

N72129 Accident, 26 JUL 2021

Pilot Statement: Christopher Hardee

I arrived at the airport some time before 8am planning to do a short flight (less than an hour) before the heat set in and to mark the airplane's 75th birthday. I performed a normal preflight, noting fuel quality and quantity, and oil. I had 14 gallons of fuel (about 3 hours) and 4 qts of oil.

When starting I normally note the time and ensure I have oil pressure within 30 seconds. I started the airplane at 8:26 am. I always sit at idle for 5 minutes before adding power. I used this time to verify the current AWOS and make sure my iPad is properly connected to my Stratus. I began my run up at 8:32. Run up was normal. I taxied out to runway 36 after my run up and took off. I departed to the southwest. Not intending to go anywhere, after a few miles I turned back to the airport for a few landings.

I entered the pattern on a 45 and joined the pattern behind a 172. On the departure leg after my 2nd touch and go, at around 100 ft (a guess), the engine sputtered and abruptly quit. Training and instinct kicked in and I quickly assessed my options. To my left was Dejarnette Ln and the intersection of Memorial. There were a lot of cars and power lines. Ahead and slightly left was State Farm, I felt I could not make the roof of the building and the parking lot was full of hazards. Straight ahead was trees, and I knew I would hit them straight on instead of landing in the canopy. To the right was Dejarnette and the right lanes were clear. I began a right turn. In my mind I held hope that I could make a 180 and clear the power lines on Dejarnette and the boundary of the airport property. As I turned I realized that wasn't possible.

As all of the above was happening, I switched tanks and thought about attempting a restart. By the time I lined up with Dejarnette my hand had reached the start handle, I immediately determined a restart wouldn't be possible. Even if the engine started, I was so close to the power lines I was still landing. I knew I needed all of my attention focused on navigating the power lines, which I could see. I believe I turned the fuel off at this point. I flew over one set of lines and was preparing to fly under the next set. The road ahead was clear. At the last moment I saw a "school zone" sign across the road. Being a private school, it was a small sign and wasn't visible until the last moment. I tried to quickly pull up over it, but couldn't pull up too much because of the power lines ahead. I clipped the cables and the aircraft impacted the road, nose down, and slid to a stop at the curb.

After the aircraft came to a stop, people were there very quickly. I instructed them on how to ensure the fuel was off and the Master Switch was off. Fire fighters were soon on the scene and I was removed from the aircraft.

Possible cause? When the engine quit, it sputtered once then stopped. It did not run rough and there were no abnormal noises or vibrations. The prop windmilled after engine failure.

A carb issue comes to mind, either fuel or air. N72129 does not have an idle cut off mixture, so shutting down the engine after a flight requires turning the fuel off. The result is a prolonged sputter before the engine finally stops. The failure I experienced was quit abrupt. The C-85 with the Stromberg Carburetor is fairly susceptible to carburetor icing, due to the carb being further away from the heat of the engine.

I have had one possibly related occurrence. The engine quit once before in a similar fashion, doing a run up. While performing the idle check the engine abruptly quit. After a minute or so, I was able to get it started, but it wasn't smooth. I applied carb heat and it eventually smoothed out. The airplane had just come out of annual inspection, so we looked over everything. All connections were normal and we could not duplicate the problem, so we concluded it was carb icing. All operations since were normal.

To the greatest extent possible, these are my recollections of the events leading up to and including the accident. If any further information is required, please do not hesitate to contact me any time.

Chris Hardee

