

Witness Statement Form

My name is Stirling Benedict Naber, and I live at [REDACTED]. My phone number is [REDACTED]. I am a certified flight instructor with over 800 hours of flight time working with Gulf Coast Aero Adventures under our chief flight instructor Chris Dupin. I am making the following statement concerning the crash of N232VA at FL-17 that occurred on November 17th, 2018 at approximately 12:30PM Central time. I am making this statement voluntarily, without reward, promise of reward, threat, or force, to the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

N2332VA had been in a 100 hour inspection since October 30th, 2018. In addition to the usual 100 hour maintenance tasks, it had also received a new radio, and had received an approved Vans engineering doubler fix for small cracks located on the spar originating from gear bolts. The maintenance had been conducted by Chris and his wife April Dupin, both licensed light sport aircraft repairmen. I, as well as most of the airport tenants and my students had been witness to this work on multiple occasions. I myself assisted in some of the two hand jobs and inspection panel removal under Chris's supervision. All maintenance was always conducted to Vans specifications. On the day of the accident Chris Dupin finished the 100 hour inspection on N232VA about the same time I was returning in N969RV from my first flight of the day. I witnessed Chris and his passenger, Bill Garner, owner of N969RV, conduct a taxi test, run-up, and ops flight test of N232VA following the 100 hour inspection. Upon return, they only mentioned an issue with the stall horn, and the brakes. After that, they worked on tightening the brakes a bit, and conducted yet another taxi test under engine power, before parking the plane back on the concrete pad at FL-17 noting no issues.

At this point I was told by Chris Dupin that the 100 hour check had been completed, the plane was good to go, and my post solo student Jason Brown and I completed a pre-flight inspection, and run-up before departing with more than ¾ of a full tank of fuel. The run-up was normal, and our takeoff was normal. On climb out at 400 feet we noticed the engine was running at a lower RPM than usual, at 500 feet we had a momentary loss of power, I exchanged flight controls and began an immediate search for a landing area and turned to the highway. Our flight school policy is that no turn backs are to be made below 700 feet AGL, a quick glance at the altitude indicator showed 600'. I decided I had enough altitude to return to the field, considering the engine was still developing power at this point. The Dynon flight display made an "Engine Monitor" audible alert, however a quick glance at the engine displays showed no erratic exhaust or cylinder head temperatures, and no loss of oil pressure. I do not recall managing to see the fuel pressure reading. I made a radio call, pulled engine idle, which the engine maintained smoothly to the ground, touched down at a high speed, applying swift braking, and halting the plane by the end of the runway lights. A normal taxi back to parking with no erratic readings occurred. After the after landing checklist, I ran the plane for 30 seconds at full throttle on the ground, again noting only smooth operation and all normal engine instrument indications. At this point I shut down the plane, cancelled the flight with my student and went to talk to Chris who was starting the 100 hour inspection with Bill on N969RV. I debriefed him on the entire situation, and we looked at the engine, checked for leaking fluids, any odd smells, checked the oil, checked the fuel, and noted no irregularities. Chris decided it was likely brief vapor lock, something we have had an issue with before on N232VA after multiple startup/shutdowns and on hot days, and a common issue for RV-12s. I voiced that this was most definitely the most intense occurrence of such an event I had ever felt to both Chris and Bill. We decided to let N232VA cool down for several hours before continuing flight operations.

For the next two hours or so we wrenched on N969RV while discussing possible reasons for the engine power loss on N232VA. Chris mentioned something about a fuel seal or gasket or something he had

worked on during the 100 hour that could have produced debris in the fuel line, and mentioned that he would be sure to sump the fuel well before the next flight. When Ralph Mollega showed up for his pre-solo stage check, I briefed him on the last flight as well, as well as our view on the probable cause. He and Chris went to preflight the airplane prior to departure, and I left the field to grab lunch, and print out Ralph Mollega's solo endorsements should he have passed the stage check flight. At 12:16PM local time I received my last text message from Chris that stated the stall horn had checked good during the preflight. At 12:57 PM I received a phone call from a friend asking if I was alright, and that N232VA was down.

Signe 

Date Nov-18-2018