

BRINGING SAFER SEATBELTS
FROM NASCAR TO GA



BY TI WINDISCH

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"I feel that if I can present numbers, and certified results from a certified test lab, even though they're not an FAA-approved test lab, that we should be able to pass and install these belts in every aircraft in the world. It is a safety enhancement." — Butch Stevens



Experimental amateur-built aircraft are under no such restrictions, so one bright spot has been satisfied customers installing the belts in their E-AB aircraft.

"Regarding aircraft that we've installed belts on, there has been all models of the RV, all the SX300s, and we've also done a few Harmon Rockets," Butch said. "A lot of individuals. We've done, approximately, in two years' time, close to 150 sets of belts. And as we work our way through, then word gets out."

Keith Phillips, EAA Lifetime 5973, is one of the SX300 owners who installed a Simpson belt after Butch convinced him it was a good call. He replaced his old harness with a five-point one that incorporates a sub belt about five years ago and has been happy with that decision.

"It secures a lot more, I'm much more comfortable if I'm doing any sort of maneuvering in the airplane, and it really holds you in place," Keith said. "We can't say enough about them."

Keith, a stalwart at Spruce Creek Airpark, said roughly a dozen airplanes in the community have the Simpson belts, and that number is growing because of Butch.

"What convinced me is I know Butch, and he's a part of that company, and he gives me all the background on the crash evidence they've seen in racing," Keith said. "Butch was able to explain to us the shortcomings of the basic system, particularly just the regular lap belt and shoulder harness, more or less. Some of the older airplanes don't even have the shoulder harness."

From his experience flying aerobatic airplanes and fighter aircraft, Keith said he was familiar with more expansive harnesses. The transition to wearing one in his sport aircraft



was pretty quick and painless. He reported that nothing has changed for his passengers, except their safety factor thanks to the better belts.

The certification process has presented several challenges for Butch, who has invested time and money into working with the FAA for the good of so many pilots.

"I just don't feel that we're any further along than what we were," Butch said. "We've already spent \$100,000. We test the same standards as the FAA, but we exceed them. And for us to lower our standards down to the level of the FAA, they want us to totally retest."

EAA Vice President of Advocacy and Safety Sean Elliott said he sees great potential for increased safety with Simpson harnesses. "EAA fully believes this is another example of safety-enhancing equipment that is commonplace in the experimental fleet and should be added into the certified world," Sean said. "Data-driven testing is onerous even that another technological community like NASCAR has proven through data and example that these harnesses save lives."

Helping out somewhere, at least, is comforting for Butch. His only goal all along has been helping to make general aviation safer, and he hopes to continue doing so by outfitting more aircraft with adequate harnesses. "My help in getting this info out is to save lives," Butch said. "My help with getting involved with Simpson, and doing all the tests that we've done out of our own pocket, spent millions of dollars doing this, is to save lives." **EAA**

Twindisch is assistant editor at EAA and enjoys learning about various types of aircraft. Outside of aviation, he can be found watching, writing, and podcasting about the sport. Email Ti at twindisch@eaa.org.



The difference between the Simpson harness and the outdated one in this SX300 is striking especially given the ease of installation.