

## Latest Crash on Kauai: How Safe Are Ultralights?



We're saddened once again this week by the deaths of two people on Kauai. The crash took place at Waiakamoo Valley near Polihale Beach. Killed were Birds of Paradise owner Gerry Charlebois, a pioneer in Hawaii ultralights, and his passenger. Charlebois was said to have over 50,000 hours of Ultralight experience.

Ultralights, like the one pictured here, are frequently seen taking off and landing at Kauai's Port Allen air field adjacent to the south shore's Salt Pond Beach Park. They are certainly very popular and we've heard from visitors and locals alike that they love the experience.

### Are Ultralights Safe?

First, I'm not a pilot. Our friend, Daniel (pictured above), raved about his experience.

Here's what others have said however.

- Research (no longer online) from Australia suggested "Ultralight fliers are about six times more likely to die for every hour flown than if they flew in general aviation aircraft." At least 65 ultralight pilots and students died in Australia from 2001 through 2009.
- Ultralight has been compared with a motorbike in terms of crash records. Ultralights fly at slower speed than airplanes, however, which could moderate the severity of crashes.
- Professionally built Ultralights have quality design. At the same time, the craft have the least requirements in terms of training and proficiency.
- Pressure to make money shouldn't, but could be, an issue when ultralights fly in spite of deteriorating weather conditions. We have noted that here on Kauai. The size and weight of these craft could also be an issue in terms of increased susceptibility to fast-fluctuating island wind conditions.

## **Prior Hawaii Ultralight crashes**

May 17, 2011

- Crash took place on Kauai's north shore following take off from Port Allen. Both the passenger and pilot died.

February 15, 2011

- Big Skies Ultralight crashed into the ocean near glass beach, just east of Port Allen Airport. The pilot, Jim Gaither, 55, and owner of Big Sky Kauai, died together with his passenger, Kim Buerger, 49, who was from Spokane Washington.

December 22, 2010

- A Big Sky Ultralight was severely damaged but no one hurt when the craft made an unplanned golf course landing in Poipu.

April 21, 2010

- An Ultralight crashed on the Big Island, after one of its wings apparently folded, killing both the pilot and passenger. It plunged into the waters off Kealahou Bay.

August 2009

- The Birds of Paradise passenger's leg was broken in two places, among other injuries, resulting in a federal lawsuit claiming pilot negligence and fraud. The craft plummeted into Hanapepe Valley during inclement weather. The passenger was forced to remain at the crash site overnight before he could be airlifted.

**Copied 1/17/2015 from: <http://beatofhawaii.com/crash-on-kauai-how-safe-are-ultralights/>**