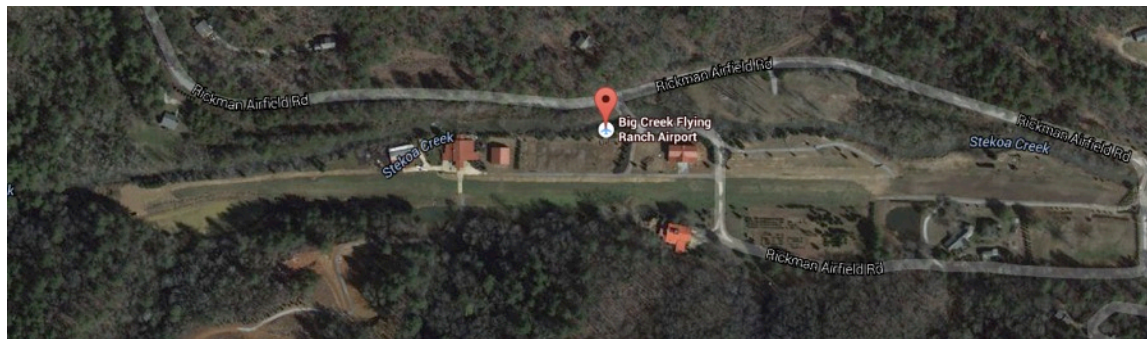


Narrative of N2275G Accident on Sunday, July 27, 2014 at approximately 16:30 (EDT).

Location: GA18 – Big Creek Flying Ranch, Clayton, GA
2800' x 50' grass strip

Aerial View



We had a safe and uneventful landing to the west at this location (RW27) at approximately 12:15 EDT and parked at the location indicated below. After attending a function nearby for several hours, we returned at approximately 16:25 with the intention of flying home to Stockbridge, GA - 7GA7 Berry Hill Airport; approximately 40 minutes of flight time.



After completing a preflight inspection and confirming fuel on board (38 gallons), I walked to the extreme west end of the runway to check conditions since I had landed and parked approximately 500 feet prior to that point. The grass over the entire runway was ankle high and moderately wet. There was also a light wind (<3 kts) coming from the southwest.

After completing a run-up and pre-takeoff checks, I elected to taxi to the very end of RW9 to utilize the entire runway based upon several factors: grass was thick, moderately wet, and I would have a slight tailwind during the takeoff roll. Note that landings occur on RW 27 and takeoffs occur on RW 9 due to rapidly rising terrain to the immediate west of the field (this is also specified in the comments section of the airfield) – so takeoff to the west was not a reasonable option. Additionally, the field contact, Danny Bensow confirmed the landing and takeoff instructions the day before, when I secured permission to land.

As can be readily noted from the aerial photos above, the runway is significantly narrower at the extreme west end, but I wanted to make sure I had the entire runway length available for takeoff due to the aforementioned conditions.

View from west end of field looking east (e.g. beginning of takeoff roll)



I began the takeoff roll with a standard soft field takeoff (yoke full aft and full power with the intention of raising the nose wheel and mains just above the grass surface until rotation speed reached). I was favoring the right rudder from the onset of the takeoff roll due to the upcoming “dogleg right” and prevailing wind conditions.



I was somewhere between one-third and one-half right rudder deflection when an unexpected significant gust of wind was encountered from the right quartering direction (approximately 4-5 o'clock). At that point, I immediately applied full right rudder to arrest any further drifting to the left. This was approximately 2 seconds prior to impact with the tree shown above.

I recall thinking, "good... correction is working and we should be airborne soon." I simultaneously glanced at the airspeed indicator to see if it was "alive" yet (the attitude was such that I estimate the mains were 4-6" above the runway surface and I was consistently releasing backpressure on the yoke to maintain that attitude while waiting for rotation speed - 50 kts). I estimate a speed of 40 kts as it appeared the airspeed indicator was just coming "alive" at this point. It appeared the fast approaching tree would not be a factor as I glanced to the left and shifted my attention forward.



At that point, the left wingtip then clipped the sole tree shown above – causing a yaw to the left. I immediately returned the throttle to full idle, moved mixture to idle cutoff, and applied maximum braking. The two snapped branches shown are approximately 6” and 12” in from a point where the wing would have completely cleared.

The plane stopped quickly – aided by some pallets and other debris stacked in front of the shed. This debris caught the nose wheel and abruptly stopped the remaining forward motion of the aircraft, while causing the nose to “dig in.”

It was immediately apparent that myself and my passenger (my wife, a non-pilot) were unharmed and I focused my attention on securing the aircraft (verified fuel mixture was idle-cutoff, mags off, master off, fuel selector off). We then removed our seatbelts and exited the aircraft through the right passenger door.



I have since walked the path of the taxi out and takeoff roll separately with a CFI and a 15,000 hour airline captain – describing the real-time events and asking for “what they would have done differently.” Each assured me that “this could have been them.” I feel that everything was done “textbook,” “by the book,” and identical to what any proficient pilot would have done in this situation.

With the advantage of hindsight and replaying this over in my head hundreds of time, if I were faced with an identical situation in the future, here’s what I would do differently:

First, I would remove the lone tree that shouldn’t be there in the first place if it were up to me.

That said, instead of taking a pure soft field approach, I believe in this situation, keeping three wheels on the ground would have made more sense. I would have the benefit of nose wheel steering as well as differential braking to have positive, immediate directional control. The main factor here was limited control input – even with full deflection; due to the low airspeed and quartering wind gust from the rear. In this narrow area, if I had the wheels on the ground, I would have had exceptional forward visibility and direct, immediate directional control, while still building some forward airspeed until the point the runway opened up. At that point, I could have resumed a normal soft field takeoff when out of the confined area. That isn’t “textbook” – but in my opinion, that’s the only thing I could have done differently, in retrospect.