

December 5, 2016

Thomas Savickas
FSDO
Allentown, PA

Dear Mr. Savickas,

As per your request, here is a statement detailing my accident on October 15, 2016 in N3701M. It is to the best of my recollection.

My wife, Dianne, and I were returning from a fly-in at Benton Airport (PA40) to my home field, Pegasus (50PA). It was approximately 3:30 pm and we were in a Zenith CH-701 (N3701M) with a Jabiru 3300. The aircraft has 60+ hours on it.

Prior to departing 50PA that morning, the two fuel tanks were topped off with 100LL, giving the aircraft 10+ gallons each for a total of 20+ gallons. The fuel source was two 5-gallon tanks with fuel purchased from Braden Airpark (P43) the afternoon before.

Flight time was approximately 50 minutes each way with a fuel consumption rate of 4.5 to 5 gallons per hour.

The weather was high clouds (7/10) with a wind from the southwest at 7 – 10 mph and temperature was low 50's. Light turbulence.

At 3:30 pm we were 8 minutes out from 50PA at 3,000 msl and preparing to descend to 1,400 msl, which is pattern altitude.

The aircraft gave a slight lurch and the engine dropped to low rpm then stopped. Carb heat was immediately turned on high and the fuel valves were checked to confirm they were both on. We were over a heavily wooded area with no open areas available. Best glide was set, about 50-55 mph for this aircraft.

The pilot side fuel gauge was showing 3 gallons and the passenger side gauge was showing 8+ gallons. Experience has shown these gauges to be inaccurate. Time aloft and burn rate calculations are done to verify fuel availability.

An engine restart was attempted. The engine immediately started but would not develop power and shut down after a couple of seconds.

Fuel valves were again checked and another restart was attempted with the same results.

A third restart was attempted and the engine turned over easily but would not start.

The 701 is a STOL aircraft, and even at best glide, will lose altitude rapidly. Seeing no alternative and deciding that it was more important to control the descent onto the trees, I told Dianne that we were going in.

The aircraft was slowed up as much as possible without risking a stall. The master electrical switch was turned off as was the right fuel tank lever, which I could reach. The pilot side fuel valve was below my left leg and I could not reach it while flying the aircraft and without losing the sight picture. I aimed for what looked to be the shortest group of trees. Just before hitting the treetops, the nose was pulled up to further bleed off airspeed. It settled into the trees.

The aircraft stopped almost immediately and slid down, coming to rest on the pilot's side of the fuselage. Dianne's door had been torn off and she was able to exit out that side, which was above her. I verified that the electric was off and the right fuel valve was closed. The left fuel valve was beneath me and I could not reach it. Dianne then helped me exit out the door she used.

Dianne only received bruises. I had three broken ribs and a broken scapula.

As added information, right now the plan is to remove the engine and send it down to Embry-Riddle University in Florida. Both of our sons are graduates of the school and the oldest has friendly contacts in their AP department. They run classes that tear down, inspect, and rebuild, if necessary, aircraft engines. Besides being a necessary step to retain the option of selling or reusing the engine, it would have the added benefit of receiving results of the inspection. If they accept the engine as a project, it would take several months to have it finished and returned.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Regards,

Rod Hatcher

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