

04/07/2021

On March 5th, 2021 I Donald Huffman completed and signed off the annual inspection for aircraft N5018Y. Post annual N5018Y was flown with an appropriately rated pilot and maintenance technician to verify the aircraft was operating appropriately. Once the flight was complete the aircraft was reinstated for student training with the flight school, Highland Rim Aviation LLC.

Previous to Monday's events N5018Y was a sound flying aircraft that was rented by students on a frequent basis. N5018Y came to us about a year prior to its accident. It was flown in with no issues and continued to operate in the same fashion. N5018Y only required routine maintenance such as 100HR inspections and annual inspections along with the normal brake linings tires and an occasional servicing of a strut. N5018Y for its age was a flying machine.

On Monday April 5th, 2021 around 0945 in the morning I arrived at work at [REDACTED] Springfield, TN 37172. Upon entering the hangar, I was pulled outside to the flight line by one of my mechanics to answer a question. While tending to the mechanics question N5018Y began taking the runway for take-off. When my maintenance team and I heard N5018Y throttle up for take-off we stopped to watch as we have done several times in the past due to N5018Y's impressive take off abilities and the fact we loved the sound that her engines made. The initial take-off roll was longer than I was used to seeing N5018Y do, normally N5018Y would break ground and take flight just before or right in front of our hanger. On this day N5018Y did not rotate until after it had passed the windsock on runway 22. Once N5018Y had rotated and taken flight myself along with several of my maintenance team members noticed a distinct popping noise coming from N5018Y that we had never heard before. The popping noise that N5018Y was making held all of our attention as we watched N5018Y attempt to climb and gain altitude. I knew there was a problem when N5018Y's landing gear was not brought up and the aircraft appeared to be settling and climbing repeatedly in what looks like an attempt from the pilot to gain air speed. I sent one of my mechanics into the hangar to get our handheld radio so I could attempt to contact N5018Y and get a report of what was happening in the cockpit. By the time I received the radio the landing gear had come up on N5018Y and the aircraft was still attempting to gain altitude but appeared to be only descending. I made a radio call to N5018Y in an attempt to contact the pilot at this time the aircraft had descended to tree top height on the other side of Kinney's School RD. which is near the end of runway 22. What I had just witnessed scared me to the point Spencer Jones and I got into his truck and began searching the sky and nearby fields for N5018Y. Spencer and I ran into an EMA representative named Amanda at the scene as we were the first three individuals there.

----- End statement -----

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: N5018Y
Date: Friday, April 16, 2021 3:23:33 PM

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I was standing in my maintenance hanger with the hanger door open. As I heard the aircraft accelerating down the runway I heard the engine sputtering and missing. It sounded like a very poorly running tractor. I moved quickly out onto the ramp where I could observe the aircraft continue its takeoff roll and very slowly, at a significant length down runway 22, he rotated. It was obvious the aircraft was struggling to maintain air speed as it started a very very shallow climb up to what I would estimate to be no more than 100 feet AGL. I continued to observe the aircraft in this very shallow climb and witnessed the landing gear retract. After a brief period of time the aircraft gradually entered a left bank of approximately 20°. After approximately 30° of heading change I lost sight of the aircraft behind the tree line.

Chris Ferraraccio
Wingnuts Aviation
[REDACTED]

April 5, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

I was working in the Wingnuts maintenance hangar when I heard [before I saw] the Aztec just becoming airborne. My viewpoint was the open hangar door facing south-southwest toward the runway. The sound of the engines was very unusual as it wasn't the normal sound made when making takeoff power. I couldn't discern whether it was just one engine, or both engines, that was making the continuous sputtering/backfiring sound but it was obvious that the plane was not making full power. This obviously abnormal sound of the engines drew the attention of many of us out to observe the airplane struggle into the air. I estimate that the plane didn't climb much above 100' AGL while on runway heading. The landing gear remained down for quite a while; I'm estimating until around the south end of the runway, when it finally was retracted. Shortly thereafter, the airplane began a shallow left bank and turned to the left (estimating 20-30 degrees left of runway centerline). On this heading, the plane continued at the estimated 100' AGL before disappearing over the distant tree line south of the airport.

Please feel free to contact me if there are any further questions.

Sincerely,
R. Sam Swift

Airline Transport Pilot-Multi Engine Land (B-737, B-757, B-767, LR-JET, MU-300)
Commercial Pilot-Single Engine Land & Glider
Flight Instructor-Single Engine; Multi-Engine; Instrument
Mechanic-Airframe & Powerplant

Contact info:

Ralph S. Swift, Jr (Sam)

[REDACTED]

Nashville, TN 37221

[REDACTED]

April 7th, 2021

To whom it may concern:

On Monday, April 5, 2021, I was standing outside of our maintenance hangar assisting a customer. I heard an aircraft coming down the runway. Right away, I could tell at least one of the engines was not running properly. I heard popping, sputtering, and crackling noises. I glanced over to the runway, and saw the Aztec heading down the runway. The aircraft was extremely low, possibly even still on the runway and was clearly struggling to climb. It was obvious at this point that at least one of the engines was not making full power. The aircraft then disappeared from my view and other employees continued to observe the aircraft as it continued to struggle to climb.

Thank you,

Theresa Ferraraccio