



For more information, please contact:

Elisabeth Handley, (619) 997-0771

elisabethwrites@cox.net

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coronado Speed Festival Celebrates the Centennial of Naval Aviation At Its Birthplace: Naval Air Station North Island

September 20, 2011 (SAN DIEGO, CA) – More than 250 classic racing cars will take to the specially-constructed track on the runway at Naval Air Station North Island (NASNI) September 24-25 for the 14th annual [Fleet Week Coronado Speed Festival](#). While the Festival's mission is to honor San Diego's military every year, this year it will help commemorate a momentous milestone.

The Coronado Speed Festival will be celebrating the Centennial of Naval Aviation (1911-2011) at the place where it all began, Naval Air Station North Island. Numerous types of aircraft displays from old vintage aircraft to the newest technology of jets and helicopters will be located at the entrance to the Speed Festival so guests will have the opportunity to get a close-up look at the evolution of Naval aviation.

In commemoration, a vocalist from the Navy Band will be performing the National Anthem at the opening ceremonies and the Commanding Officer of the base will present Welcome messages on both Saturday and Sunday.

More than 31,000 service members and civilians who work on NASNI will put on a spectacular show at Coronado Speed Festival with flyovers, Leap Frog demonstrations, military static displays and ship tours. The USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier, the USS Benfold, and the HMS Ottawa will be available for touring. To learn more, visit www.fleetweeksandiego.org.

Naval aviation history began 100 years ago when inventor Glenn Curtiss taxied his seaplane to the battleship USS Pennsylvania, and it was hoisted aboard the ship. The Secretary of the Navy decided to purchase their first aircraft after this event.

Curtiss also opened the flying school on North Island and held the lease until World War I. Before it became a naval base, however, J.D. Spreckels, a major developer in San Diego, bought the sandy land that was sitting empty in 1886 with plans to build a resort. The island was divided into a northern and southern region, and the southern part of the island is what was developed for tourism. The North Island was never developed.

World War I was the catalyst inciting dynamic change to the North Island. In 1917, Congress commissioned two airfields – one each for the Navy and the Army. Through this the Naval Air Station was born and the two branches of the military shared the land for 20 years.

The historic flight of Charles A. Lindbergh from New York to Paris began at Naval Air Station North Island on May 9, 1927. His aircraft, the Spirit of St. Louis, was also built in San Diego. There were many other monumental "firsts" in the history of aviation to take place at North Island, such as the first parachute jump by a 90-pound woman, named Tiny Broadwick, in 1911, the first mid-air refueling and the first transcontinental flight in 1923.

At the Speed Festival it won't just be the cars that are going fast, flyovers will take place at phenomenal speeds that are only possible due the early aviation pioneering at NASNI. The three-plane

“Sea Hawks” of VF-6B and the “Felix the Cat” squadron captured the attention of audiences as early as 1928, when they dazzled with their bomber pilot skills and often flew in formation with their wings tethered together.

In the early 1920s NASNI went from not only acting as an airbase, it took on more needs to serve the Navy by housing and building aircraft carriers with the construction of the USS Langely, the Navy’s first carrier. The Langely was home-ported at NASNI in 1924, marking the beginning of North Island for continuous use as home port of the Pacific Fleet of carriers. North Island became a hub for building up the Navy. It began providing service and training to the personnel of these new components of the Fleet, and by 1935 was home to all four of the Navy’s carriers.

North Island has been home to many other momentous events, including:

- The last Seaplane departs North Island, 1967
- The Coronado Bay Bridge opens, 1969
- The first S-3 Viking Squadron stands up, 1974
- HSL-41 receives first SH-60B helicopter, 1983
- The first C-2 Greyhound aircraft arrives, 1985
- Nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz finds home port, 2001

Today, NASNI serves as a Master Helicopter Base, supporting over 140 tenant commands, including Commander, Naval Air Force, Fleet Readiness Center Southwest, 20 squadrons and two aircraft carriers: USS CARL VINSON (CVN 70) and USS RONALD REAGAN (CVN 76). With an unparalleled operational tempo, NASNI continues to provide world-class support to the Fleet, Fighter and Family.

About Coronado Speed Festival and Fleet Week San Diego

The Coronado Speed Festival is Fleet Week San Diego’s preeminent event. Fast-paced, thrilling auto racing and exhibitions for car enthusiasts of all ages mark the widespread draw of this event. Staged at one of racings’ most distinctive locations – Naval Air Station North Island, the birthplace of Naval Aviation – it’s the only place to see live racing on an active U.S. Navy runway.

The San Diego Fleet Week Foundation is a nonprofit, public benefit corporation. In addition to honoring the military services through the annual Fleet Week events, the Foundation’s goals are to foster awareness of the contributions made by enlisted military personnel and their families, to enhance relationships between the civilian, business and military communities, to provide events that military personnel and their families can attend at little or no cost, and to raise funds for charitable efforts benefiting enlisted service members and their families.

For more information, or for a complete listing of all of the Fleet Week events, please visit www.fleetweeksandiego.org or you can find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/fleetweeksd or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/fleetweeksd.

###