

To: Ken Murray, Aviation Safety Inspector

From: Eric Wright Miller

Subject: Statement Concerning In-Flight / Landing Incident for N723LW (N86RD)

On 9 May, 2022 at approximately 1015 EST, I was flying my Wingren Norman (experimental Just Aircraft Escapade with an experimental Viking 110 engine) near Nottely Lake near Blairsville Georgia. I had departed from a private grass airstrip in Brasstown, NC which is approximately 12 miles SW of KRHP, Western Carolina Regional Airport. There was an (at the time) unidentified sound from the engine, and a vibration ensued. I immediately turned back toward some open fields I had just flown over and prepared for an off-airport landing. I also made a "Mayday" call on 122.9 because that's the frequency we use at the private strip, and I knew others there would hear my call and know where to look for me after I reported my position. As I neared my selected landing field, I decided it was not optimal, and the engine was still running strongly. I opted to continue flight towards the airstrip at Brasstown while keeping other viable landing sites within reach. I was losing engine coolant, and the coolant temp and oil temp were rising. It was about an 8 mile flight back to the field, and the engine was still running strongly when I got there although the coolant and oil temps were now very high. Because I feared complete engine failure at that point, I decided it would be an added risk to attempt to fly around the pattern and land on the established runway. I made the choice to instead land on an un-mowed portion of the field. These airplanes may be configured as nosewheel or tailwheel, and mine is of the nosewheel variety. The nose landing gear leg is a weak point in this design, and the tall hay grasped it causing it to collapse. This resulted in a prop strike, cowl damage, and some damage to the "headrack tube" of the fuselage and the windscreen due to the forward inertia of the wings during the sudden stop. There was no personal injury. I was able to move the aircraft back to my hangar where I investigated the cause. I found that the damper for the prop speed reduction unit had failed in flight resulting in the felt vibration and damage to the radiator with subsequent coolant loss.

Additional info: I have requested and received approval for a registration change to N86RD. The change was completed, and the paperwork has been submitted as required. However, since the FAA Registration Branch is backlogged, I haven't yet received the new registration in the mail and therefore have not yet changed to ELT registration.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Signed,

[REDACTED]
Eric W. Miller

[REDACTED] CFI, AGI, A&P