

Mary Jones

The Future of Ultralights

Life after the deadline

For ultralight pilots flying over-weight or two-place machines, a major deadline just passed. January 31, 2007, was the last date for those pilots to make the easiest transition to sport pilot status. Yes, ultralight pilots may still choose to become sport pilots at a later date, but they'll have to jump through a couple of extra training hoops.

But that deadline doesn't signal the end of ultralight flying as we've come to know and love it. EAA isn't relegating ultralighters to the "recycle" bin, nor will this magazine leave ultralight coverage behind. In support of FAR Part 103, EAA will continue to operate its ultralight student, pilot, and vehicle registration programs. Future ultralight pilots who later choose to become sport pilots will benefit from having registered. In addition, EAA will continue its ultralight instructor program until the exemption ends on January 31, 2008. Timm Bogenhagen will continue to manage those programs.

EAA's six-member Ultralight Council, led by Carla Larsh, will continue to serve as an advisory body regarding ultralight issues. One of the projects it's working on with EAA staff is the development of a training guide for ultralight pilots and flight instructors who might instruct ultralighters in the future.

In other ultralight activities, EAA AirVenture Oshkosh will continue to dedicate a portion of the convention grounds to ultralight activity, including those special flying slots for single-place machines. EAA will also

continue to induct individuals into the EAA Ultralight Hall of Fame, recognizing worthy pioneers.

Ultralight vehicles are the most affordable way for people to enjoy the freedom of flight. And freedom is one of the reasons many people choose to fly ultralights. Recently, Timm shared the results of an informal survey on a Yahoo! Groups site: 29 percent of the respondents indicated they chose ultralights for the freedom offered, 27 percent for their low cost.

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Many ultralighters have bemoaned that the sport pilot rule "changes everything." In reality, nothing about ultralights changes...except now there's no excuse for flying an aircraft illegally because there is a reasonable, legal alternative. That said, ultralighters have a legitimate concern about where the ultralight trainers of tomorrow will come from. Most of the new special light-sport aircraft (S-LSA) airplanes aren't ideal for training ultralight pilots. Considering the FAA will require that minimum certification level for all aircraft used for compensated flight training after January 31, 2010, that could pose a problem for the ultralight industry.

Or, perhaps it offers an opportunity. Several manufacturers of

ultralight-like two-place machines could capitalize on this market and gain approval for and produce one or more models as S-LSA. This is a classic example of the supply and demand theory; if there's a demand, some entrepreneur will supply the product. The challenge, then, comes for the ultralight community and industry to work together to fill this need.

I'm excited to hear that some manufacturers are designing new single-place machines. Perhaps ultralights may become a resurgent market. Could sport pilot actually provide a boost for ultralights? Time will tell.

On the other hand, some *EAA Sport Pilot* readers may think we should leave ultralights behind. For the reasons stated above, that would be a mistake. EAA is one big family, and like most large families, different members have different tastes...but you don't disregard your brother or sister just because he or she doesn't like the same sport as you! Families that stick together and help one another live in the greatest harmony. That's what EAAers do!

Speaking of family, a longtime member of the ultralight family suffered a loss in his family recently. Phillip Lockwood's father, Bernard, passed away in early January. Many of us came to know Bernard as he assisted Phil at various air shows in recent years. A kinder man would be difficult to find. We'll all miss Bernard, and we extend our deepest sympathy to Phil and his family. 

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