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Air Safety Investigator
AS-ERA

Date: 5/29/2024

Subject: ERA24LA211, Owner/Pilot Statement

Contact: Frank Neilson, Owner/Pilot

On May 21, 2024, Mr. Neilson sent the IIC a statement via electronic mail the following is that statement.

"On Wednesday, May 8, 2024, we had an accident in the Cherokee PA 32-300 (N908dk) that I own. I would like to quickly go over the background of this accident. Before this date, this aircraft was being flown by my son, as a student pilot with an instructor. On March 7, 2023 (which happens to be my son's birthday) my son and his instructor, at the time, both told me that the aircraft lost a cylinder in flight and they had to make an emergency landing in Orlando (KORL). Upon touch down the plane's engine shut down while still on the runway. They could not even make the hold short line. When they informed me of the scenario, I contacted Bill Turley (Owner) at Aircraft Engineering in Bartow, Florida (KBOW) to tell him what had happened. He thought that they may have played around too much with the mixture or perhaps it was old fuel as the plane had been sitting for some time. He suggested that I do a run up for him while he was listening on the phone. When I did the run up, the engine sounded fine, and he was certain that the problem was old Fuel, or they had choked the engine by playing with the mixture too much. As he was the only mechanic working on the plane for the past six to seven years, I believed him and allowed my son and his instructor to go flying again in the same aircraft. On April 4, 2023, my son and his instructor went up for a flight. After a few maneuvers they noticed that the cylinders were shutting down again. The instructor decided to make an emergency landing at Sanford International Airport (KSFB). Both my son and his instructor told me that they lost cylinder three and four, then cylinder two and five and landed with one and six

still running. I again contacted Bill Turley at Aircraft Engineering and relayed to him what had happened. Mr. Turley dispatched two mechanics to KSFB. According to Mr. Turley his mechanics worked on the aircraft all day and ultimately put the plane back in service. These same two mechanics flew the aircraft back to Orlando (KORL) and parked it in my hanger. I contacted Mr. Turley again and asked him if he was sure that the problem had been taken care of. He repeatedly assured me that the plane was safe to fly and that he had put it back in service. I told Mr. Turley that this is my son who is flying, with his instructor. I did not want to put him or his instructor in harm's way. Again, he assured me that the plane was fine, and he has put it back in service. I asked him what the problem was. He said it was a "bad fuel" problem because the plane had sat for a long time. Even though I told him that the plane had been fueled on multiple occasions by this time, and the fuel was fresh he stood by his diagnosis. Once again, he assured me that the plane was safe and was ready to be flown.

The instructor that my son was using no longer felt safe in the aircraft and decided not to instruct my son any further. As a result, we contacted Daryle Gordon, who was my personal FAA check ride guy. I asked him if he knew of a good instructor for my son. He recommended Mr. Glen Grey who was a very accomplished pilot and experienced. On April 4, 2023, after flying for approximately one hour or so the engine began to act rough again and started losing cylinders again. According to my son and Mr. Grey they lost cylinder three and four first followed by cylinders two and five as they began their emergency descent onto State Road 50 near Christmas, Florida, then cylinder six went out as well. They landed with cylinder number one running only. Given Mr. Gray's age and experience and with the grace of God, they managed to land the aircraft safely on State Road 50 and bring it to a halt in the median, causing very little damage. Only a flat tire. An FAA inspector came to the scene. Because the damage was very minimal it was classified as an incident and NTSB was not involved. Mr. Turley was contacted. He arranged for Flying Colors Aircraft Salvage to dispatch a crew to the scene. Flying Colors Aircraft Salvage came to the scene, dismantled the aircraft and delivered it to Mr. Turley's place of business within a couple of days from the date of the accident.

Mr. Turley has been in possession of the aircraft since then, nearly one full year. During this time, his outfit put the plane back together and gave it a fresh annual. He had a \$26,000 bill waiting for me. On May 8, 2024, Mr. Turley dispatched Nick to deliver the aircraft to me in Orlando (KORL) and take me back to Bartow (KBOW) where I was to pay my bill and fly the aircraft home. Nick flies for Aircraft Engineering. He also happens to be a flight instructor. Nick flew the aircraft to Orlando (KORL) without incident, according to him. The aircraft had been installed with a new G3X navigation system. I mentioned the new nav system to Nick. He was familiar with this system. I had studied the new nav system and asked Nick for some hands-on

instruction during our flight back to Bartow. Nick agreed, and we began our flight to KBOW. Nick was the pilot-in-command for the duration of the flight including the decent and subsequent "hard landing" that occurred. As we departed Orlando Executive Airport, the tower gave us instructions to "fly runway heading", which we did. Nick was explaining the auto pilot to me, and we were practicing with it when the tower called and released us by giving us the "frequency change approved" command. At this time, we set the auto pilot to 2500 feet, and began the climb to that altitude. As the aircraft attempted the climb, the engine began sounding rough. We were both trying to see if the mixture and the throttle were OK. Nick noticed that two cylinders were out, numbers 3 & 4. Nick instructed me to look up the frequency for Orlando-Apopka Airport (X04) as that was the closest to us. I managed to find the frequency. We dialed it in and made an emergency call to Apopka traffic. I noticed two more cylinders were out, numbers 2 & 5. We were losing altitude rapidly. During our decent Nick asked me to put full flaps on. We were at 700 feet at this time and Nick pointed to a field in front of a building, which turned out to be the Amazon building, and a powerline to our left and to our right. We hit the field in front of the building. As soon as we cleared the powerlines the tires hit the ground. We bounced and came back down again. As we were both hitting the brakes, the front landing gear hit a drainage ditch and collapsed. This action caused the aircraft to swing to the right at first, this action caused the left wing to strike a tree, approximately 4 inches in diameter, causing the wing to break in half. After that strike the aircraft swung to the left. The aircraft finally came to a halt with its nose down and its tail up in the air. We immediately unlatched our seatbelts and exited the aircraft in an expeditious manner. We looked at each other and made sure that each other was unharmed. Thankfully the aircraft did not catch on fire. There were no fuel leaks, bad enough to cause a fire. The tank on the left wing was separated from the fuselage and the right tank was leaking slightly, dripping from the very tip of the wing. Nothing to be majorly concerned about. After a few minutes Apopka Police and Apopka Fire Department arrived and they secured the crash site. Nick was on the phone with FAA and NTSB. He also was in communication with Mr. Turley. Once again Mr. Turley summoned Flying Colors Aircraft Salvage. They showed up around 4:30pm. to, once again, break down the wings to transport the aircraft.

A gentleman by the name of Ricardo Rodriguez, FAA safety inspector, arrived at the scene. Mr. Rodriguez is a very pleasant gentleman. He took multiple pictures. I believe he was in contact with NTSB. Because the damage was easily above \$25,000, this could not be classified as an incident as was previously. It had to be qualified as an accident. Mr. Rodriguez arrived on site with such a calming demeanor. I was in a state of panic, as you can imagine, his professionalism and empathetic nature helped me gather my wits and enabled me to gain perspective. Mr. Rodriguez has an exceptional ability to create a calming atmosphere, which greatly contributed to a

positive atmosphere. His presence alone greatly contributed to easing my stress. This was the most stressful experience in my life. I was in a state of shock, disbelief and did not know which way was up or down. I was very confused at this time. Mr. Rodríguez was professional, his demeanor was calm, and his behavior and relaxing conduct helped me to sort of come out of the deep dark hole that I was in. I cannot express how he was a gift from God. He was an angel to me at the time to help me deal with the dramatic stress that I had just gone through. I really cannot express what a joy it was to meet him and how he helped me recover from my very traumatic experience. I truly believe he was an angel sent by God."