplane at constant V/nD will be of the order of 4° at 15,000 feet, becoming larger as the air speed approaches a minimum.

For the determination of curves of horsepower available from the propeller at altitude, given the sea-level curve, the method described above is simple and more accurate than others customarily used for the same purpose. The method for finding the original sea-level power available curve is only a little longer than approximate methods using generalized propeller data, and would usually more than justify the increased labor by finding the airplane performance with a propeller specifically fitting the operating conditions.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
      Cambridge, Mass., December 1, 1932.

REFERENCES

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