

Investigator Name: Doug Brazy
Title: ASI

Division: AS -ERA

Date: 05/16/22

Subject: ERA22FA227 - N17879, Blairstown, NJ, 05/15/22

Witness Information

On May 16, 2022, Paul Scialabba, the pilot's flight instructor, provided the following statement:

I am a glider instructor at Jersey Ridge Soaring in Blairstown, NJ. On May 15, 2022, I met with Bruce Gelotte at approximately 2:00pm to review his logbook and plan for 2 instructional flights in the school's Schweizer 2-33 aircraft. Weather was good with light winds, and smooth conditions based on my experience flying in that aircraft earlier in the day.

Bruce flew well on each flight: we used runway 25, and I did not note any concerns as he exercised good judgement and flew well within safety limits. Following our second flight, Bruce remained in the cockpit and I endorsed him for 90 day solo (his second endorsement, with his first in November 2021). On his next flight (his first solo of the day), several of us watched Bruce closely during hook up, takeoff and tow, and approach and landing: all phases were conducted safely, and Bruce landed normally on the first third of runway 25.

Bruce indicated he wanted to take another flight, so we again observed his takeoff and climb to pattern altitude. I was watching near our glider shack about midway down runway 25. All aspects of the flight appeared normal, however the glider's turn from base leg to final for runway 25 looked early, and slightly higher than normal. I saw the glider enter a forward slip then recover, which appeared to put it close to a normal glide slope to the runway. The glider appeared, however, somewhat close to tall trees on the left. I then observed the glider enter another forward slip, resulting in a slight bank to the left during recovery, which put it even closer to the trees.

Approaching the runway threshold, I observed the glider in a wings-level attitude strike a tree with its left wing, which caused it to rotate to the left and pitch steeply nose down to the ground. The glider impacted out of my sight.

I immediately ran towards the area, and was picked up by our golf cart heading in the same direction. I made a 911 call and reported the accident, and was told others calls were coming in. I jumped over the airport fence and crossed the road where I could see the downed glider, but was prevented from reaching it by a tall fence. I observed Bruce being administered first aid by a male responder, and remained near the scene as rescue vehicles arrived.

Paul C. Scialabba

On May 16, 2022, Kevin Martin from Jersey Ridge Soaring (operator) provided the following statement:

This is what I observed during the unfortunate event on Sunday, May 15, 2022. At approximately 3:30 pm Bruce Gelotte, a student of Jersey Ridge Soaring, was taking his 2nd solo flight of the day when I observed him flying a close-in, slightly high pattern. He was left of centerline on final approach and appeared to be initiating correcting maneuvers. Shortly after leveling out from a slip the left wing of the glider impacted a tall tree and the glider was forced nose down towards the ground where I then lost sight of it. I immediately drove to the location of the impact where bystanders were already on the scene including an off-duty police officer who was performing CPR.

Kevin Martin
Jersey Ridge Soaring