

# REPORT ON GLIDER TOW HITCHES

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SSA Tow Release Subcommittee of the Technical Committee

There has been considerable interest by the membership in the glider tow hitch problem and I would like to take this opportunity to report on the activity of the tow release subcommittee and what has been learned, for dissemination to the membership of SSA.

First and foremost it has been learned that there is no easy way of obtaining approval of a specific tow hitch installation which is not a duplicate of a previous installation upon which an STC (Supplemental Type Certificate) has been obtained. The reason for this lies in FAA policy relating to decentralization and the placing of as much authority as possible into the hands of the FAA agents in the field. Currently, this policy is being strengthened. As a result, the basic rule of procedure is that *the applicant must work with and satisfy the cognizant FAA agent and office* that his installation is an airworthy one.

Where an STC for the tow hitch modification exists, and the workmanship is adequate and signed off by an FAA agent or AI (Authorized Inspector) there should be no problem in obtaining the necessary approvals. It is where no STC exists that the difficulties mount. Specific guidelines from higher authority relating to glider tow hitches and which are directed toward the field agent are virtually nonexistent. As a result, the inspecting field agent is essentially on his own to interpret and apply his own experience and whatever rules and regulations of which he has knowledge and seem to him to be applicable and pertinent. Many of these agents are unfamiliar with the sailplane towing operation, and the stress it applies to an aircraft. Consequently, they tend to be very conservative and cautious, at least from their point of view. Further, each such repair or modification must be judged on its own merits. Unless the inspecting agent so wishes, a prior installation on another airplane approved by another agent (and for which a copy of the pertinent Form 337 is available) need not be accepted as

a precedent. If it is so accepted, the inspecting agent is not relieved of responsibility for having approved the installation in question. The net result is a wide variance in restrictions, requirements and calendar time required to obtain approval of a specific hitch installation. The applicant may literally run into almost anything.

This is the current situation and represents the background from which an applicant must work at the present. For those considering a non-STC tow hitch installation the tow release subcommittee cannot now be of much direct help in solving problems with a particular agent. It can, however, offer some advice and alternative courses of action:

1. If you are buying a towplane, avoid the problem if you can: Buy a Super Cub and put a Schweizer STC'd hitch kit on it, or buy an aircraft with a glider tow hitch already installed and with an approved 337 in the log. It should be noted that a hitch approved for banners is not necessarily approvable for gliders.

2. Duplicate an existing approved installation if you can get prior assurance from the FAA agent who will make the inspection that this will meet his approval or, if you can, arrange for your aircraft with the duplicate installation to be inspected in the territory of the agent who approved the original installation. Incidentally, you may not duplicate any STC installation without

obtaining an approval and release from the owner of the STC; such STC's are regarded as the property of the applicant for whom they were approved.

3. I have recently been informed that it is probable that the FAA will no longer grant waivers for glider towing with a restricted aircraft. In any case, placing an aircraft into the restricted category would probably not be advisable to obtain a hitch alone, but this action would open the door to other improvements such as more power, etc. I have little information on this subject and would appreciate hearing from anyone now operating or having difficulty in this category.

It seems that there has been a widespread impression that approval of a non-STC hitch installation on one aircraft guaranteed approval on all similar installations. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* In the face of this disclosure I have previously doubted the value of attempting to build a library of approved tow hitch 337's. However, I will shortly undertake discussions with the FAA hoping to establish some guidelines which can be mutually agreed upon between FAA and SSA and which can be distributed to the field agencies to provide a common standard for glider tow hitch inspection and approval. If I am successful, it is possible that previously executed 337's may have some value. In addition, if the original approving agent is within reach they can be quite valuable, even now. I am therefore hereby appealing to the membership to send to me copies of their 337's. This should include replacing those sent to my predecessor, the late Jack Devins, which were unfortunately lost after his death. I will attempt to prevent a recurrence of their loss.

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A model of the Polish SZD-27 Kormoran, a new all-metal, two-place sailplane now under construction. It will have a wing span of 56 ft., a wing area of 210 sq. ft., an aspect ratio of 15, a gross weight of 1120 lb., be fully acrobatic and have a maximum glide ratio of 28 to 1. This design will eventually be used for all training work in Poland.

