

Crewing for a Champion

by RALPH TODD

MY FIRST acquaintance with Dick Johnson was at the 16th National Soaring Contest (at Elmira, N. Y.) through Fred Walters, co-pilot and radio man with Dick's TG-2, since I became interested in Fred's tinkering with their glider radio, which was not working very well. At that time I was a new spectator, very much interested in soaring. Crewing for him that year (1949) was easy as flights were averaging about 50 to 75 miles.

The next year at the 17th National Soaring Contest at Grand Prairie, Dick had his new RJ-5, which made crewing for him more like work. This was the year in which I found out what crewing really was. Getting up around 7:00 to 7:30, hurry to breakfast, hurry back and get the RJ-5 set up, hurry to pilots' meeting after which we push the RJ-5 up near the starting line to wait for the thermals to start popping. Then after he takes off, speed down the highway for the retrieve, dismantle the RJ-5 and load those 180 lb. wings in the trailer. Speed back to the field to get as much of that good shut eye as possible and then drag yourself out again the next morning to go through the same horror again.

During the period in which the pilots are waiting for the thermals to start popping I would hitch up the trailer and get the car all set to go so we crew members could leave just as soon as Dick had taken off. Also during this period Dick would make his decision on which would be the best direction to go. About five minutes before takeoff he would let us know what direction he would pursue and whether he expected to make it a



HEADS UP! At nose of RJ-5 sailplane is Ralph Todd, with 3-time National Soaring Champion Richard H. ('Dick') Johnson, and Dick's wife, Alice. Warren Watson

goal flight plus any other last minute instructions.

After he has taken off and we are on our way I keep a close watch on his soaring as long as possible to get a fair idea of how the day is going to be. I always figured if he could stay up the first half hour or so he should be able to stay up at least till 4:00 p.m. as by that time the best soaring conditions of the day are passing. This is the reason we never make the first phone call to headquarters till about 4:30. (the trusting souls!).

This is a gamble I know, but one which has always paid off. It saves much valuable time for the crew and relieves some of the burden at headquarters. Sometimes it has taken as long as 15 minutes to get a call through to headquarters. Of course I watch the soaring conditions and if it shows signs of dying out much sooner we would make an earlier call to headquarters. Usually Dick has reported in by the time we make the second or third call.

Very often we are not far behind,

Of himself, Ralph Todd says:

I am a mushroom grower. Am 22 years of age. Have lived in Nottingham, Pa. all my life. Have been very much interested in soaring since I was 12 years old, when I happened to read an article on soaring and gliding in an old National Geographic Magazine dated July, 1938, which I still have. I have a private license for both glider and power planes.

sometimes only minutes. This is especially the case in Texas, for the highways are straight and direct, with few towns on the way and much less traffic. In the Eastern states you cannot make as good time. A good example of this is our retrieve of Dick's flight from Elmira to Norfolk, Virginia, in 1951.

We did not arrive in Norfolk until the next morning at 4:30 (what a retrieve!). Dick had checked in at a hotel and was sleeping merrily away — until early in the morning the news reporters started calling, one after another, until daylight (Oh murder!).

Turn to page 13

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Modifying the 1-19.....	Page 6
\$1,000 Elmira Awards.....	8
Soaring Society News.....	10

'Spiraling' by EJ.....	12
President's Message.....	15
Editorial: 'Opinions Invited'.....	20

SOARING — Editor, JULIAN STAG; Publication Office, 504 Lacy Building, Dallas, Texas

SOARING is published bi-monthly; entered as second class matter at Memphis Tenn.; application for re-entry at Dallas, Tex., pending. Subscription, \$3 per year. This issue, November-December, 1952, is Volume 16, No. 6. Further data on SOARING and Soaring Society of America, Page 20.