



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Eastern Region – Ashburn, Virginia

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Who: Ernie Newbury, witness

When: February 6, 2018

RE: N543SX

In a telephone conversation, Mr. Newbury stated that he was a friend of the pilot and witnessed the accident. He said that he heard the pilot start the airplane's engine and taxi to runway 5. Everything sounded normal. The airplane then departed. When it was about halfway down the 4,000-foot-long runway, he heard the engine lose power. There was no sputter or sound of a rough running engine, the rpm just decelerated. Mr. Newbury then looked up and saw the airplane. It was about 100 ft above the runway. He said that instead of landing back down on the 2,000 ft of remaining runway, the pilot made an "aggressive bank" to the left, stalled, and the airplane went straight down toward the ground. Mr. Newbury did not see the impact.

Mr. Newbury said the pilot had purchased the experimental-homebuilt airplane about 2 years ago when it was almost completely built. The pilot finished building the airplane, which was equipped with a Volkswagen engine. Mr. Newbury said the pilot had "constant" problems with the engine, and the current engine was the second one he had installed on the airplane. He said at one point, the wrist pins had failed. The pilot was known to take apart the engine, fix something, and put it back together again, only to have another problem. On the day of the accident, the purpose of the flight was to flight-test the engine. Mr. Newbury thought that the pilot had recently replaced some gaskets and he wanted to see how the engine was working.

Mr. Newbury said the pilot was a "known risk taker", and this was not his first accident. He had crashed his other airplanes in the past. Mr. Newbury was not surprised that the pilot crashed, especially with the airplane's long history of engine problems. Mr. Newbury stated the accident was 100% preventable, and all the pilot had to do was settle back down on the remaining runway. He said that even in if the airplane went off the runway, he would have gone into a grassy area.

The pilot used auto-gas, which he brought to the airport to fuel his airplane. Mr. Newbury said the pilot most likely kept the airplane's logbooks in his hangar at the airport. He was not known for "writing things down" in regard to maintenance on the airplane or engine.

Mr. Newbury also said that he did not hear the pilot perform any engine run-up or test-run on the ground before he departed.

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