

Inspector Statement

Re: Inspector Report for Accident Investigation of N76TG S/N 7278; Accident occurred approximately 1840 EST on March 14, 2024 at Ft. Meade, FL near Lake Buffum Road

On March 19, 2024, the owner of aircraft N76TG, Mr. William Papich, agreed to allow Aviation Safety Inspector Jeremy Puckett to examine the remains of the aircraft. N76TG is an Experimental Amateur Built Sportsman 2 aircraft. Mr. Papich had coordinated to recover the aircraft himself and had transported it to his personal hangar near his home at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

Inspector Puckett arrived at approximately 1220 pm local time and was invited into the hangar by Mr. Papich. The inspector observed that the forward section of the aircraft was upside down on a trailer at the center of the hangar. The right wing and tail section were placed on the floor together at the South of the hangar and the left wing was on the North side with the trailer and forward section in the center. It was also noted that a bag was placed on the floor near the right wing- this bag was opened and contained smaller debris that appeared to be burned beyond recognition and were not removed for photographs. The inspector photographed the aircraft remains in the hangar.

Inspector Puckett noted that the exhaust section of the engine (which was facing upward due to that section being upside down on the trailer) was missing the exhaust pipe and there was evidence of extremely high temperatures in that section. Fire damage was noted on the lower cowling, engine fluid lines, carburetor, and other components beneath the engine. The evidence indicated that hot exhaust from the broken/missing exhaust pipe may have ignited the composite materials in the lower cowling, melted fluid lines beneath the engine, and caused the engine to shut down. The burning of the lower cowling, fluids, fluid lines, and related materials beneath the engine was the likely cause of smoke entering the cockpit during flight. When the aircraft impacted and flipped upside down, the fire progressed to the entire aircraft. The inspector took several photos of the exhaust section of the engine as well as what remained of the lower engine cowling.

Inspector Puckett issued a Pilot Bill of Rights to Mr. Papich and explained the PBR.

The inspector then requested maintenance records as well as Mr. Papich's pilot logbook and pilot certificate. Mr. Papich purchased the aircraft in 2019. He stated that the aircraft had been underwater in the Bahamas and he had refurbished it using certificated Airframe and Powerplant Mechanic James Buchanan. Inspector Puckett confirmed through log entries in the engine and airframe logbooks that Mr. Buchanan had refurbished the engine and returned to service April 1, 2023 with a Total Time recorded of 250 hours. The aircraft Condition Inspection was accomplished on January 28, 2024 by Mr. Buchanan.

Mr. Papich gave the inspector a typed statement of events for the accident. The inspector also took a verbal statement. Mr. Papich stated that he took off from his home in Vero Beach and flew to Lakeland Linder airport (KLAL), in Lakeland, FL with no issues. He stated that when

departing KLAL, it was very hot outside and the aircraft sat idling for a longer time than he had experienced in this aircraft prior to being cleared for takeoff by ATC. He stated that he took off and shortly after takeoff began to smell a strong "hot" smell, or smoke smell. He stated that he does not remember seeing smoke, but did say that he conveyed to ATC that they "smelled" smoke. ATC cleared him to land, and he was able to land without incident.

Mr. Papich landed, taxied to parking and shut down. He opened the engine cowling and inspected the engine where he found a "scat tube" near a header pipe and appeared to be discolored. He zip-tied the "scat tube" to an engine mount cross-member and started the engine, taxied, and took off with no further smoke smell (inspector Puckett noted that this "scat tube" was no longer secured to the cross-member and had no discernable discoloration- a photo was taken). He stated that approximately 10 miles out from KLAL, the cockpit filled with smoke at which point he found an open field to land in. Upon landing the aircraft main landing gear sunk into the soft dirt, which flipped the aircraft upside down. He and his passenger threw dirt onto the engine in an attempt to extinguish the fire. When the fire department arrived, he was told to vacate the area at which point the aircraft became engulfed in flames and was destroyed.

Mr. Papich stated that he believes the exhaust pipe was broken and ultimately departed the engine which caused the smoke and the fire. Inspector Puckett obtained Mr. Buchanan's contact information for possible follow-up interview.

Mr. Papich requested permission to disassemble everything so that he could return the trailer to its owner. Inspector Puckett told him to contact the NTSB investigator and his insurance company.



Digitally signed by JEREMY
RICHARD PUCKETT
Date: 2024.03.27 10:49:42 -04'00'

Jeremy R. Puckett, ASI

Orlando, AFG-800-SO-15