

What's An LSA, Anyway?

A "light sport aircraft" is defined by the FAA in FAR 1.1 and encompasses newly manufactured aircraft we might think of as conventional airplanes as well as powered parachutes, weight-shift control aircraft, balloons, airships, gliders and gyroplanes. Here's the FAA's definition:

...an aircraft, other than a helicopter or powered-lift that, since its original certification, has continued to meet the following:

- A maximum takeoff weight of not more than—
 - (I) 1320 pounds (600 kilograms) for aircraft not intended for operation on water; or
 - (II) 1430 pounds (650 kilograms) for an aircraft intended for operation on water.
- A maximum airspeed in level flight with maximum continuous power (V_H) of not more than 120 knots CAS under standard atmospheric conditions at sea level.
- A maximum never-exceed speed (V_{NE}) of not more than 120 knots CAS for a glider.
- A maximum stalling speed or minimum steady flight speed without the use of lift-enhancing devices (V_{S1}) of not more than 45 knots CAS at the aircraft's maximum certificated takeoff weight and most critical center of gravity.
- A maximum seating capacity of no more than two persons, including the pilot.
- A single, reciprocating engine, if powered.
- A fixed or ground-adjustable propeller if a powered aircraft other than a powered glider.
- A fixed or feathering propeller system if a powered glider.
- A fixed-pitch, semi-rigid, teetering, two-blade rotor system, if a gyroplane.
- A nonpressurized cabin, if equipped with a cabin.
- Fixed landing gear, except for an aircraft intended for operation on water or a glider.
- Fixed or retractable landing gear, or a hull, for an aircraft intended for operation on water.
- Fixed or retractable landing gear for a glider.

Further, a light sport aircraft can be broken down into four categories, depending on how and by whom it was manufactured:

- **Special Light Sport Aircraft (S-LSA):** A factory-built, ready-to-fly aircraft designed and constructed according to the consensus standards for LSAs.
- **Experimental Light Sport Aircraft (E-LSA):** A kit-built aircraft not conforming to amateur-built certification requirements and based on one that has received a S-LSA airworthiness certificate.
- **Experimental Amateur-Built Aircraft (E-AB):** A "conventional" experimental aircraft meeting the FAA's definition of an LSA.
- **Standard-Category LSA:** An aircraft for which an FAA type certificate exists and which meets the agency's definition of an LSA.