

HOMOLOGATION

by Charles Gale

I HAD heard of Richard Chichester du Pont as an outstanding private pilot for several years but did not meet him until the Third annual National Soaring Contest at Elmira, N. Y., in the summer of 1933.

First we had word through Hawley Bowlus that he and Dick would arrive at Elmira the next day with two new sailplanes that had been built by Hawley in California on order from Dick and with Dick's close supervision.

This announcement was especially interesting to us who were sharing the job of administering the Soaring Society and the national contests at that time, because we were always anxious to have as many contestants as possible and the active participation of a du Pont (if he turned out to be a regular fellow and not merely a playboy pilot) would inevitably help add to the prestige of the "cause" we were still trying to prove to aviation and the public.

Dick turned out to be a regular fellow, of course. In fact, he was a soaring devotee of a rare sort. His sincere enthusiasm, his ability as a pilot, his self-effacement quickly made him one of us. His subsequent record in motorless flying, in fact, far exceeded our original hopes.

The one thing that seemed to get Dick off to a right start with the gang was the fact that he would not live at a hotel while he was at the contest but camped out on the ridge—it was old No. 6—with Hawley. The weather wasn't the best that year, but, surrounded by their two sailplanes, they stuck it out in sleeping bags and pup tents for the "duration."

Nor long after Dick's arrival his father and mother visited Elmira to see what this soaring business was all about. They quickly became enthusiasts too, and Mr. du Pont demonstrated the worth of the "block" from which the "chip" was hewn. His first act after the crack-up of the two-seater in which he and Dick tried to get off the hill was to urge me (as publicity director) with feeling, to make it clear to the press that this incident did not destroy his faith or interest in soaring and that he was extremely sorry if there was any reflection on the sport because of the mishap.

That accident, by the way, was one of the highlights

of that contest which we officials will never forget. One of the two sailplanes Hawley and Dick had brought with them was a conventional single seater. The other was a two-place affair that was quite novel for the time. It had much the same lines as a single-place model; in other words it was a high performance sailplane, made slightly larger in order to provide for the second seat.

Shock cord launchings were the conventional take-off procedure from No. 6 and there was some concern as to whether or not this two-placer could be given the proper impulse with the equipment at hand. Sure enough, on the first attempt the ship did not budge.

On the second attempt more shockcords were used. When the word "go" was shouted, which was the command for the men holding the tail to release, we sensed at once that there still was not enough "power." The sailplane moved forward too slowly, then seemed to pick up a bit, then rose only a few feet above the ground and headed at a slightly downward angle for bushes and trees just beyond the cleared take-off area.

Dick attempted to get some additional momentum and pull the ship up over the obstructions. It disappeared from our view for a moment. Then there was the sound of splintering wood and the flash of a right wing in a cartwheel. Then silence.

What a crash of the two du Ponts could mean flashed through our minds as we ran to help them. And our relief can be imagined when we saw plowing through the underbrush both Dick and his father, trying to regain the cleared part of the slope. Dick proved himself an excellent pilot by the way he got the sailplane back onto the ground and both showed their mettle in the way they brushed off the affair as just one of those things.

It was the next year that Dick set a new world distance record by soaring from Elmira to Basking Ridge, New Jersey. He had already made substantial contributions to soaring by his general interest and by interesting other pilots in soaring. He was generous in releasing his equipment to friends for their use and he spent considerable time coaching his wife, Allaire, through her first hours as a soaring pilot. Another side-

(Continued on page 8)