

LAMA Audit Program

LAMA, the Light Aircraft Manufacturers Association, has announced its audit program recently. LAMA, co-founded by chairman emeritus Larry Burke in 1984, is a trade association representing manufacturers of light aircraft, including the recently created category of light sport aircraft.

The audit program is one of LAMA's newest initiatives. Because manufacturers of special light sport aircraft, or SLSA, self-certify that they follow the industry consensus standards when building aircraft, LAMA has developed an audit program to provide third-party confirmation of compliance with those standards.

Tom Gunnarson, LAMA president and board of directors member, explains that one of the chief benefits of the light sport aircraft category is that the aircraft are manufactured to industry-

developed standards. Commonly referred to as ASTM standards, because they were developed by committees convened by that international industry standards organization, these standards allow manufacturers of LSAs a much greater latitude for innovation and a much quicker development time for new models.

The first audit was recently completed at Indus Aviation, and several other manufacturers have expressed interest in participation. As this is an independent third party verification process, participation is purely voluntary. Tom outlined why manufacturers would want to participate: customers can either trust just the manufacturer, or they can trust the manufacturer and a third party that all the standards have been complied with. He also noted that should any questions of compliance arise, a completed audit provides an additional level of security for a manufacturer.

From a consumer's viewpoint, a successful LAMA audit functions much like a seal of approval from any other advocacy group – it's an extra assurance that the maker of their airplane has done what they claim to, and followed all the applicable standards.

What is a LAMA Audit?

Our first question to Tom, after he explained why LAMA developed their audit program, was what is involved in the audit process. As it turns out, it is much like an IRS audit: mainly paperwork. Tom, who has personally done the first audit, and is finalizing the procedures and practices should any other auditors be needed in the future, tells us that he expects the typical audit to take about five days. Approximately three days are devoted to reviewing all the documents manufacturers are required to have. These include everything from test data which proves that their designs meet LSA standards to the pilots operating handbook for each aircraft. The second phase of the audit is conducted at the manufacturing facility. Here, the auditor



Right: Dan Johnson and Tom Gunnarson.

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meets with the head of quality assurance and the person in charge of continuing operational safety. These meetings are to review yet more paperwork, and to ensure that proper manufacturing procedures are in place. For example, the auditor might check to see that incoming raw materials and parts are inspected, and that there is a secure location for defective material and parts somewhere in the facility.

Procedures like the flight test required for each aircraft are also reviewed, and the auditor makes sure that the head of quality assurance has a methodology in place to document and fix any deficiencies before delivery to the customer.

The audit is not meant to replace the airworthiness inspection. While individual aircraft being manufactured at the time of the audit might be spot-checked for good building practices, the main purpose of LAMA's audit program is to ensure that the manufacturer is keeping up with the required paperwork and procedures that they demonstrated when they received their initial SLSA certification. Owners of aircraft covered by the audit program can be assured that the manufacturer has kept up their quality assurance program, and has a workable system for distributing safety bulletins and maintenance information.

An audit from LAMA is valid for two years from completion, although Tom points out that with sufficient documentation, sometimes the audit can be backdated to include aircraft built before the audit. Aircraft built while the audit is valid will have a decal affixed which indicates that fact, and the manufacturer receives a certificate from LAMA specifying when the audit is valid.

Tom Gunnarson, in addition to his position as president of LAMA, drew on his experience with ultralights as both a dealer and a member of the United States Ultralight Association when developing the audit program. His participation in several of the ASTM committees which developed the light sport aircraft standards was also of great value, as was his independent consulting business, in

which he helps foreign manufacturers negotiate the process of receiving SLSA certification in the United States.

He points out that this program is only one of many areas of interest for LAMA. Their most important interest remains ongoing advocacy for manufacturers of light aircraft in Washington, D.C., a process helped by their new headquarters location in Frederick, Maryland. Still, Tom, and the rest of LAMA are very glad to be able to provide a practical service for both industry insiders and buyers of light aircraft.



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