

Inspector's Statement

On Thursday April 6, 2023 I went to Collier Airpark, 2AL1, 14367 Mannich Lane, Foley, AL to inspect the aircraft wreckage of N272AM and interview the pilot, Mark Peterson.

When I arrived at 3:45 pm, the aircraft was on a trailer in front of Mr. Peterson's hangar. The aircraft was completely burned. The tube structure and skids was intact but charred. The tail boom and tail rotor were mostly intact but separated from the main fuselage. The engine was charred but still intact and recognizable. The majority of the engine accessories, cables, controls were charred and disintegrated. The rest of the wreckage was extremely charred and mostly in ashes.

Mr. Peterson has a business, AirMark Helicopters. He helps owners assemble and learn to fly Rotorway helicopters, an amateur kit-built experimental helicopter. He said he has been in the business of flying these helicopters, training and assisting owners in building and flying these helicopters, built this helicopter himself and has been operating it for the last 20 years. Mr. Peterson's son is an A & P mechanic and assists him with assembly and maintenance of the helicopter. Mr. Peterson provided his pilot certificate and picture ID and operates under BasicMed. He did not have his BasicMed paperwork available but FAA records indicates he holds BasicMed privileges since 2021.

Mr Peterson stated to me that he had just reassembled the aircraft after hauling it back from Lake City, FL on a trailer. He said it is typical to just remove the main rotor blades for transport. He was in the process of test flying the aircraft after reassembly. He stated that the engine has over 300 hours on it. This model engine is very reliable which is why these engines are used on these kits.

Mr. Peterson stated that he conducted a pre-flight inspection and determined the aircraft had 15 gallons of fuel. He uses a calibrated stick to check the fuel tank prior to flight. He stated that the engine is liquid-cooled and he normally allows the engine to warm up for about 20 minutes prior to departure. He stated that he did the usual warm-up and conducted a normal run-up. Everything appeared to be operating normally. Mr. Peterson then lifted off from the departure end of runway 15, heading approximately 150°. At approximately 30 - 40 feet, the engine began to "roll back," lose power. He did not have enough altitude to troubleshoot anything. He attempted to autorotate but was so low and had little forward momentum. He thinks that he may have caught the skid slightly as he touched down. The aircraft rolled over on its side. A moment later he heard a whoosh and thump, saw flames coming from behind him and knew that the fuel had ignited. He released his harness and was able to climb out the door opening (there is no door) and get away just as the flames engulfed the aircraft.

Mr. Peterson said that the engine appeared to perform normally and was fine just before the power began to decrease. Weather was VFR and winds were light, 150/5-7 knots.

Fire department arrived but wreckage was mostly just smoldering at that time.

Mr. Peterson claims over 8000 hours of total time, most of it in Rotorway helicopters. He has some time in a Robinson. He did not have his pilot or aircraft logbooks available at this time. He has chosen to contact AOPA for advice as to how to proceed through the accident investigation. I requested to come back and review his records on Monday or Tuesday of this coming week.

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