



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Douglass Brazy
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

November 15, 2021

Subject: NTSB investigation ERA21LA018, N668CL, experimental amateur built Z-HI-MAX 1400, October 16, 2021, Benton Airport (PA40), Benton, Pennsylvania.
Information provided by FAA Inspectors

On October 18, 2021, Mr. Robert Frederick, FAA Inspector from the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Flight Standards District Office, provided the following information via telephone:

The airplane had been donated to the pilot and his brothers and had been assembled (or reassembled) in June 2021. It had since been test flown, however the accident pilot had not previously flown the airplane. His brothers reported that the airplane was quick to roll into turns, but slow to roll out of them. When stalls were performed, the airplane did not “break” it instead would “mush into a buffet”.

The accident pilot intended to takeoff from runway 03, perform a teardrop turn and return to land on runway 21. The winds were light. After starting the airplane, the pilot taxied to runway 03, and performed an engine run up. He stayed there for some time, and his brother walked over to see if everything was ok. The pilot told him everything was fine, thought he didn’t have any earplugs. His brother gave him some earplugs, and the airplane departed shortly thereafter. The pilot’s brother reported that the takeoff appeared normal. During the initial climb, at an altitude of about 70-100 ft above ground level, the airplane began a “slow right bank.” The airplane then rolled into a left bank which “just kept getting steeper” and the airplane descended into the ground. He heard a crunching sound and an increase in engine rpm.

Mr. Frederick subsequently interviewed another witness, Michael Evans. During his interview, Mr. Evans stated that he heard the engine have two momentary misses on takeoff, “like a singular cylinder momentary misfire on a single stroke” and other than that the engine was running normally and developing power throughout.

Examination of the airplane revealed that it sustained substantial damage. Both wings were twisted, partially separated from the fuselage, and structurally damaged throughout their spans. The fuselage was crushed forward of the pilot’s seat and remained largely intact aft of the pilot seat. Flight control continuity could not be established due to the damage. The engine was separated from the fuselage. The spinner was twisted, and the wooden propeller was severely fragmented.

On November 15, 2021, Mr. Ron Wright, FAA Inspector from the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Flight Standards District Office, provided the following information via telephone:

Mr. Wright examined the engine on November 15, 2021. He removed the cowl that surrounded the engine. He removed the sparkplugs and noted their condition as "clean, with no carbon or other deposits." The ignition produced spark on all leads when tested. The engine turned smoothly when rotated manually at the crankshaft. Thumb compression and suction was observed on all 4 cylinders. The valve covers were removed, oil was present, and all valves moved normally as the engine was rotated. There were no obstructions found in the air intake or the exhaust.

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