

6 Months and Counting

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The Sport Pilot rule is approaching the 2nd anniversary of its effective date (Sept, 2004) and is gaining momentum. Both ultralight pilots and zero time student pilots are taking advantage of the reduced (from private pilot) aeronautical experience required for certification. The new certificate is taking hold, but there is still work to be done.

Although the industry is trying hard to get the word out to all pilots about the benefits of the Sport Pilot rule and the transition period for ultralight pilots, there is still some confusion on the timing of the transition period and a false notion that the entire Sport Pilot program will be withdrawn. Both the transition timing and the permanency of the Sport Pilot rule should be understood by all interested pilots.

The Sport Pilot rule is here to stay. There are portions of it that need to be clarified, but the rule is not going away. Some indications that the rule will stay in place include:

- By the 2nd anniversary date of the rule, there will be more Sport Pilots than Recreational Pilots. The Recreational Pilot Certificate was introduced in 1995.
- One of the most discussed short comings of Sport Pilot rule is the number of DPEs (Designated Pilot Examiners) and DARs (Designated Airworthiness Representatives) available to transition the existing fleet. This has been addressed with the selection and training of additional DPEs and DARs.
- An NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rule Making) is expected to correct wording in the original rule.
- The USUA request for an extension of the Ultralight Training Exemption for all Ultralight organizations was reviewed by the FAA and denied.

The transition period has key dates for ultralight pilots. To take full advantage of the transition (grandfather) to Sport Pilot, an ultralight pilot must complete the Sport Pilot Practical Test (check ride) prior to the end of January, 2007. We are in the final stretch.

What is at stake for the eligible ultralight pilot is credit for their ultralight flying. Ultralight flying can be used in lieu of the aeronautical experience requirements of Sport Pilot. The credit of ultralight flying time could save thousands of dollars vs flying time with an instructor to log the requirements outlined in the Sport Pilot Regulations. Details can be found in prior "Hours and Counting" articles.

Key transition elements for eligible ultralight pilots are the Knowledge Test (Written Test) and the Practical Test (Oral & Flight Test). Both must be completed prior to January 31, 2007 to receive the benefit of the transition.

All Sport Pilot applicants must take and pass the 40 question Sport Pilot Knowledge Test. A recommendation is required to take the test and it can be obtained from a flight instructor, home study course or your ultralight organization. Study material - ground school classes, internet programs, home study courses and DVDs are readily available. Practice test questions take the fear of the unknown out of the actual test. The pass rate is very high for pilots who prepare properly. FAA testing locations are at many airports and a list of all locations can be found on the internet

The Practical Test is taken with a DPE in a registered/certificated aircraft (airplane, powered parachute, weight shift trike). The Practical Test is a review of the planning, preparation and execution of a cross country flight, flight maneuvers, emergency procedures and T&Ls. The test is described in the PTS (Practical Test Standard) which outlines the expectations of the applicant and the DPE. A recommendation from a flight instructor or your ultralight organization is required to take the Practical Test. If you have any questions about the Practical Test, the PTS is the place to look for the answers.

Ultralight pilots, BFIs/AFIs flying prior to September, 2004 can request an affidavit from their ultralight organization and use it as the recommendation to take the Knowledge Test and the Practical Test. The affidavit is used to show aeronautical experience in lieu of the logbook. This is the "grandfather" portion of the rule.

If you choose not to transition to Sport Pilot, Part103 did not change and is still available. However, you will have to be fully compliant. The request for additional safety devices allowed in Part103 was denied, so the Part103 weight remains unchanged. Two seat operations allowed by the Part103 Training Exemption will end in January, 2008. The USUA request for extension was denied. No extension of the Training Exemption by the FAA is anticipated.

The Sport Pilot Rule is not going away. Do not miss the January date for pilot transition. Take advantage of the grandfather portion for eligible ultralight pilots prior to January 31, 2007. You have earned it.

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