

Incident Statement

Date of Incident: 7/14/2019

Time (approx.): 0745

**Witness: Edward F. Clark III (sport pilot [REDACTED] LSRM-A- WS
[REDACTED] Remote Pilot [REDACTED])**

At around 0715 on the above date I was conducting routine runway maintenance at 13FA, Earle Airpark, by mowing. The previous mowing had taken place 7/2/2019 and there had been numerous heavy rains in the intervening time. The grass on 7/14/2019 was long, thick in some areas and still wet from the morning dew. As I began mowing from the SE side of the runway heading north it was necessary to proceed slowly so the mowers would not clog. When I passed Dennis Dixon's property I saw that Joe Linebach was preparing his tri-pacer for a flight by removing his tie-downs and that there was a second person with him but assumed it was Dennis seeing him off. I was concerned due to the long, thick, wet grass conditions and resolved to complete one circuit of the runway and then mow the centerline to mitigate the conditions for Joe.

As I was mowing the centerline and passed Dennis's property heading north I noted that the tri-pacer was taxiing out to the runway, thus I would not be able to do more than one run down the centerline. Once I reached the north end I turned to face south and parked on the east side of the runway near the large tree so as to be out of the way.

The tri-pacer taxied out to the runway and went to the south end, where it paused for a short time and I assumed the pilot was conducting a run-up, though I could not verify this since I was wearing ear plugs and sitting on a diesel tractor with its motor running. After a while the tri-pacer accelerated slowly down the runway on a northbound heading using the freshly mowed area on the centerline. The aircraft did not appear to be speeding up significantly. I became concerned when it passed the midway point and was still accelerating, albeit slowly.

Ultimately it passed my position and was still on the ground with all three wheels. I was concerned that it did not have enough speed to lift off and turned around in my seat and watched. At nearly the end of the runway the aircraft suddenly lifted off and

proceeded to fly through the tall corn stalks of the adjacent field and continued to gain altitude. Judging from surrounding trees I estimated it got to about 50-100 feet AGL and initiated a left crosswind turn and shortly after that a left downwind turn. As a result of both turns it had lost altitude and passed my position (southbound) on the west side of a stand of trees but below the tree tops at which point I lost sight of it. I did not hear or see any signs of a crash and after a short pause assumed that perhaps he was flying low, so put the tractor in gear and continued on down to Dennis Dixons property while scanning the area for signs of the tri-pacer. Seeing none I called Dennis at 0750 to tell him I thought Joe might have gone down so he could head over to Barrel Factory Road to check and was planning on then calling 911. While telling Dennis what I had seen I heard sirens approaching so did not call 911. I finished mowing the runway leaving an area on both sides of the centerline un-mowed.

While doing this I saw that the tri-pacer had left wheel tracks most of the way down the runway that were noticeable and on the north end with enough surface disturbances to be easily visible. They confirmed my observation that the aircraft had not lifted off until well north of my parked position. I could also see distinctive damage to the cornstalks where the three wheels and prop had impacted them. These were in-line with the last portion of the wheel marks on the ground prior to lift-off.

Signed: Edward F. Clark III