COMPOSITE MATERIALS

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INTRODUCTION

The use of composite materials in home built aircraft construction got its start back in 1970 when Ken Rand introduced his KR-1 and KR-2 kits. At the same time, a young designer named Burt Rutan was completing the design of his VariViggen which was awarded the Stan Dzik trophy for design contribution at Oshkosh in 1972. Although this aircraft featured some composite construction materials, it was fairly labor intensive to build and interest was modest. Taking the canard design concept a step further and simplifying construction through the use of the moldless composite technique, Burt educated thousands of builders and future designers through his plans, construction manuals, and many seminars and convinced aircraft enthusiasts worldwide that composites were indeed the future for aviation construction. Rutan Aircraft Factory followed the tremendous success of the VariEze kit program with plans for new designs such as the Long-EZ, Defiant, and Solitaire. At the same time, SCALED, Burt's new company specializing in design and prototype construction, was busy building proof-of concept aircraft such as the AD-1, Grizzly, and Beech Starship. Burt continues to operate SCALED today and remains active in designing and building the aircraft of tomorrow. We hope he will someday return to the homebuilt aircraft market, and arena that allowed him endless freedom to pursue aircraft design innovation.

During the 1980's many new designers entered the homebuilt aircraft market including Nat Puffer who introduced the popular Cozy, a side-by-side version of the Long-EZ. Aircraft Spruce & Specialty Co. became the distributor of Cozy kits as it had been for the Rutan designs since 1976. Hundreds of kits were shipped worldwide, and Aircraft Spruce grew as quickly as the composite movement. At the same time, Aircraft Spruce began supplying kits and materials to designers marketing their own new designs using the new "fast-build" pre-fabricated kit concept. This type of kit program was pioneered by Tom Jewett and Gene Sheehan of Quickie Aircraft and Tom Hamilton of Glasair fame. Many new designs followed, including Lance Niebauer's Lancair, Ken Wheeler's Express, the Cirrus and White Lightning. Aircraft Spruce has been a supplier of materials for all of these kit programs, and looks forward to working with the designers of new composite aircraft on their kit programs in the years to come. The design sophistication and ease of construction that are offered in composite aircraft kits today have provided a way for many aviation enthusiasts to build and fly higher performance aircraft at affordable prices. What an exciting time to be involved in sport aviation!

ADVANCED COMPOSITE FABRICS

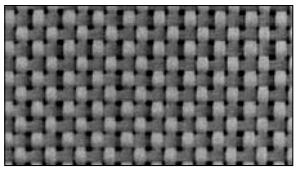
Advanced composite fabrics are those materials which have been used for a number of years in aerospace applications, replacing standard fiberglass fabrics. Today's materials - Kevlar, graphite, S glass and ceramics - are now making the transition from aerospace to homebuilt aircraft. Kevlar is an organic fiber which is yellow in color and soft to touch. It is extremely strong and tough and about the lightest structural fabric on the market today. Kevlar is highly resistant to impact but it is rather difficult to work with for hand layup applications and its compressive strength is considered poor. Graphite fibers are created by extreme stretching and heating of rayon fibers to change their molecular structure. Graphite has very low density (weight/unit volume), is very stiff (high modulus) and very strong (high tensile). S glass uses a different chemical formulation from standard E glass fabrics, and is stronger, tougher and stiffer than E glass. One ply of S glass can replace several plies of E glass, which can result in a stronger and considerably lighter aircraft component. Ceramic fabrics are the latest innovation in advanced composites. These fabrics produce laminates approaching the qualities of S glass plus they can withstand temperatures of almost 3000° F. Ceramic cloth can produce a very lightweight and effective firewall laminate, although at this time the cost is high. These advanced composite materials are currently being used in the production of such items as aerospace components, high-performance boats and race cars, and many revolutionary homebuilt aircraft such as the Long-EZ, Solitaire, Sea Hawk and Q200. The performance of future homebuilt aircraft will most certainly be incredible with the availability of these innovative new composite materials.

	Best ←				→ Worst
Cost	E Glass	S Glass	Kevlar	Graphite	Ceramic
Weight (Density)	Kevlar	Graphite	S Glass	E Glass	Ceramic
Stiffness	Graphite	Kevlar	S Glass	Ceramic	E Glass
Heat	Ceramic	S Glass	E Glass	Kevlar	Graphite
Toughness	Kevlar	S Glass	E Glass	Ceramic	Graphite
Impact Resistance	Kevlar	S Glass	E Glass	Ceramic	Graphite

WHICH ONE DO YOU CHOOSE?

Often the choice of the materials to use for a laminate is difficult because of the required properties. One must consider the advantages of one material over another and its anticipated performance. S glass is about 30% stronger and 15% stiffer than E glass. It has 20-25% of the stiffness of graphite and is as strong, but it is also 30% heavier. S glass though, has only half the strength and stiffness of Kevlar and twice the weight. Kevlar on the other hand, is 40% stronger and 25% lighter than graphite but has only half the stiffness of graphite. Sometimes, blending different advanced composite fabrics in a laminate can achieve the proper balance of stiffness, strength and weight. Use the following six parameters listed here, from a best to a worst case, to help you decide which advanced composite fabric(s) is best for your application.

KEVLAR FABRIC STYLES



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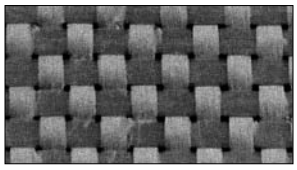

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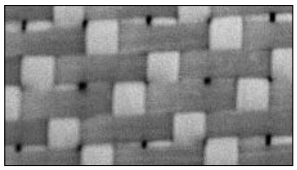

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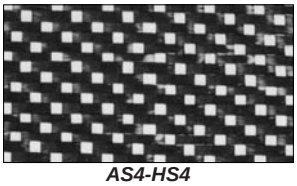
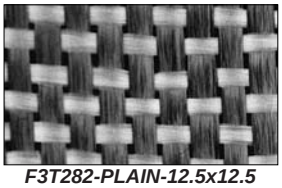
GRAPHITE FABRIC STYLES



AS4-HS4



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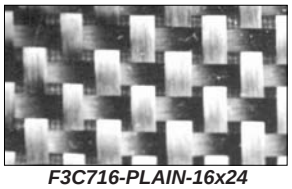

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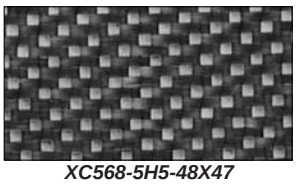
CERAMIC FABRIC



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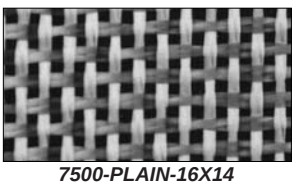
E-GLASS



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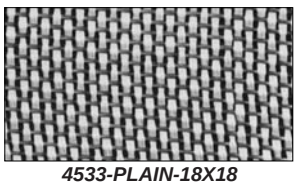
S-GLASS



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