UP-TO-DATE ON THE "FLYING PLANK"

by AL BACKSTROM

The "Plank" or "Little Wing" as we prefer to call it has aroused quite a bit of comment lately, both pro and con. People seem to be either all for it or scared to death. A running argument in SAILPLANE & GLIDER between Fred Hoinville and O. W. N. has added interest to the project, for me at least. I should write and give my opinions but I guess it's a private fight.

The Little Wing has been flown a lot since reported by Jock Powell in the July-August issue. The ship now has well over 20 hours, its longest flight being about 2 hours 45 minutes by Phil Easley. At least three pilots have been in the slipstream and even if it does rock its wings a lot it is controllable. The wing span is short enough for the entire wing to be inside the slipstream. When Jock Powell got into the slipstream of a Wasp Stearman on takeoff, it was said to look real hairy. I didn't see it fortunately.

The stability and handling characteristics of the ship have been very good. The controls are light and positive and all responses normal. Somehow people just don't want to believe that the Plank is as stable as anything we have been in and better than most; reminds me a little of an Olympia in still air. In rough air it feels different but not objectionable.

In November we decided that it was about time we checked out Eric Craik who had helped in the final stages of construction and had finally soloed a sailplane (one time—but he had been through RAF Flight School during World War II and hardly flown since). We were giving him short auto tows on a dirt field and on his second tow he nosed over. The landing was made beside the runway on an area of turf which had been rained on recently. The Schweizer towplane hook made like a plow and over it went. The tip fins acted as turnover structure as planned and he only had a few bruises to show for it. The ship had a busted nose piece, hatch, and torsional failure in the outboard three bays of the left wing. The problem of nosing over had been considered and was believed to be very improbable. This should make several people happy because it did tumble—even if on the ground.

Since we don't have a shop just now the ship sat around until late December when Wally Wiberg offered us the use of his spacious new accommodations. We jumped at this because Wally and June live there and June sure makes good cake and coffee (they don't exactly live in the shop but in an apartment on the front of the shop).

The wing repair about which we were concerned was done easily. A wheel was installed by building sub structure directly over the bottom skin and reskinning with a V bottom. A very effective brake was installed and a new nose piece was built using wood structure and Balsa fairing. With the new nose piece and bottom the pod has a much nicer appearance than before. During this work we decided that we would like a good smooth finish so we started filling and sanding (using Brolite Quicksand putty which is a very good product to work with). It took a lot of putty and sanding to get everything in good shape for painting. The original white marine enamel was added to, and all the upper surfaces hand rubbed. Boy! It sure is slick and pretty (I'm prejudiced).

When the ship was ready to fly, late in March, Phil Easley decided it was his turn to be test pilot. We were to try an auto tow from Wally's strip but the field was still soft and the car could not get up take-off speed due to wheel spin; also the soft dirt lodged in the brake, locking the wheel. The tow rope broke and we had an inadvertant check on stopping with the brake locked on a soft field. It stopped in a big hurry leaving quite a furrow but showed little nose-over tendency. Also on this misadventure, it was noted that the tow bridles were still giving trouble due to their high position.

Phil built a new nose hook and flew the ship the next Sunday. The hook is located high on the nose and since the ship tows normally with it we are going to eliminate the wing hook and bridle setup.

The ship has only made a few flights since this, due to poor weather, but we are all happy with its action since it is unchanged control-wise and very easy to handle on the ground. The ship will fly at 27 MPH IAS (not calibrated) with the stick full back and no stall indication.

Well I have about got those drawings for it finished and that's about it—up to date!

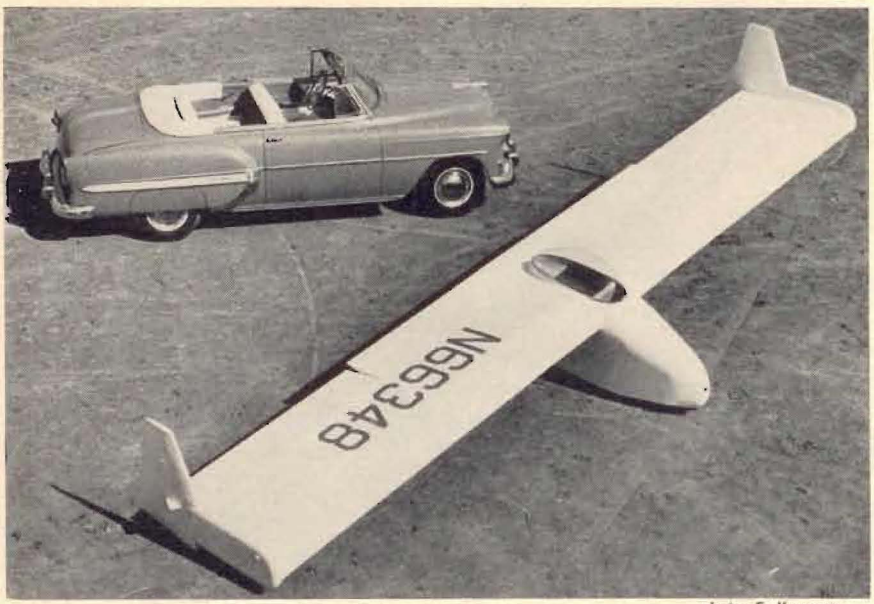

photo: E. Kurzawa

The diminutive size of the "Flying Plank" is apparent when compared to this 1955 convertible. However, from watching it, and from the reports of those who have flown it, its size presents no handling problems in the air.