



Photo by Robert Lee Moore

Slingsby's Dart, a ship many pilots feel is without a peer in handling.

Three years ago when the Slingsby Dart first appeared it looked like a remarkably good compromise between the need for climb and the need for penetration. We read that endless hours had been spent on the design and expected a far better standard of construction and detail design than that seen on the earlier Skylarks. We were all very pleased to learn that Philip Willis was bringing along one of the newest 15/17-meter models to have a bash at some records at Marfa. Frankly, I was rather disappointed when the ship arrived as the construction was in no way better than the Skylark IV. The same old canopy hinges stuck a good solid English inch into the breeze, the wingtip attachment bolts and safety pins were still outdoors, and every rib and bulkhead showed plainly on this brand new ship, giving the familiar starved horse look of the Skylarks. Stabled there opposite the sleek Austrias and Sisus, the Dart looked more at home with the I-26s.

Still, beauty is as beauty does, and the Dart is a beauty as long as you stand far enough away to miss the amateur paint job and protruding ribs. The

long swept tail and low fuselage give a graceful, fast appearance. Needless to say, I soon persuaded Philip that we should trade sailplanes for an afternoon so that I could try the Dart. The day was as poor as one could possibly pick for evaluations. Ceilings varied from 1500 to 2500 feet, thermals were small and tricky and the wind, about 25 knots at takeoff, soon was up to 35 and 40. The large, fairly prone cockpit proved very comfortable. Towing out showed no vices of any sort. After releasing downwind in a thermal which abruptly vanished, I soon found myself lower and lower until I finally hooked a feeble little bubble at 500 feet above the field. In any other strange ship I would have called the whole thing off and landed. In the Dart the required 45-degree bank felt completely natural, in fact I felt as at home as if I had flown the Dart for weeks. In short, the handling is sensational. Not only are the ailerons as light and quick as any ship I have ever flown but the whole ship is so magnificently coordinated that it almost defies being flown badly. I have no hesitation in saying that the Dart is the best handling ship I have ever flown of more than fifty types. If it has any vices, I was unable to find them in three hours of testing, including spins, stalls, etc.

Unfortunately the performance hardly seems to match the handling. Flying against Philip in my Austria and Ben in his, I seemed unable to outclimb them and neither was Philip able to outclimb us when he flew the Dart. Between thermals the Dart hung on fairly well up to 75 mph but then the Austrias began to move ahead at almost embarrassing speed. At speeds of 90 to 95 mph, typical interthermal speeds for Texas flying, the Dart was so much worse than the Austria that comparisons became impossible. These conclusions as to the inadequacy of the Dart for high-speed flying were supported by speeds over courses. The Austrias usually could beat the Dart by 8 to 10 mph in average speed. On one day my Austria finished a 500-km triangle in less time than the Dart took for the 300. In short, the Dart is no speed demon although it is probably a bit better than the K-6-CR. Speed dashes aren't everything in gliding, however, and if I wanted a ship with beautiful handling, comfort and easy rigging, with contest potential as only secondary, I would have to look a long way to beat the Dart.

While at Marfa Philip Willis only once flew the ship with the additional wingtips which convert it to a 17-meter sailplane so we were not able to judge performance in this category. The extra tips are very easy to attach or remove, but their addition drops the rate of roll by about half a second. My guess would be that most people would fly the convertible in the 15-meter configuration.

MANUFACTURERS SPECIFICATIONS

	SHK	SH	K-6E	DART	EDELWEISS
Span (meters)	17	15	15	15	15
Area (square feet)	158	146	133	134.5	134
Aspect Ratio	20.2	16.7	18	18	18
Gross Weight (normal)*	816	772	660	750	772
Max. Wing Loading (lbs./sq. ft.)	5.2	5.3	4.96	5.59	5.75
Max. L/D @ M.P.H.	38.0/—	34/—	33/56	33/50	36/60
Min. Sink (ft./sec./mph)	2.1/—	2.4/—	2.0/—	2.0/46	2.25/50

* With 135 lbs. of ballast the Edelweiss weighs 907 lbs., has a loading of 6.8 lbs./sq. ft.