

NIMBUS III

by VIC SWIERKOWSKI

Many people who have recently joined the ranks of the Soaring Fraternity are not acquainted with some of the older pioneers in the sport in the U. S. I mean those pioneers who are still very active today.

Just one of these pioneers is Don S. Mitchell who, in 1937, started with William Hawley Bowlus; in fact, he invested much of his own money, helped with the design, and did most of the building of the first Baby Albatross. Hawley and Don at this time originated the Baby in kit form, and a year later Bowlus Sailplane Company was formed with Mr. Mitchell as its president.

Early in 1938 the first Super Albatross was designed and built by Bowlus and Mitchell in the record time of 30 days from start to flying. As a sidelight to this feat it is interesting to relate that Don flew the original Baby after only 30 minutes

built three flying wing gliders of his own design and with a unique type of control system, but after many flights and much testing he decided that there was nothing to be gained over the conventional sailplane configuration so the ships were destroyed or given away.

From 1946 to 1949 Don spent most of his time working on the Nelson Dragonfly and Hummingbird project, constructing almost single-handed the original retractable-engine side-by-side Hummingbird and the first tandem Hummingbird.

Just after the War with about 400 surplus sailplanes of the heavy two-place type available the Soaring Movement in the U. S. had all the ships it required. However, with increasing activity throughout the country the demand for more ships grew with a resulting hike in prices for those that were available. The desire



This view of Mitchell's latest creation, the Nimbus III, shows the three-piece wing construction and the closely spaced ribs. Note the sleek-looking canopy which leaves unbroken the top line of the fuselage.

instruction in a light aeroplane.

Altogether about 165 Baby Albatross sailplanes were sold in kit or completed form, and many National and World Record Holders of today got a start in soaring because they were able to purchase, build and fly the Baby Albatross sailplane. The untiring efforts of Hawley Bowlus in promoting soaring in this country has already been acknowledged. Mitchell worked with Bowlus as his right hand man on every glider project, including the Nelson Dragonfly, the original Hummingbird powered glider.

Before and during the War Don

to own a high performance sailplane at a reasonable price was, to most of us, wishful thinking.

Recently, for people like Don and other designer-builders, it again became possible to design and build custom ships at a price within reach of the average soaring enthusiast with an average income, and in 1952 Don produced the advanced sailplane, the Nimbus I. Doctor J. B. Sawyer purchased the ship but, unfortunately, before having a chance to try its possibilities, the fuselage was severely damaged in a cross-country flight during the N.C.S.A. meet in May 1954. However, Don was very sat-



Designer-builder Don S. Mitchell, who has played an unheralded but very important part in the growth of U. S. soaring.

isfied with the performance of that ship and at the time of the crack-up he had already completed 75 per cent of the Nimbus II.

With the Nationals coming to Elsinore, California that summer and Dr. Sawyer without a ship and his heart set on participating in the Nationals, Don decided to rush completion of the Nimbus II to allow Sawyer to fly in the National Contest. Before the contest started the ship had flown less than four hours, and in the rush to get the ship ready for the meet several things were left unfinished. There was no anti-servo tab on the elevator nor any neutral balance springs for the trim of the elevator. During the fifth day of the contest while flying at high speed, Doctor Sawyer momentarily took both hands off the stick and the elevator suddenly moved to the fully-up position. The resulting high loading caused Dr. Sawyer to black out, and, upon recovery, he decided he had better land so that a full inspection of the ship could be made. Only small damage was found in one of the elevator mounting brackets, but since the necessary tools to effect a repair were unavailable the ship was removed from the contest.

Immediately afterwards, Dr. Sawyer purchased the Nimbus II from Don and he still owns it. In this ship Sawyer made a 230 mile flight in 4 hours and 43 minutes during the N.C.S.A. & S.S.C. Meet at Lincoln, California in May 1955.

The same summer he also flew many hours at Minden, Nevada, to heights above 20,000 feet.

While accurate test flight data are

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