

# GA Transition to Trikes (Weight-Shift)

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Probably 60% of my students are GA pilots (fixed-wing or airplane) who want to get rated to fly trikes or weight-shift control aircraft (WSC) in FAA speak. So I naturally get asked frequently, “What are the requirements to transition to trikes”? This answer has two parts:



1. What are the FAA mandated requirements?
2. What are the practical, real-world, requirements?

## FAA Mandated Requirements

When you want to know what the FAA has to say on a particular subject the best place to start is with the FARs. Many pilots stop looking at the FARs as soon as they pass their last checkride and are afraid to venture back into them. I'll grant you that many of the FARs can be confusing but the two sections that deal with this topic are pretty straight-forward. The two sections in question are:

- Part 61.321 -- How do I obtain privileges to operate an additional category or class of light-sport aircraft?
- Part 61.419 -- How do I obtain privileges to provide training in an additional category or class of light-sport aircraft?

## Sport Pilot Privileges

Part 61.321 applies to pilots while 61.419 applies to flight instructors. Let's look at 61.321 first. There are four paragraphs that say, in essence, to get your WSC logbook endorsement to legally fly trikes you must:

1. Get training from an instructor and his/her endorsement in your logbook stating you are ready for your Proficiency Check.
2. Get a Proficiency Check from an instructor other than the one who trained you.
3. Complete an application for WSC privileges on an FAA accepted form (FAA Form 8710-11)

4. Receive a logbook endorsement from the instructor who provided the Proficiency Check.

While this sounds like a four-step process it is really just a two-step process because the first instructor helps you accomplish Step 3 when he/she provides their endorsement and the second instructor takes care of Step 4 as soon as you complete your Proficiency Check in Step 2? Simple right :-)? It really is – the instructors handle the paperwork so you can concentrate on the training and the check ride.

Notice what is NOT required:

- There are no “minimum number of hours” required.
- There are no “solo” requirements.
- You don’t have to take the WSC Knowledge test.
- You don’t have to see any Examiners (this may change in the future).

How can this be? Well the FAA is giving you credit for all the hard work you put into earning your other pilot ratings and recognizes that in getting a WSC rating you need to concentrate primarily on learning to fly the aircraft. After all, most of what pilots have to know about weather, navigation, FARs, etc. are the same for trikes as for any other aircraft. There is one exception – the Proficiency Check. Even though this is performed by a CFI (certified flight instructor) rather than an Examiner the standards are the same as if you were taking a Practical Test given by an Examiner. In other words, you need to study all the areas delineated by the WSC Sport Pilot Practical Test Standards (PTS) and be prepared for a 2-3 hour oral exam.

Transitioning pilots are sometimes a little put out that they have to go through an oral exam that covers much the same material as their pilot checkride oral. Why can’t they just do the flight maneuvers and call it a day? Because when the second CFI issues you your WSC endorsement you will be authorized to take the unsuspecting public up for a ride. The FAA wants to make sure that you haven’t forgotten those basic VFR skills necessary to fly safe with a passenger. They don’t mind so much if you kill yourself; they just don’t want you taking anyone with you.

## CFI Privileges

What about CFIs who want to add WSC to the list of aircraft they are authorized to provide instruction in? Well, let’s see what Part 61.419 says. It says that if you are already a flight instructor you must:

1. Get training from an instructor and his/her endorsement in your logbook stating you are ready for your Proficiency Check.
2. Get a Proficiency Check from an instructor other than the one who trained you.

3. Complete an application for WSC privileges on an FAA accepted form (FAA Form 8710-11)
4. Receive a logbook endorsement from the instructor who provided the Proficiency Check.

Look familiar? It is identical to 61.321 except in its specific references, which I have not included. Notice that the same types of items are missing:

- There are no “minimum number of hours” required.
- There are no “solo” requirements.
- You don’t have to take the WSC CFI Knowledge test.
- You don’t have to take the Fundamentals of Instruction Knowledge test.
- You don’t have to see any Examiners.

So from a FAA point of view as soon as two instructors feel you have met the standards set forth in the PTS they can endorse your logbook and you are a WSC pilot and/or Instructor with Sport Pilot privileges.

## **Practically Speaking**

Ok, that’s all well and good but what does it really take for a fixed-wing pilot (or any other pilot rated for another category/class aircraft) to transition to trikes?

In my experience fixed-wing pilots need 10-15 hours of dual instruction to make the transition to trikes. For a SP-CFI endorsement for WSC you are probably looking at another 10 hours, maybe more. The focus of the training is on learning to fly the aircraft – initially from the front seat where the pilot normally sits and then, for those getting the CFI endorsement, from the backseat where the instructor normally flies.

Additionally, you should expect to spend several hours studying for the oral portion of the Proficiency Check. You will be surprised how much you have forgotten and there are some trike specific topics.

Finally, while the FAA doesn’t set any minimums with respect to the number of hours you have to spend in a trike they don’t restrict the WSC CFIs from setting minimums of their own if the CFI is convinced that a minimum number of hours are required. So ask your CFI what he or she will require of you to get that coveted endorsement.

### *About the Author*

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([www.PrecisionWindsports.com](http://www.PrecisionWindsports.com)). Precision Windsports is AirBorne's East US distributor, providing aircraft sales and support in conjunction with concentrated flight training. They are centrally located in Lynchburg, VA and are responsible for eastern US sales.

