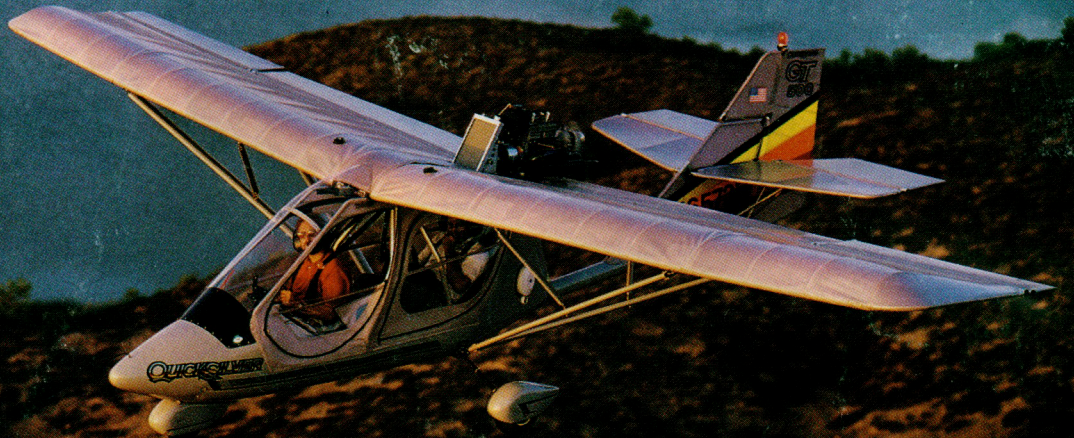


OF PRIMARY CONCERN

IN COMPARING THE QUICKSILVER GT 500 PRIMARY AND THE EXPERIMENTAL VERSION, YOU HAVE TO ASK: WHAT'S THE DIFF?

BY MARC COOK



Those of you who have been around the industry for awhile realize that the Light-Sport Aircraft/Sport Pilot program, while undeniably important overall—and likely to succeed in getting regular people to become pilots and extend the flying of many existing pilots—is not the first such effort. In the early 1990s, the industry and the FAA helped create a category based on simplified certification rules. The choice was to build an airplane that met foreign Joint Airworthiness Regulations for Very Light Aircraft (JAR/VLA). Or it could be certified under a different set of slightly relaxed certification rules called Primary category that allowed for, theoretically, a more direct path from drawing board to tiedown spot for the manufacturer, and simplified maintenance requirements for the owner.

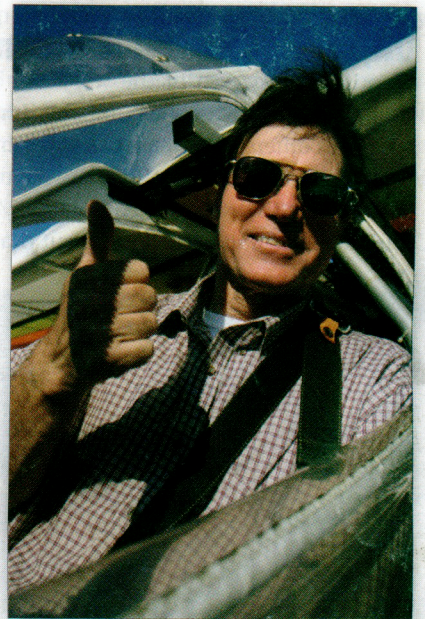
It was hoped at the time that a raft of new, light, sleek designs would arrive to replace the increasingly shop-worn Cessnas and Pipers in the training fleet and help elevate that curious in-between category of “sport flying” to something of a major player.

History records that this initiative didn't work, did not in any significant way succeed in building the ranks. In

fact, the only airplane to be certified as a Sportplane under the Primary category was the Quicksilver GT 500, launched with great fanfare at Oshkosh in 1992 and put into production during 1993. This is another example of two designs living side by side, one an Experimental/Amateur-Built and another a certified model. (As well as the “fat ultralight” version.) We'll look at just how the Experimental and Primary versions of the GT 500 differ shortly.

Back to 1992: With great anticipation we watched for the line out the FBO door and held hopeful thoughts. It was not to be. Quicksilver sold all of 10 GT 500 Primary aircraft, all of which survive, including this example owned by Jon Thornburgh. (Who has, incidentally, a remarkable love and appreciation for the GT 500 and high hopes for the LSA program now. “We learned how *not* to do it the first time,” he says.)

There are a host of reasons why the GT 500 didn't succeed, the vast majority of them having nothing at all to do with the airplane itself. For starters, Quicksilver the company suffered greatly from a flood that took out the factory in early 1993, which severely impacted its ability to fulfill demand early in the game. It also suffered a bit from the ingrained distrust of two-stroke engines by pilots brought up on conventional aircraft powerplants. It may have been a misplaced fear, but it was there nonetheless.



The owner of this GT 500 Primary, Jon Thornburgh, is an unabashed supporter of the airplane. “Why did I buy one? Because I fell in love with it. I haven't been disappointed.” He's logged more than 500 hours in N5500R.