

On July 15, 2017, about 1300 mountain daylight time, an experimental amateur-built Endler Glasair SH2 (Glasair 1-TD), N181AL, ground looped and veered off runway 15 (6,000 feet by 60 feet, asphalt) during takeoff from Meadow Lake Airport (FLY), Colorado Springs, Colorado. The airplane impacted a taxiway light and was destroyed by fire. The pilot and passenger were uninjured. The airplane was registered to and operated by an individual under 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 as a personal flight that was not operating on a flight plan. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident. The local flight was originating at the time of the accident.

The pilot stated that the airport automated weather observing system reported winds from 050 degrees at 7 knots, which was a "direct crosswind" to runways 15 and 33. The pilot decided to use runway 15 because an American Champion Decathlon or Citabria airplane "just landed" on runway 15, and runway 15 was the "favored runway" for the airport. The pilot said that there was a 1-2 knot tailwind for the accident takeoff. During the takeoff roll on runway 15, the airplane "continued to creep" to the left side of the runway even with application of [right] brake and rudder. The pilot made "one last big effort" to return the airplane to runway centerline, by "swerving." The airplane veered toward the left and off the runway surface. The airplane ground looped and a fire ensued from the right main landing gear well.

Postaccident examination of witness marks along runway 15 revealed a mark consistent with continued application of right main landing gear wheel brake. The airplane veered off the runway about 2,400 down the runway and struck a taxiway light. The grass area located about 10-20 feet preceding the taxiway light exhibited burning. The right main landing gear was collapsed under the fuselage. The airplane was equipped with a castoring tailwheel with a locking pin. The tailwheel was not a steerable assembly.

The pilot said that the normal takeoff distance for the airplane was about 1,000 feet and when asked why the airplane impacted about 2,400 feet down the runway, he said "I don't know." He said that he discussed this in his analysis of the statement he provided. He said maybe it was an engine issue and did not know what the engine rpm was at the time of takeoff.

The airplane owner's manual states that the tailwheel locks in the straight position for takeoff and landing. In the unlocked position, the tailwheel full swivels 360 degrees. The airplane checklist states that the tailwheel is to be in the locked position for takeoff. The pilot stated that the tailwheel was in the unlocked position during the takeoff.

The National Transportation Safety Board Investigator-in-Charge asked the pilot what the maximum demonstrated crosswind velocity was for the airplane and the airplane's center of gravity (CG) location for the flight; the pilot said that he did not know the velocity and would check with the airplane owner and try to obtain the weight and balance form. The pilot said that based on the owner's information, the maximum demonstrated cross wind for the airplane was 15 knots. The pilot said his personal maximum crosswind velocity limit was 10 knots.

The airplane owner's manual does not cite a maximum demonstrated crosswind velocity but a recommended velocity of 20 mph.

The pilot said that the airplane weight and balance form was in the airplane and destroyed by the fire. The CG location for the flight could not be determined. The pilot said that the accident takeoff weight was about 470 lbs. He said that the fuel and passenger locations are roughly the moment arm from the airplane CG, so all weight has the same CG effect.