

# WE BREAK 500!

By R. H. JOHNSON

*This tense expression on Richard Johnson's face was caught by the official photographer during the height of the excitement of the 18th National Contest at Elmira. Dick never looked this intense at Odessa; there he just relaxed and "let 'er go."*



Last summer during the 17th National Contest I made three rather successful flights from Grand Prairie to various points in West Texas and of course I was quite impressed with the thermal velocity and high cloud base that I found there. My final flight of the meet was to a goal at Odessa, Texas where Jack Stafford, the donor of its goal prize, resided. Odessa looked like a wonderful place to do record distance flying from. Pop Krohne spent some time there just after the National and his reports of his flights in his "Comet" L-K confirmed what I had seen.

I should have stayed there that year with "Pop" but my ship, the RJ 5 was then too new and needed a good deal of work and modification to get it in shape for this kind of flying. By working most of the year and carrying on systematic flight tests, we at Mississippi State College were able to increase the glide ratio from 31 to close to 40 and thus be in a position to seriously attempt to exceed the long-standing Russian distance record.

At first I thought that Shelly Charles, with his Weihe, and I were going to be the only ones on this expedition but I soon found that many others also planned to come, which made it better yet.

Pat Mulloy and his Schweizer 1-23 and I arrived there July 24 and we both made a local survey flight the following day to familiarize ourselves with the area. I had a very interesting ride when a squall line passed the vicinity. In front of the roll cloud

the climb was about 5 meters/sec. and I had some difficulty staying low enough to stay out of the thunderhead whose base was about 11,000 A.S.L. With the dive brakes open and the airspeed at 70 m.p.h., I was able to reduce the rate of climb to a more moderate value. I flew upwind over the top of the roll cloud and under the thunderhead until I was on the back side of the storm and out of the lift area. The sun was shining and there was little rain now. I could not find lift after that and glided down to a landing about an hour later.

Now began the serious task of waiting and watching the weather for the right day that would be good enough to go 500 miles. Unfortunately we had no weather maps available and had only the teletype reports available by telephone from nearby Midland Airport.

July 27 looked promising so I set out as early as possible. Taking off at 10:45 A.M. was a little early as the air was smooth above 2,000 feet. I released at 2,800 feet anyway and had to descend to 1,800 ft. before lift was encountered. The thermals quickly grew stronger and I was on my way. However by noon—the little cumuli which started to form at 11:00 A.M., had turned into occasional cumulonimbus. This made endless detours necessary and of course slowed down my progress. However it was a thrilling flight and I did end up 403 miles away, near Johnson, Kansas.

Of course I was rather happy with this flight