Which Aircraft does AUA Support?

You'd think that would be a simple answer, right? "Well, ultralights, obviously." But like they say, "the devil is in the details". So here's a breakdown on which aircraft AUA acknowledge, and what your membership supports.

FAR Part 103 Ultralights

By using the description "vehicles", Part 103 allows just about any type of device to be flown under these limitations. Fixed-wing, flex-wing, rotor-wing, parachute-wing. Even "no-wings" can be flown here! As such, the AUA wishes to support all flying contraptions that meet these limitations, no matter the flavor.

"Fat" Ultralights

But what about those aircraft that don't exactly meet Part 103? The regulation puts the responsibility of deciding if the aircraft meets the limitations squarely on the operator's shoulders. The AUA has no interest in requiring anything more from its members. AUA members are free to determine if their aircraft meet the limitations.

What if, after determining that his/her aircraft exceeds the limitations of Part 103, an AUA member chooses to register and certify it as an Experimental aircraft? Again, this is the decision of the owner, and AUA has no interest in creating rules that could discourage registration and certification, if the owner feels the need to do so.

But What About the Trainers?

This is where it gets a little complicated. Back in the day, the old ultralight exemptions allowed for 2 seat ultralights, but only for the purpose of training. This is where we get all the great "Legacy Trainers" of yesteryear; think Challenger 2, Flightstar 2, and 2 seat Quicksilver aircraft. If these aircraft are still flying, they are now N-numbered and certified as Experimental, and require a pilot with a license to operate. How do these aircraft and their owner/operators fit into the AUA scheme of things?

The AUA will use more modern perimeters to define what could be considered an adequate trainer for ultralights, or in other words, a 2 seat "ultralight-like" aircraft: low-mass, high-drag aircraft with an empty weight less than 650 pounds and a VH less than 87 KCAS. However, to understand why these are the limitations, and what it means, we first have to look at the past:

Back in 2010, the FAA realized they had missed something with the then relatively new Light Sport rules. They said "The FAA does not believe that receiving training in an airplane with a VH greater than 87 knots CAS will adequately prepare a sport pilot to operate a low-speed, high-drag airplane with a VH less than or equal to 87 knots CAS without additional training. The agency maintains the proposed endorsement to operate an aircraft with a VH less than or equal to 87 knots CAS is justified and is adopting this change." (https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2010-2056/p-94). VH the fastest speed an aircraft can safely sustain in straight-and-level flight using maximum continuous engine power. Not to be confused with VNE, which is the absolute maximum airspeed at which an aircraft may be flown under any conditions.

In other words, a pilot that learned to fly in a Flight Design CTLS had no business thinking he could fly a Challenger 2 without additional instruction, or vice-versa. The FAA could have just said that the new Sport Pilot shouldn't try to fly an ultralight-type airplane, but they couldn't use the term "ultralight", because it legally only refers to a Part 103 vehicle. So, the VH rule was created, using 87 knots (100mph) as the benchmark.

Move forward to our new-ish FAA Advisory Circular AC91-94 published in December 2024. This document outlines programs for which a CFI can apply for a LODA (an aircraft-specific allowance to use an Experimental for instruction, and also for compensation). Under Table 2, it specifically states that a LODA is available for the purpose of "Training for the operation of ultralight vehicles only when conducted in low-mass, high-drag aircraft with an empty weight less than 650 pounds and a VH less than 87 KCAS." So, now we have an additional "line in the sand"; 650lbs empty weight.

Thus, the AUA adopts this criteria for establishing what constitutes an “ultralight-like” 2 seat aircraft; low-mass, high-drag aircraft with an empty weight less than 650 pounds and a VH less than 87 KCAS. These aircraft will be supported by the AUA as well.

What about AUA supported Fly-Ins and Competitions?

The stimulus for creating the AUA was the success of the Hodges Ultralight Fly-in (HUFI). In that case, activities were limited to these aircraft, but fixed-wing only. In fact, competitions were limited to single seat, fixed-wing ultralights only. This was for safety reasons primarily, but also because fixed-wing ultralights haven’t had a dedicated fly-in for years, and HUFI was purposed to rectify that. But what about future events?

That is yet to be determined. We are not sure if events will be open to all, or segregated as deemed necessary for safety. This is especially true with AUA-supported competitions. But be assured that AUA will not ignore any segment of the ultralight world. How HUFI and other regional events will be organized remains to be seen. Yes, we hope this will grow into more events!

The goal is that all ultralight-type aircraft find a home with AUA. Stay tuned for more!