

Statement: Thomas E. O'Donnell (pvt. pilot passenger)

Incident flight N14NP on 04 Sep 2023

On 04 SEP 2023 at 10:31am (according to flight aware), my neighbor Ken Brown and I departed Fair Weather Field (TX42) in his airplane N14NP. Our intention was to have lunch at the KLBX runway cafe. This was also my first ride with Ken in his "new" plane - which he had purchased the previous month.

After a normal departure, climb and slight course diversion west of KTME airspace we reached 2500 feet leveled out and proceeded on course toward KLBX.

Within a minute or two of leveling out on course, Ken noticed an intermittent battery warning on the EFIS. The two of us discussed this and began trouble shooting. We were unable to identify any obvious (or not obvious) battery system, charging system, fuel system or engine system faults. The airplane was otherwise operating well at that time. The intermittent battery warnings continued. We remained on course in straight and level flight for another 5 or 6 minutes and continued troubleshooting, looking at the information on the screens, and discussing the systems during this time.

Without any other notice/warning, all the radios, the MFD EFIS, the panel mounted GPS and the transponder lost power. The PFD, VFR GPS and backup EFIS continued to operate. We immediately turned back toward TX42 to go home - although with a 10-15 degree course deviation west of a direct course to avoid a small rain shower we could see which had popped up a number of miles north between us and TX42.

According to flight aware the N14NP transponder was last seen at 10:48am - I believe this coincides closely with the same loss of radio/transponder power described in the previous few sentences.

After turning toward home, our cockpit conversation changed. We continued to trouble shoot and discuss systems but we also started talking about nearest airports and potential landing sites otherwise - "just in case". We did not have fully functional electronics and no functional radios but the plane was still running and flying well otherwise. We were still feeling mostly confident of flying all the way home at that point.

We continued like this for something like 8-10 minutes. In addition to continued aviating, navigating and troubleshooting we both had time to get our phones out and turn the garmin pilot apps on and get them working - "just in case" we needed navigation if the PFD went out. At the end of this period of time we had cleared the west side of the rain cell and we turned back onto a direct course to TX42 when.....

The PFD turned off, the engine pitch changed and the plane started slowing down. We were suddenly now in "real" emergency mode.

It took us something like 30 seconds to completely realize the engine was definitely not running, definitely wasn't making any power and we definitely weren't going to be able change that. The engine was only windmilling and we were gliding.

Thereafter we focused on maintaining flying speed, preserving energy, preparing for an unpowered landing and trying to get to the nearest airport.

We turned westward toward Eagle Lake as a first hopeful thought and then immediately turned direct toward a much closer glider field west of our position. We could both see the glider field and were able identify a parked aircraft sitting on the field.

The last minutes of this flight were controlled but hectic. We almost immediately realized we weren't going to be able to make the glider field after visually identifying it. We looked next at the roads under and around us - all roads had power lines on them and we discounted those. We picked a series of big open fields west and south of us.

The winds were out of the south and we had turned west just after the airplane completely shut down. Essentially, we were on a best glide left base for wherever we were going to land as soon as we turned west.

Exact timings are hard but Ken got a call from the ELT monitoring services at 11:05. My own internal clock tells me we had been on the ground for 5 to 7 minutes by then. So, we touched down just at or slightly before 11:00am.

Somewhere between 100-200 AGL we turned left into the wind on final, lined up with the north/south crop rows, spoke about keeping the nose gear off as long as possible and landed.

Touch down occurred with a full stall - 45-50 knots? We didn't have any ship power during the approach so we also didn't have trim or flaps. This landing was with the plane in a clean configuration.

The mains touched first. Nose gear touched next. The propellor (still windmilling) chopped into the furrows we were between and the prop broke apart. The furrows were set on 40 inch centers with bottom to top depth of 12-15" (I asked the farmer). Neither the spinner nor the bottom cowling ever touched the dirt.

The freshly plowed dirt in the field grabbed the landing gear as they touched. All three gear were bent directly back under the wings/fuselage toward the tail.

The plane came to a stop about three fuselage lengths past initial touch down point and skidded/skewed to the right about 2 or 3 feet as it slid to a stop down the furrows.

The landing happened fast with a fairly violent deceleration and stop, but neither one of us had a scratch on us as a result of the landing.

I'm not sure we could have done much better from an aviate-first-point-of-view once we got into "real" emergency mode.

We had our eyes outside the cockpit throughout the whole final phase of the flight. These aren't hard numbers but my seat of the pants and eyeball estimates - we were probably at 1500-1750 AGL after we turned west during the glide. Descent rate was likely 500-750/min down. Indicated air speeds were around 70 knots during glide and must have been 45-50 knots or less at touchdown.

Ken is an excellent pilot and, all things considered, we ended up having a very much unwanted but safe dead stick off airport landing.