



The French "Air-100" Goes Aloft

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## INTERNATIONAL DURATION

By Mlle MARCELLE CHOISNET

**T**HE airfield of Romanin les Alpilles lies in a typically French Provencal site, where winter fogs and the hard climate of Central Europe are unknown. The Alpilles themselves are an isolated little chain of calcareous mountains, cragged, denuded and arid, which rise vertically to 1000 ft. At their base lies the beautiful Comtat plain and its cheerful little towns: Cavaillon, St. Remi, Chateaurenard. The upcurrents, which are irregular and violent, recall flights over the Engadine. The Mistral is strong there, and the slope is active for winds from Northwest to Northeast.

Last October and November I chose this site for two performance flights which were to break the 24-hour and 14-minute International Duration Record for single-seater sailplanes held by Mrs. Wanda Modlikovska of Poland.

I took off from the airfield of Romanin on October 19, 1948, at 2:17 P.M. There was a WNW wind, but the lift was poor and I was obliged to fly close to the mountain to keep my altitude. Somehow I managed to stay up and spent all afternoon in a very rough turbulence.

By night-fall prospects for a long flight seemed dim. I was forced to make three turns every five minutes. However, I was determined to do some night training before landing, as it was my first flight in an Air 100 under these conditions.

A good Mistral forecast for the Rhone Valley during the afternoon of the 19th had not yet started, but the sky began to show some signs of its approach. A secret hope encouraged me to continue my flight in spite of generally unfavorable conditions.

Around 8 P. M. I began to rise and the turbulence increased; the Mistral was starting. Going up slowly, I reached 3700 ft. around 10:30 P. M. in a partially cloudy and foggy sky; the turbulence decreased slightly; it was not yet calm, but much better.

As the night went on, I flew sometimes under a ceiling of high altitude clouds, sometimes in wonderful moonlight which lighted before me a splendid panorama. The clouds as I watched them intensely were going SW to NW and did not seem to be very high. The thought that the Mistral might stop increased my suspense, for I felt that I had played and nearly won a difficult hand.

Around 3:30 A.M. on the 20th the wind speed increased, the turbulence became extremely violent, jerky; I was flying at 75 mph and had trouble staying over the slope. I thought of a flight I had made the previous winter aboard an Olympia. Then I had been forced down by similar conditions. In the middle of the storm I had succeeded in landing in the dark night, but it was a risky business and my forehead was sore from several knocks against the cockpit. This time I had a new Air 100 and the machine resisted wonderfully. There was none of the worrying cracking I heard last winter, only a rustling of the wind passing a little faster around the ship, like the sound I heard when, as a child, I put my ear against those new and mysterious shells I found on the beach.

The hours passed. After having flown at 1500 and 1200 ft. I was again up at 2750 ft., daylight was near, and with its approach my hope increased.

7:15 A. M. With sunrise the visibility became wonderful and I continued to go up slowly without a break.