



Memorandum for Record

Fabian Salazar
Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Investigator in Charge

NTSB Accident Number: WPR21LA070
Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N261MD / SilverLight AR-1
Accident Location: Heber, Utah
Accident Date: December 16, 2020

Michael Greenhawt
Witness
December 16, 2020

Mr. Greenhawt provided a witness report to the Utah Department of Public Safety. In his statement he reported the following:

"I was at my hangar and witnessed the gyrocopter take runway 22 at KHCR and takeoff. We were watching the takeoff in front of hanger 24 approximately 750 ft from take off end of the runway. The gyrocopter attempted to lift off around 500 ft and settled back onto runway and continued to accelerate. The gyrocopter lifted off again around 750 ft down the runway and began to climb. Around 50 ft of altitude the gyrocopter leveled off and began to accelerate. After a few seconds the gyrocopter appeared to continue a normal climb, then the gyrocopter pitched nose up abruptly and began to yaw to the right. The aircraft rolled over to approximately 90 degrees of bank. The pilot then appeared to recover the roll back to level flight but continued to drift to the west towards highway 189. Just prior to the aircraft beginning to spin we heard the engine sound change to what sounded like a reduction of power. The aircraft began to spin a few times and flutter, it then pitched nose down and began to accelerate quickly in almost a straight down descent. After the aircraft hit the ground there was a huge boom sound. (Not like an explosion, more like the sound of a large rock being dropped to the ground, but much louder)."



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Zachary P. Anderson
Witness
December 16, 2020

Mr. Anderson provided a witness report to the Wasatch County Sheriff's Department.
In his statement he reported the following:

"Witnessed gyrocopter lift off then bank hard right. Collided with the ditch on north side of 40."



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Michael Blanchard
Witness
December 16, 2020

Mr. Blanchard provided a witness report to the Wasatch County Sheriff's Office.
In his statement he reported the following:

"I was at the end of the runway watching the gyro-craft do his run up. He taxied out after run up and held at the end of the runway. The gyro-craft engine throttled up for about 15-20 seconds then released the brakes. The rotor tilted back what looked like full deflection upon releasing the brakes. The nose wheel left the ground pre-maturely as the craft returned to the ground. After building more speed it looked as though the pilot was having a hard time controlling it. He took off and remained in ground effect for a brief moment before abruptly gaining altitude and stalling. I heard the throttle increase as he struggled to maintain control. The gyro-craft took a full power on stall with a high angle of attack before spiraling down to his right and crashing in a bank across the highway."



Record of Conversation

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Jeffery S. Dowling
Witness / Operations Manager for OK3 Air FBO

In an interview with Mr. Dowling, he stated that he was taxiing a PC-12 to the South OK3 ramp for an engine run. As he turned out of the parking space headed northwest, he noticed an aircraft coming down the runway. Hangars blocked the view of the runway so the first time he saw the gyroplane, it was already airborne, and he thought the gyroplane was doing a low pass. He thought that he was about 50 feet or less off the runway and going fast. He then saw an abrupt pullup and a right-hand turnout. He stated that he thought "wow, what a hotdogger". He stated that he thought the pilot screwed the maneuver up, because of the bank angle the pilot placed the gyroplane in. When asked about the degree of bank angle, he stated that "the mast was parallel to the ground if not beyond." He stated that the gyroplane rose beyond his view of the right-hand windscreen. He stated that it came back into view and the gyroplane was coming down in a steep angle, almost directly down and in a 45° to 50° bank angle, and the bank angle was getting steeper. He stated that he did not see anything come off the gyrocopter as it was descending.

He said that it impacted the ground on the other side of the highway from the airport. He said that he had not tuned into the unicom frequency for the taxi.



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Erik Midgley
Witness

Mr. Midgley stated that he was at the airport to perform maintenance on the heating and air conditioning system in a client's hangar. While at the client's hangar he heard that there was a gyrocopter getting ready to take off, so he decided to record the takeoff. He stated that he saw the accident and video-recorded it from start to impact.

He said that he watched the gyroplane start to takeoff, and he thought he was rotating a little too early. He saw the gyroplane nose wheel lift off the runway, settle back onto the runway and it rolled to the right, then the nose wheel lifted off again and the gyroplane rolled more to the right, and then on the third time it got off the ground. He thought that it looked like he had to correct with a lot of rudder. He said that the entire flight looked incredibly unstable, the entire time that he was airborne. He said that after he got airborne, he straightened out and got a little more level, then he pitched up and gained altitude quickly, trading airspeed for altitude and that made him look even more unstable. He said that he started to bank, and he lost control. He said that it spun and completely fell out of the air. He stated that he did not see anything fall off the gyroplane while it was in the air, and that it sounded like the engine was running just fine. He stated that he had never met the pilot of the gyroplane before.

Who/What/Where/When

I WITNESSED A GYROCOPTER TAKE OFF FROM HEBER AIRPORT ON RUNWAY 22, THEN SHORTLY LATER LOSE CONTROL AND IMPACT TERRAIN AT HIGH SPEED. FROM THE MOMENT THE PILOT ATTEMPTED TO GET AIRBORN, THE AIRCRAFT SEEMED VERY UNSTABLE, WITH HEAVY RIGHT-RUDDER BEING APPLIED FOR MOST OF THE FLIGHT. I DIDN'T HEAR ANY ENGINE PROBLEMS OR SEE ANYTHING FALL OFF OF THE AIRCRAFT. I SENT A VIDEO THAT I TOOK TO DETECTIVE BOWERS OF THE WHOLE INCIDENT. PLEASE FOLLOW UP WITH ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Figure 1. Copy of Mr. Midgley's statement to the police on the day of the accident.