



Tealeye Cornejo
Air Safety Investigator (Field)
AS-WPR

Date: September 25, 2023
Subject: WPR21FA227, Witness Statement
Contact: Corey Drury, Gila Bend Airport Manager

According to Mr. Drury the flight arrived the evening before the accident and refueled at the Gila Bend Municipal Airport (E63), Gila Bend, that evening with 17.5 gallons of 100 low-lead aviation fuel. The following morning, the flight departed to the northeast, runway 4.



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Contact: Michael Gardner

According to Mr. Gardner he was working on his airplane when he saw two men perform a preflight and then board the accident airplane. The engine started and was taxied to the hold short line where it sat for about 20 minutes, with the engine running before the airplane took off on the active runway (runway 4). During the takeoff run, about a 1/3 of the way down the runway, the witness observed a dirt cloud, and surmised that the landing gear must have departed the runway surface. The airplane returned to centerline and continued down the runway; about midway down the runway, it appeared that the airplane was yanked off the runway and struggled to gain altitude. The witness estimated that the airplane reached an altitude of about 50 ft when it made a left turn, stalled, and impacted the ground.

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Contact: Douglas Berke

According to Mr. Berke, he and Mr. Gardner had flown to Gila Bend to replace a starter on a Cessna 172. He recalled watching it taxi out to the runup area, and that it sat there for a very long time during the runup.

He observed the airplane takeoff and during the takeoff roll, the right main landing gear appeared to depart the runway surface and onto the dirt. The airplane came back onto the runway, and it looked like the airplane was forced into the air. In his opinion, the airplane was too slow and once it was out of ground effect it was flying slow. He then saw the airplane roll to the left. Mr. Berke did not see the airplane crash but did hear the explosion and saw the smoke/fire after.

Mr. Berke stated that when the airplane lifted off the runway the engine was running.



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Contact: David Rempfer

According to Mr. Rempfer, he had flown to Gila Bend to practice touch-and-go takeoffs and landings. He was on the left downwind for runway 4 and he observed one other airplane in the pattern on takeoff. He radioed that he was crossing midfield for runway 4 for a full stop. He then heard over the radio an experimental on takeoff on runway 4. Mr. Rempfer was a little surprised as he had not seen the airplane on the runway, but after the radio call he was able to see the airplane on the runway.

Mr. Rempfer did not see the takeoff or subsequent crash of the accident airplane, but he recalled that it was already very hot.