

Icon Aircraft cofounder Kirk Hawkins dies in wingsuit crash Swiss authorities investigating

August 20, 2025 By Jim Moore

Kirk Hawkins, a former U.S. Air Force fighter pilot who cofounded Icon Aircraft in 2006 to build a light sport seaplane, died August 19 during a wingsuit jump in the Swiss Alps, according to his longtime friend and former business partner.



Icon Aircraft cofounder Kirk Hawkins took center stage at the AOPA Aviation Summit in Tampa, Florida, in 2009. Photo by Mike Fizer.

Local police did not immediately release the name of the 58-year-old U.S. national who jumped from a helicopter with three other wingsuit skydivers, flew along the east ridge of the iconic Eiger, and collided with trees. Hawkins was eulogized in a LinkedIn post by Steen Strand, who cofounded Icon Aircraft with Hawkins to build the amphibious A5 light sport aircraft in 2006. While local police said the accident would be investigated, Strand, who met Hawkins at Stanford University, shared the “devastating news” that his longtime friend had died.

“Kirk was the most extraordinary person I’ve ever known, or ever will know. He started life with nothing and climbed to the top—Clemson, Stanford, the Air Force (F-16’s), then Stanford again for business school. At ICON, he led the charge to create the most badass recreational aircraft in history. His new startup was poised to transform the world again,” Strand wrote.

Information about Hawkins’s surviving family was not immediately available.

Hawkins was the hard-driving, enthusiastic face of Icon from the moment the company first announced its forthcoming seaplane at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh in 2008 until he was forced out of his job as CEO in November 2018.

Litigation ensued, including claims by Hawkins against his former company that eventually became part of a bankruptcy case which began in Delaware in 2024, when Icon Aircraft filed for Chapter 11. While the court approved the sale of the company's assets within months, and subsequently various settlement agreements among creditors and other parties—including agreements with other plaintiffs who had joined Hawkins in claims related to the company's intellectual property, as well as the owner of the factory facility the company leased in Tijuana, Mexico—Hawkins was specifically excluded from those settlements. He remained a party in the still-open bankruptcy case, according to court records, at the time of his death.

Hawkins marshaled the A5 to market after earning an FAA exemption to the LSA weight limit in 2013, justified in part by the aircraft's spin-resistant design. Deliveries began in 2016, though Icon raised the price of the two-seat A5 to \$389,000 in 2017.

The A5 was not in service for long before accidents began to accumulate, including a high-profile crash less than a week after Icon announced the price increase.

The Major League Baseball Hall of Fame inducted Roy Halladay posthumously in 2019, the retired all-star pitcher having died when his A5 slammed into the water on November 7, 2017, less than a month after Halladay took delivery. That and other accidents raised questions about the A5's safety, though investigations consistently attributed the accidents to pilot error. No investigations to date have attributed an A5 accident to any mechanical or design fault.

The common theme—pilots taking risks including flying low over the water at high speed, or mistakenly into the wrong canyon—was one that Hawkins himself embodied, according to Strand:

"Kirk devoured life experiences most of us would never touch. He was damn good at assessing risks, probably because he took so many. He'd get you into tricky situations, but he's also the one you wanted beside you when things got dicey... He used to laugh about a test pilot who, realizing he was seconds from dying, had the coolness to radio: 'This will be a full stop.' I imagine Kirk, in his final moments, knew what was coming, thought that line, and laughed one last time before the exit."