

# Finding a Light Sport Instructor

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“How do I find a light sport instructor near me?” This has got to be one of the most frequently asked questions I run into to. Why is finding an instructor SO HARD? The short answer is “because there aren’t very many of us.” This is particularly true if you are looking for a trike (weight-shift control) or PPC (powered parachute) instructor. So, in writing this article my purpose is two-fold: first, to encourage Sport Pilots to consider becoming instructors, and second, to give aspiring Sport Pilots the tools they need to find the nearest or best qualified instructor to suit their needs (nearest and best qualified are not necessary the same).

Those of you who have already become Sport Pilots should give serious consideration to helping out the wannabes. A great way to do that is become a Sport Pilot CFI yourself. It is not that hard and the rewards are significant. Do you remember the smile on your face when your instructor first turned you loose for that first solo? I’ll bet your friends couldn’t scrape your smile off for days. Now imagine you are the one who made that possible. I’m not a very emotional person, but when I see one of my students bring his plane in for that solo landing it is pretty moving. Oh, and guess what. I get paid to make that guy’s dreams come true! Can you believe it! While you will never get rich as an instructor the satisfaction is worth the effort and the few bucks you make while doing it is a pleasant plus. For more information on becoming a Sport Pilot CFI go to

[http://www.precisionwindsports.com/become\\_a\\_sport\\_pilot\\_cfi.htm](http://www.precisionwindsports.com/become_a_sport_pilot_cfi.htm). You can also find out more about the benefits of becoming a Sport Pilot CFI by reading the article “Where are all the Weight-Shift Examiners” available at <http://www.precisionwindsports.com/Downloads/Where%20are%20all%20the%20Weight%20Shift%20Examiners.pdf>.

Now let me address those of you who are not Sport Pilots yet and have been frustrated by the search for instructors. There is always the Google search. Unfortunately the results from these searches are very inconsistent and haphazard at best. There are three sources where you can go to find registered instructors who are ready and willing to teach you. The first I’ll mention is EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association). They have an excellent learn-to-fly guide called “Reach for the Sky” available at <http://www.sportpilot.org/learn/reachforthesky.html>. I highly recommend this book, partly because we are on page 6©, but especially because it covers the different types of aircraft, first steps, finding an instructor, the check ride, etc. Plus it has great pictures and mini-stories that will get your flying juices flowing.

In addition, EAA provides a listing of registered Light Sport instructors at <http://www.sportpilot.org/instructors/>. You just enter your state or the states around you and up pops a list of instructors – if you are lucky. Remember at the top where I said “there aren’t very many of us”? Don’t be surprised if you have to expand your search to find one or more instructors. But just because you didn’t find one near you does not mean there isn’t somebody. The EAA list is not complete. They

only list instructors who are EAA members and have taken the time to register in their instructor database. There are other lists.

The next best place to look is the list of schools maintained by Dan Johnson at [byDanJohnson.com](http://byDanJohnson.com). The great thing about this list is that Dan has checked on the members of the list independently to be sure they are qualified to offer the services advertised. Dan calls this his F.I.R.M list for Flight Instruction, Rental, and Maintenance for Light Sport Aircraft. You can find the F.I.R.M. list at <http://www.bydanjohnson.com/index.cfm?b=6&m=3>. Now this is a great list. As you can guess from the name you get a lot of information about each of the members plus links to email, websites, and phone numbers.

Last but not least are the lists maintained by USAA (United States Ultralight Association). If you go to <http://www.usua.org/flightschool/> you will find all the USUA registered flight schools. The great thing about this list is that these schools teach for a living, so you are likely to find instructors with more experience and time (I'll discuss the "time" issue in a moment). In addition to the list of schools USUA also provides a second list of instructors found at <http://www.usua.org/SportPilot/FAA.html>. While there will be some overlap (instructors on the second list who work for the schools on the first list) you may find a part-timer on the instructor's list who is close to you and fully qualified to teach you how to fly.

Before wrapping this up let me just say a few words about the type of instruction offered in the field: you have concentrated and part-time. Most general aviation pilots learned to fly using the part-time or "not-concentrated" approach. By that I mean they scheduled 1-2 hours a week at the local airport or flying club until they were done. That's how I got my Private, Commercial, and Instrument airplane ratings (I flew airplanes before I discovered that trikes were the best☺). It took me 2.5 years but I enjoyed it and the airport, airplane, and instructor were only 20 minutes away. It was a comfortable way to learn how to fly.

However, with Light Sport it is rarely that easy – particularly for those who want to fly PPCs or trikes. Remember the "there aren't very many of us" statement I've now made several times? You probably won't be able to find an instructor 20 minutes down the road. In fact, your nearest instructor may be a day's drive or farther. If that is the case then you should really look to someone who provides concentrated instruction. My wife and I both took the concentrated approach to learn to fly trikes. Consequently we were able to get our ultralight pilot rating (this was before Sport Pilot) in days instead of months.

Concentrated training is just that – concentrated. You are trying to squeeze as much instruction into as short a period of time as possible. This will definitely get you flying faster and is almost always the cheapest way to learn. When you are training an hour here and an hour there you will spend part of every training event reviewing maneuvers from the previous lesson. It's a 1-step back for every 2-steps forward scenario. In concentrated training you spend very little of your valuable training time trying to get back to the level of proficiency you were at when you finished the previous lesson. In concentrated

training it is common for a student to get to the place in his training where he is ready to solo in the first week of training. And soloing is your goal. Once you solo you can practice largely on your own.

Another other big advantage to concentrated training is the distance you have to travel to get instruction is not as big a hurdle. For example, most of my customers live 3 hours or farther from my facility (Precision Windsports in Lynchburg, VA – [www.PrecisionWindsports.com](http://www.PrecisionWindsports.com)). For them to come here for 1-2 hours of instruction is pretty inconvenient. So they come here for 3-5 days so that they can get soloed quickly and then practice their maneuvers at home in their own aircraft. This approach allows us to take advantage of morning and evening training slots and we average 3-5 hours of training per day.

Finally, instructors offering concentrated training are frequently your most experienced instructors (this is not always true so find out more about your instructor to see how qualified they are – there are some exceptionally well qualified part-timers out there). The average part-time instructor will fly 30-50 hours a year and maybe 25% of that time will be giving instruction. Remember, he has some other full-time job to feed the family. The full-timer however, is typically flying 150-200 hours or more a year and 90% of that time is giving instruction. But, like I said at the beginning of this paragraph, there are some part-timers who are exceptions to the rule. Unless you have already determined concentrated training is for you give the local instructor the first shot. If you don't support the locals they will disappear. But if you don't have a local guy or you know that concentrated training is what you want then find a flight school with a full time instructor.

I hope this helps. Learning to fly has always involved a higher commitment to the dream than many other leisure activities, but for me it has been the most fulfilling. The freedom flying a trike gives me is unparalleled to any other activity I have experienced. Yes it took some work but in some respects the work involved made the achievement that much sweeter.

### ***About the Author***

*Terri Sipantzi is the Owner/Operator of Precision Windsports, Inc. based in Lynchburg, VA. Precision Windsports is a full service (sales, training, and maintenance) weight-shift light sport aircraft dealer specializing in AirBorne Trikes. Terri's qualifications include Commercial/Instrument SEL, Sport Pilot CFI WSC, FAA Designated Pilot and Instructor Examiner WSC, Light Sport Repairman with Maintenance rating (airplane, WSC, and PPC), and FAA Designated Airworthiness Representative (WSC). He is a frequent contributor to magazines such as "EAA Light Sport" and "Ultraflight Magazine." You can reach Terri at [www.PrecisionWindsports.com](http://www.PrecisionWindsports.com).*