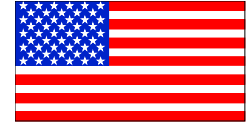




# Flying Gliders in the USA



## A Guide for UK Glider Pilots

This note is intended to assist UK based glider pilots who wish to fly in the USA. It has been carefully checked against documentation and the experience of others but ultimately, responsibility for compliance with US regulations rests with the pilot.

### Gliding Operations in the USA

The Soaring Society of America ([www.ssa.org](http://www.ssa.org)) has a “where to fly” directory but it is not completely comprehensive as only SSA affiliated organisations are included.

There are three distinctly different sorts of gliding operations in the USA:

#### ***Glider Rides Operators***

These cater to tourists and the general public who wish to have flight in a glider. They may use Schweitzer 2-32 gliders which can accommodate two passengers in the back seat. They may be able to offer instructional flights but some of the pilots may not have the instructor rating needed to allow the passenger to take the controls.

#### ***Commercial Operators (Gliderports)***

These are commercial operations that will certainly offer rides but also provide instruction and facilities for private owners. They will charge for instruction as well as glider hire. Unlike most clubs, you can book an appointment for a lesson and not be expected to stay for the day. They typically employ staff to do the things that club members are used to doing for themselves (like towing aircraft around) and prices reflect this.

#### ***Gliding Clubs***

As in the UK, these vary from small operations flying out of municipal airports to large entities that own their own site. They may offer temporary membership to visitors but inevitably their own members

will have priority over aircraft. However they are typically very friendly and a pilot turning up for a day may well be offered a flight.

### Flight Operations

Winching is very uncommon though not unknown. Most operation is by aerotow and high powered tugs (Pawnees, Supercubs etc) are the norm.

Operation may well be from a fairly busy airport, perhaps the municipal airport serving a town, and safely integrating power and glider traffic will take some training.

### Regulatory Documents

Glider flying is regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in exactly the same way as power flying and there is no delegation of powers to a body like the BGA. This makes glider flying rather more bureaucratic than in the UK though not impossibly so.

The FAA website is at [www.faa.gov](http://www.faa.gov) and takes a little getting used to but most information you will need is there somewhere.

The FAA has local offices called Flight Standards District Offices (FSDOs) and they are often but not always located near major airports. This makes it quite convenient for visitors arriving at gateway airports (though the taxi driver that thought he was going to get a ride into the city may not think so). At a FSDO you deal with FAA Inspectors and their support staff. Since 9/11 you need to make

an appointment to visit a FSDO and this needs to be done a day in advance. This appears to be a rigid rule. You can find the locations of FSDOs at

[http://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/field\\_offices/fsdo/](http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo/).

The key document is the set of Federal Aviation Regulations - which are colloquially known as FARs though the FAA would prefer we call them 14 CFR (Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations) to avoid confusion with the Federal Acquisition Regulations. These are available on the FAA website but can also be bought quite cheaply as a book together with the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) from third party publishers. They are available in the UK through bookshops or [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).

Part 61 of the FARs deals with pilot certification and references here to (61.81) for instance refer to the relevant clause in that Part.

The other documents you need are charts (maps). These can be bought locally from Fixed Base Operators (FBOs) at airports. They can also be downloaded cheaply (about \$1.50) as digital files from the FAA at <http://naco.faa.gov/ecom>. "Half Million" maps are called "Sectionals" and "Quarter Million" maps are called "Terminal Area Charts".

### **Getting Airborne**

The easiest way to get airborne is simply to fly dual with an FAA certified glider instructor. This does not require any formalities with the FAA and may be all you need if you do not want to fly solo or haven't much time.

### **Getting Licensed**

If you do want to fly solo, you need a licence of some sort. The FAA terms these "certificates" and limits flying privileges to holders of these certificates.

The easiest routes to flying are (i) a Student Pilot Certificate or (ii) a Private Certificate under Part 61.75.

### **Student Pilot Certificate**

A Student Pilot Certificate can be obtained (61.85) from an Examiner (and a club/gliderport may have an Examiner on its books, or know one locally) or from a FSDO. You can also obtain one from a Medical Examiner although (61.23(b)(1)(ii)) you do not need a medical certificate to fly a glider on a student pilot certificate. Examiners and Medical Examiners can charge for issuing a Student Certificate but from a FSDO they are free. If you are arriving at an airport with a FSDO, then to visit it may be the easiest option. Don't forget to make an appointment and take your passport as proof of identity.

A Student Pilot Certificate has, as you would expect, limited privileges (61.89). Principally you cannot carry passengers. You have to have to take a test (61.87(b)) on the regulations, airspace rules, and model of aircraft to be flown. You also have to have been trained for and demonstrate proficiency in the model to be flown or a similar model (61.87(c)). This will be accomplished in the course of a check flight or flights which any operator will require anyway.

You also have to have the Certificate endorsed for the model to be flown before solo flight and have had a similar logbook endorsement during the 90 days before the flight (61.89(n)). This needs to include the type of launch authorised (aerotow or ground launch).

You can be authorised to fly cross country with a Student Certificate (61.93). The authorising instructor has to make some very specific endorsements and detailed study of this part of the FARs is vital.

The minimum age to hold a Student Pilot Certificate is 14 for gliders (61.83(b)). This means that competent youngsters can solo in the US two years before they would be able to in the UK. They cannot however obtain a Private Certificate until they are 16 (61.103(b)).

For many visitors, flying on a Student Pilot Certificate will be quite adequate.

Many US pilots fly single seaters on a Student Certificate before getting their Private Certificate.

### **Private Certificate under 61.75**

The FAA will issue a Private Certificate to people who hold a foreign private pilot licence (61.75). In practice this very straightforward but occasionally an Inspector will not be familiar with the regulations. Fortunately the FAA places its Inspector Handbook on the internet too – so it is easy to politely refer the Inspector to the appropriate materials. The relevant document is FAA Order 8900.1, Volume 5, Chapter 2, Section 14 and is accessible via the Table of Contents (TOC) at <http://fsims.faa.gov/>.

Historically, the FAA has accepted an FIA Silver C (or sometimes a national Bronze Badge) as the equivalent of a pilots licence. The BGA Glider Pilots Licence (which requires Bronze plus Cross Country Endorsement) has been designed to meet this requirement of foreign administrations such as the FAA.

The Inspector Handbook above says:

*“N. Flying Clubs. A foreign-pilot license issued by a flying club under a specific delegation of the foreign CAA of an ICAO member state is acceptable for the issuance of a private pilot certificate under § 61.75. For example, several countries may delegate the authority to issue glider pilot certificates to members of their national gliding clubs.”*

So there should not be a problem using the BGA Glider Pilots Licence to have a Private Certificate with a Glider Category Rating issued. You may need to explain that you do not need a government issued licence to fly a glider in the UK to an incredulous FAA inspector.

In principle you need to hold a medical certificate (61.75(b)(4)) to have a Private Certificate issued but you do not need a medical certificate (61.23(b)(3)) to exercise the privileges of a Private Certificate with a Glider Category Rating. Inspectors do

not seem to insist on a Medical Certificate but it may be as well to have your Medical Declaration with the GP endorsement signature to hand.

In principle you also need to not hold a US Pilot Certificate (61.75(b)(3)) but this is interpreted to exclude Student Certificates. If you already hold an FAA Certificate for (for instance) Single Engine Power, you may have problems – but in practice adding a Glider Rating to it is straightforward (61.63) if you already have the relevant skills. The reverse process (obtaining an FAA Private Certificate for Single Engine Power when you already hold a Private Certificate for Gliders under 61.75) is permitted as an exception to the usual rule that you can only hold one Certificate and there is a section on this in the Inspector Handbook above.

You can no longer just make an appointment and turn up at a FSDO with your documents. You have to send a form (or write a letter) to the FAA in Oklahoma City so that they can verify that the documents are genuine and valid. The instructions on the FAA web page are however misleading. The page at:

[http://www.faa.gov/licenses\\_certificates/airmen\\_certification/foreign\\_license\\_verification/](http://www.faa.gov/licenses_certificates/airmen_certification/foreign_license_verification/) contains “Additional Requirements for United Kingdom Applicants”. These tell you that you must have the UK’s CAA take steps (for which the CAA makes a charge) before the FAA will consider the application. This is not required for licences not issued by the CAA (such as the BGA Glider Pilots Licence). The best approach seems to be to include a covering letter pointing out that the BGA Glider Pilots Licence can be verified by the BGA and that this can be done by emailing the BGA at [office@gliding.co.uk](mailto:office@gliding.co.uk).

The FAA requires a 90 day period between receiving the documents in Oklahoma City and the applicant turning up at a FSDO – so this is something that needs to be done well in advance of a holiday.

A Private Certificate, like a UK Private Pilots Licence, allows the holder to carry passengers but it might be advisable, if the holder does not hold a BGA Instructor rating or is not used to carrying passengers, to get some training in how to handle this. In any case, to carry passengers you must (61.57(a)(1)) have made three takeoffs and landings in a glider in the previous 90 days.

All pilots are obliged to undertake a Flight Review (61.56) every two years. This is commonly known as a Biennial Flight Review (BFR) and comprises an hour of ground training and an hour of flight training (or three glider circuits). Check rides such as that taken for the issue of a Private Certificate effectively count as a review (61.56(d)) but the holder of a Private Certificate issued under 61.75 will not have done such a check ride. Therefore before flying solo, you need to do a Flight Review with an instructor – which can probably be combined with the check flight you will need to do before anyone will let you fly anything. The ground instruction will probably be a very useful review of airspace and if the instructor starts spending your hour on how a vario works, he can probably be nudged in a more appropriate direction.

## **Security Issues**

Since 9/11, there have been restrictions placed on providing flight training to aliens unless the Transportation Security Administration determines that they do not pose a threat to security. Gliding training has been given a waiver because it is not seen as a security threat. Details are at

[http://dmses.dot.gov/docimages/pdf90/302470\\_web.pdf](http://dmses.dot.gov/docimages/pdf90/302470_web.pdf).

Another consequence of 9/11 has been new airspace restrictions and rigorous enforcement of them. While all airspace regulations deserve respect, infringing some sorts of US airspace could have extremely severe consequences. You should get a thorough briefing before flying anywhere near it.

## **Insurance**

You would be well advised to ask about (and possibly to verify) the extent to which you are responsible if you damage a glider belonging to a club or commercial operator. It is possible to obtain insurance as a non-owner to cover these risks.

You should also fully understand the extent to which you are responsible for third party damage or injury.

Finally, medical treatment in the US is expensive and you should ensure that the medical cover on your travel insurance policy includes flying gliders – many exclude flying other than as a fare-paying passenger on scheduled flights. Specialist policies exist that do not have this restriction.

## **Errors and Omissions**

This document is maintained by Paul Jessop. This is version 1.0, last edited 22 Feb 2008.

Anyone finding an error or omission in this document is asked to report this to the author via the BGA office.