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How Do We Measure Up?

Setting the cornerstone of aviation's future

The sport pilot/light-sport aircraft (SP/LSA) regulation became effective September 1, 2004, a little more than two and a half years ago. EAA had many reasons for committing to the 10-year pursuit and development of this regulation. One of our primary goals was to increase the pilot population through the acquisition of new pilots and the retention of previously certificated pilots. EAA also wanted aircraft ownership to be more economically attainable. Let's look at how we're doing. Is SP/LSA meeting expectations? If not, where is it falling short?

During the first two years of the new regulation, EAA spent significant time and resources helping educate government staffers as well as the aviation industry and community. SP/LSA is one of the most extensive regulatory changes in recent memory. For it to work everyone needed to understand how the sport pilot certificate...and other pilot certificates...work together with newly created and existing aircraft categories so that an infrastructure of training, certification, and marketing could be put in place. How is this implementation progressing? How long will it take before the aviation community feels a significant impact?

Is SP/LSA Meeting Expectations?

Yes, in terms of the number of new designs available, the market is growing. To date, 50 different models of aircraft have been approved under the special LSA (S-LSA) banner as ready-to-fly aircraft. That's 50 more aircraft models that you can "buy and fly." As of early April, 838 S-LSA have registered with the FAA, with expected

sales to reach 600 to 1,000 annually in the next couple of years. Light-sport aircraft is becoming an accepted term in the aviation community.

More than 2,000 new sport pilots have been created. These new pilots have entered the aviation community because of the reduced cost and time it takes to obtain a pilot certificate. This figure doesn't include current or non-current pilots who are choosing to exercise sport pilot privileges because it reduces the cost for them to continue to fly.

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Where Is SP/LSA Falling Short?

Perhaps the greatest disappointment for many aviation enthusiasts is the cost of new LSA. Many of the new light-sport aircraft run, on average, about 20 percent higher than we had hoped. It is our expectation that as the quantity and variety of LSA expands, competition will cause this price to come down.

Another concern is the lack of a common set of worldwide LSA rules. The European aviation community is working on regulations that we hope will resolve this situation in a reasonable time frame.

The European market has had a dramatic growth in aircraft that meet LSA requirements. Many are coming to the United States, but not all have the service and distribution infrastructure in place that allows them to make a significant impact. Name recognition is also another issue. This will change over time.

What Is Needed for Continued Success and Growth?

The most important need is training aircraft and more sport pilot training centers. These elements are critical to future success. Currently, the cost of obtaining a private pilot certificate runs between \$6,000 and \$8,000. Obtaining a sport pilot certificate costs approximately half that amount. Once more training aircraft and more sport pilot training centers become available...and more flight instructors promote the sport pilot certificate... this entire movement will grow dramatically. Interest is developing—time and commitment will eventually solve this problem.

How Long Will It Take to Feel the Impact?

EAA believes it will take approximately three to five years before the full impact of this regulation will begin to be felt. The aviation community still needs time to gain confidence in the aircraft and the value of a sport pilot certificate. Three to five years is also the minimum amount of time needed for current and future LSA manufacturers to fill the pipeline with aircraft currently in development as well as new aircraft that are on the horizon.

SP/LSA is not a program or a promotion. It is the cornerstone for building the future base of aviation. When building a structure it must rest on a foundation that provides its support. It must be deep, strong, and well-constructed. Building such a foundation takes time and requires your support. But the end result will last a very long time! 