Twelve Months and Counting
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Definitions: This article refers to several different regulations. For example, 14CFR 61.329. This means that this particular regulation is found under Title 14 (Aeronautics and Space) of the Code of Federal Regulations. In that title, this regulation is in Part 61 – Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors, and Ground Instructors, in section 329. You may also see the regulations contained in Title 14 referred to as FARs – Federal Air Regulations. Other Parts often cited are Part 103 - Ultralight Vehicles, and Part 91- General Operating and Flight Rules. If you don’t have a print copy of the FARs yet, you can browse the Code of Federal Regulations online at http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/. All the regulations you will need to know are contained in the FAR/AIM, published by the government and several aviation supply companies.

It’s a new year and the countdown has begun. Twelve months and counting. January, 2007 is the deadline. Ultralight pilots wishing to take full advantage of the transition to sport pilot need to take heed.

Why are the next twelve months so important?
January 31, 2007 is the last day for ultralight pilots, who were registered with one of the three ultralight organizations (USUA, EAA, ASC) on or before September 1, 2004, to complete the pilot transition to sport pilot and take full advantage of their ultralight flying time and experience allowed by the sport pilot rule.

The bottom line is that an ultralight pilot taking advantage of the transition (grandfather or as outlined in 14CFR 61.329) will save money in obtaining his sport pilot certificate, and more than just a few dollars. If you plan to become a sport pilot, complete the transition before the end of January, 2007 and save yourself money by taking advantage of your ultralight flying time and experience.

There are two steps that have to be completed prior to the January deadline - pass the sport pilot knowledge test and pass the sport pilot practical test. Both have already been taken and completed successfully by many ultralight pilots.

The sport pilot knowledge test is a 40 question, multiple choice test that can be taken at airports and other FAA testing centers. Two hours are allowed and is plenty of time for successful completion. The knowledge test is not aircraft specific and the same test is used for fixed wing, weight shift, powered parachute and other pilot applicants. A passing grade is 70%. The minimum age for taking the test is 15.
Study materials, test preps and practice tests are available in textbook, interactive internet and DVD formats and live ground schools. Ultralight experience and knowledge of Part 103 is the starting place for the knowledge test preparation. Whether you select home study or a classroom setting, start the process. The topics covered will make you a more knowledgeable and safer pilot.

A recommendation is required to take the sport pilot knowledge test. This recommendation can be obtained from your ultralight organization. The ultralight organization will send you a letter stating that you were an ultralight pilot and member of the organization prior to September, 2004. The testing facility will accept this letter as your recommendation to take the knowledge test. Depending on the ultralight organization, you can request your recommendation letter via letter, e-mail or phone call. There is no fee for this letter of recommendation from most ultralight organizations.

An ultralight pilot can also receive a recommendation to take the sport pilot knowledge test from a Sport Pilot Instructor, Certified Flight Instructor (CFI), or Ground Instructor. There may be a fee for this type of recommendation to cover the instructor’s time.

There is a charge at the testing center to take the test and an appointment may be required. A list of FAA testing centers by state is available, as a .pdf document, at http://www.faa.gov/education_research/testing/airmen/media/test_centers.pdf

The second step is the practical test. This is where you discuss your knowledge of flying and regulations (the oral portion) and fly (the flight portion) with the FAA or a Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE).

The key to the practical test is the Practical Test Standard (PTS). This booklet outlines what should be known and is tested for in the practical test (oral & flight portions). The PTS sets the minimum level of acceptable performance and serves as an outline and guide for the DPE.

Flight instructors teach students to exceed the minimum levels described in the PTS. Applicants should be able to perform at or above the PTS limits in all required tasks. DPEs use the PTS limits as the minimum level of acceptance. Fear of the unknown is taken out of the practical test by reading and understanding the requirements in the PTS.

Questions specific to the category of aircraft (airplane, weight shift, powered parachute and others) used by the applicant will be asked by the DPE during the practical test. The oral and flight portions of the test are based on the aircraft to be used. Each category of aircraft has its own PTS. Purchase a copy, it is a good investment.
Three hours of instruction in preparation for the practical test and a recommendation is required for the practical test. An ultralight pilot can use the letter he received from his ultralight organization for the knowledge test recommendation in lieu of the three hours and as a recommendation to take the practical test.

The three hours of instruction in preparation and the recommendation can be given by a Sport Pilot Instructor or a CFI rated in the aircraft category that will be used for the test. There will likely be a fee for the instruction and recommendation to cover the instructor’s time and expenses.

An applicant for sport pilot must show, in a logbook, that he meets the aeronautical experience requirements of 14CFR61.313. This includes minimum flying time, takeoffs & landings, cross country flying and flight training outlined in 14CFR61.311. However, an ultralight pilot with a letter from his ultralight organization does not have to show the aeronautical experience required in 14CFR61.313. As a registered ultralight pilot the experience level is verified by the letter from the ultralight organization.

An outline of special provisions for obtaining a sport pilot certificate for persons who are registered ultralight pilots with an FAA-recognized ultralight organization is contained in 14CFR61.329. This is good reading and summarizes all the above.

There is considerable savings by not having
An instructor recommend you for the knowledge test
An instructor give you three hours of training in preparation for the practical test
An instructor recommend you for the practical test
To show aeronautical experience required by 14CFR61.313 in a logbook.
This is the benefit of transition from ultralight pilot to sport pilot or what has been referred to as the grandfather clause (14CFR61.329).

Bottom line suggestions:
Study for and take the sport pilot knowledge test
Get a copy of the FAR/AIM and review 14CFR61.329
Review the PTS for the category aircraft you plan to use in the practical test
Complete the practical test prior to January 31, 2007
Do not wait till the end of 2006 to start – you may not be able to get an appointment for the test.
Beat the deadline and save some money
Remember – January 31, 2007

Twelve months and counting . . . . .
For more information check the website of your ultralight organization or the following links:
United States Ultralight Association (USUA)
   www.usua.org
North American Powered Parachute Federation (NAPPF)
   www.nappf.com
SweeneyCorp
   www.sweeenycorp.com
FAA Sport pilot Office (afs610)
   www.faa.gov/licenses_certificates/airmen_certification/sport_pilot/

Jim Sweeney is a CFI and Ground Instructor, and flies both powered parachutes and fixed wing ultralights in addition to GA aircraft. He is president of NAPPF and serves on the board of directors of USUA. He is a frequent guest on UltraFlight Radio.