

"FLIGHT"
Photographs

Still numerically superior in this year's championships was the Elliott-built Olympia: this striking take-off picture shows No. 26, entered by the Wessex Gliding Club of the R.A.F.G.S.A.

NATIONAL GLIDING

Final Stages of the Lasham Championships

By KENNETH OWEN

THE big experiment that was the 1955 National Gliding Championships at Lasham, the pundits agreed, had proved an exceptional success. The weather had co-operated; on one day, the total mileage flown had exceeded that during the whole period of the World Championships at Great Hucklow last year; and, notwithstanding one of the choicer Agency reports compiled in the Press tent and headlined "Bull chases pilot, gores glider. Charges car and trailer," the Surrey Gliding Club were indeed to be congratulated for their overall organization of the contests.

This year's championships were an experiment for several reasons. They were the first to be organized by the Surrey Club and its associates, and the first to be held in the south of England since before the war. Not since 1947, at Bramcote, had launches been by aero-tow from a flat site; the problems involved in getting the sailplanes airborne speedily and efficiently were accentuated by the fact that the Lasham meeting was to be the largest yet of all the post-war competitions. It was decided that there would be no handicapping, and starting order was to be by pilots' choice and not by ballot.

The opening stages of the championships were described in the previous two issues of *Flight*, up to the beginning of flying on Thursday, July 28th, when Philip Wills was leading with the maximum possible 300 points. Thursday's forecast had been for a repeat of Tuesday's excellent long-distance conditions but, although active cumulus was building up promisingly at 11 a.m., the distances achieved were not as great. The task for the Open section was distance along a line through Yeovilton, and for the T-21Bs pilot-declared goal flights.

At 11.54 the launch-point batsman gave the "all-out" signal,

a Tiger Moth strained against the 200ft nylon rope and slowly accelerated, and Philip Wills in his far-from-unlucky No. 13 was airborne on the day's first contest launch. Once more Wills went on to achieve top performance, with a 139-mile flight to Plympton, Devon, where he landed at the relatively early time of 4.15 p.m. Dan Smith, also flying a Sky, made 128 miles to Widdecombe-in-the-Moor, landing just before 6 p.m.

As on Tuesday, the day's flying had provided pilots from the northern clubs with the novel sight of the south coast along which to fly—at the price of fairly long retrieving times. In the T-21B section, William Verling in No. 38 was the only pilot to attain his goal, a distance of 82 miles away; while at the other end of the list of placings Peter Murden in No. 40 scraped in under the (D-20) marking rule to increase his entry's total score by one solitary point, from 39 to 40, with a 20½-mile flight.

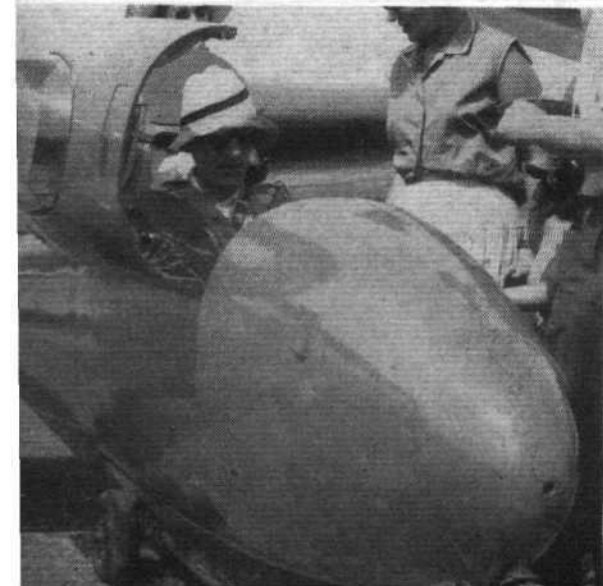
Conditions on Friday, July 29th, were disappointing, the early cloud cover clearing only fitfully to provide very weak thermals between Lasham and Romsey, turning point for the 50-mile out-and-return race laid down for the Open-section pilots. Roger Dickson, flying the Derby and Lancs Olympia No. 21, was the only pilot to reach Romsey—three hours after his 11 a.m. launch—but was forced to land after only four miles of the return leg. No pilot in the T-21B section was able to complete the two-seaters' task, a race to Ford Naval Air Station, and Friday was consequently deemed a "no contest" day.

Among the visitors to Lasham on Friday were Mr. John Proffumo, representing the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation; Captain K. Bartlett, president of the F.A.I.; and three representatives from the Russian Embassy in London, who were given circuits in a T-21B by Miss Betsy Woodward, the American pilot.

By Friday evening, due to the day's weather, there was no change in the leading positions. Wills (400 pts.), Ince (316) and Bisgood (313) led the Open section, while the T-21B section was still headed by the Detling Sedbergh (Jones and Williams, 277 pts.), No. 36.

A 62½-mile triangular race via Romsey and Thrupton was the set task for the Open section on Saturday, July 30th, the T-21Bs competing in a race to White Waltham, 25 miles away. The wind was westerly, and a "variable" day with strato-cumulus at 3-4,000ft and widespread haze was forecast.

At the launch-point, there were few take-offs between 11 a.m. and noon. The pressure came on just before 12.30, however, and the other tug-pilots and I were kept busy helping to maintain—and at times to beat—the planned two-minute take-off rate. From the tug-pilot's point of view, towing was generally smoother than during the stronger winds earlier in the week, although a keen watch had to be kept for other aircraft through the grey haze in which the releasing area was immersed. On landing we tended to come in higher than when using the 06 direction, as the



After scoring maximum marks on each of the first four contest days, Philip Wills (Slingsby Sky, No. 13) maintained his lead to win the Individual Championship, assisted on the ground by his wife Kitty.