

Private Pilot / Recreational Pilot / Sport Pilot

What is the difference between a Recreational pilot certificate and a Private pilot certificate?

A Recreational pilot certificate and a Private pilot certificate differ, primarily, in two areas:

1. Aeronautical experience requirements - Recreational pilots require a minimum of 30 hours of flight training, whereas Private pilots require a minimum of 40 hours.
2. Pilot Privileges and Limitations - Private pilots have more privileges, and fewer limitations. Recreational pilots have limitations on things such as the number of passengers they can carry (1), the maximum altitude they may reach (2000' AGL), maximum engine horsepower of 180 and are also prohibited from operating between sunset and sunrise under most conditions. (CFR 61.96 – 61.101)

What is the difference between a Recreational pilot certificate and a Sport Pilot certificate?

The differences between Sport and Recreational really boil down to what kind of plane one wants to fly. The Sport Pilot is limited to aircraft allowed maximum takeoff weight, V_h (top speed in level flight not more than 120 kts), and number of seats (two total), while the Recreational Pilot is restricted by horsepower of the plane (not more than 180). Sport pilots require a minimum of 20 hours of flight training. (CFR 61.301 – 61.327)

The definition of "*Light-sport aircraft*" is found in CFR 1.1

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

- (1) A maximum takeoff weight of not more than—
 - (i) 1,320 pounds (600 kilograms) for aircraft not intended for operation on water; or
 - (ii) 1,430 pounds (650 kilograms) for an aircraft intended for operation on water.
- (2) 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 Recreational Pilot certificate requires at least a 3rd class FAA medical certificate. This is the major difference between Recreational Pilot and Sport Pilot. The Recreational Pilot does *not* have the option of using a valid US driver's license in lieu of an FAA medical certificate.

If you already have a Private Pilot certificate (or higher), you don't need to do anything as far as your certificate is concerned. You do need to maintain currency via a flight review or whatever other means you choose (Wings program, for instance). You can operate an aircraft qualifying as a light/sport without a medical as long as you have a driver's license. If you want to fly anything else, you do need a valid medical.

Also

"A person who holds a recreational pilot certificate, has logged fewer than 400 flight hours, and has not logged pilot-in-command time in an aircraft within the 180 days preceding the flight shall not act as pilot in command of an aircraft until the pilot receives flight training and a logbook endorsement from an authorized instructor, and the instructor certifies that the person is proficient to act as pilot in command of the aircraft"

So you'll have to fly at least once within every six months or have to have a flight review; I can't find any such rule on Sport Pilots.

Additional FAQ's

To be eligible for a recreational pilot certificate, a person must:

- Be at least 17 years of age.
- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand the English language.
- Receive a logbook endorsement from an authorized instructor who verifies your aeronautical knowledge and preparedness for the knowledge test.
- Pass the required knowledge test.
- Receive flight training and a logbook endorsement from an authorized instructor who conducted the required training and certifies that you are ready for the required practical test.
- Meet the aeronautical experience requirements (see 14 CFR Part 61)
- Pass the required practical test on the areas of operation that apply.
- Comply with the appropriate sections that apply to the aircraft category and class rating sought.

Medical Concerns:

Recreational Pilot: Requires Class III medical

Sport Pilot: Requires driver's license in lieu of a medical

Pilots who have been denied FAA medical certification, are NOT allowed to fly under the Sport Pilot / Light-Sport Aircraft certificate rules. The rules preclude applicants who have been previously denied FAA medical certification.

"Must the pilot flying as a Sport Pilot, with a lapsed (NOT DENIED) FAA medical, still adhere to restrictions or specifications placed upon their airman medical certificate?"

Since the regulations do not specify, each pilot should have a close look at the Sport Pilot rules which among other things specify "... if a pilot knows or has reason to know of any medical condition that would affect his or her ability to operate a light sport aircraft....", the pilot must refrain from acting as a pilot in command.

The "certification" restrictions placed upon someone's FAA medical certificate is part of the FAA's criteria to maintain a set class of medical certification

The aeromedical rules applicable to the sport pilot can be reduced to two things:

- (1) Have a VALID driver's license
- (2) Have no medical condition which could affect light sport flight performance.

So does this mean that someone's FAA medical certificate restrictions should also be that individual's requirement for LSA flight fitness?

Many believe that all pilots who have a driver's license in hand are sport pilot fit. This is definitely a questionable interpretation of the regulatory verbiage and its intent. It is possible that insurance claims will be invalidated by those subscribing to such interpretations. Keep in mind that the FAA's medical certification policies are the benchmark standard which claims have been measured by for many years.

The new rule specifies "... if a pilot knows or has reason to know of any medical condition that would affect his or her ability to operate a light sport aircraft, then the pilot should refrain from acting as a pilot in command".

Many pilots will recognize this phrase which is also found in FAR 61.53(a)(1). The FAA has traditionally interpreted this to cover a broad range of medical conditions and physical deficiencies to include at least 15 disqualifying conditions. These conditions are:

- angina
- coronary heart disease that has been treated or, if untreated, has been symptomatic or clinically significant
- cardiac valve replacement
- permanent cardiac pacemaker
- cardiac replacement (heart transplant)
- diabetes mellitus that requires hypoglycemic medication
- psychosis
- bipolar disorder
- personality disorder that is severe enough to have repeatedly manifested itself by overt acts
- substance abuse or dependence (drugs or alcohol)
- epilepsy
- disturbances of consciousness without satisfactory explanation of cause
- Transient loss of control of nervous system function without satisfactory explanation of cause.