

Joshua Cawthra

From: Vicky Benzing [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 26, 2022 5:52 PM
To: Cawthra Joshua
Subject: Brief Statement on the Jet Gold Race Sunday September 18th, 2022

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Hi Josh,

I'm sorry that this write-up is so late. By the time that I received Mike's request to send you a statement, I was heading off to the Miramar Airshow which kept me busy until my return home last night. I will do my best to recall the events of the race, though I doubt that I have any input that will be helpful. I was not carrying a camera or any recording device on-board the aircraft that I was flying.

I barely remember the briefing as we did so many briefings over the course of race week. Even though we did not fly all of the races, we still briefed them. We gathered in the usual spot – the main RARA hangar after the morning brief. I believe that Jeff Turney led the brief since he was to ride along with the pace plane. I was to start 3rd from the pole with three fast guys behind me. They were positioned behind me due to DQ's in their last race. The briefing was standard, rejoin speeds, release speeds, etc. I don't remember anything remarkable about it except that I cautioned the fast guys behind me to be nice to me when they passed me (not to leave me in a bunch of wake turbulence). I fully expected to be passed by these much faster jets.

Since I flew the Sport Gold heat right before our Jet Gold heat, I landed my Sport plane in the jet area. When I climbed out, everyone was already in their jets waiting. There was a delay due to the 3 maydays in the Sport Gold race and the Heritage Flight did not go off on time and so I had plenty of time to get loaded up into the jet and get my head in the jet race. Because I was late to the jet area, I missed the brief at the airplane where pace goes over any last minute items. Jeff Turney made sure that I was briefed as I climbed in.

When cued, we started engines and did our usual check-in and taxied out to runway 26. After lift-off, I beat Pete S up to the formation and left a hole there for him to join between me and Aaron. Flying the formation around Peavine went smoothly from my perspective and the start of the race was also uneventful. As expected, Alex and Pete Z got around me quickly (in the chute), giving me plenty of room in my lane. At some point in the first or second lap, Mark Johnson made a radio call that he was on my right and he passed me as well. He was wide and I held an inside line making him have to work for a while to get by me. After that, as I was making the turn around pylon 4, I saw flames on the ground like a "wall of fire" that skipped a section and burned in two marks. Shortly after I saw the burn, I heard Jeff Turney's radio call "red flag, red flag, racers leave the course immediately." I pulled up at outer 5 and made the radio call that "Race 54 is off at outer 5." Then Jeff had us check in by race number. I thought that there had been a mid-air collision until I heard race 77's number being called and then I knew that it had to be just one aircraft involved, race 29 (I knew the numbers of the jets in the race).

I climbed in the cooldown and pulled the engine way back to conserve fuel as I didn't know how long we might be up there and I only had about 350 kilos of fuel left. I was shaking and could hear the emotion in the radio calls that the other pilots made. Finally, we were allowed to recover our aircraft and I left the cooldown for runway 26. I inadvertently used my Sport plane race number twice in the pattern as I was shaken up and just

focusing on getting back on the ground safely. I landed and taxied back to a pit area of crying crew members. We were asked by Mike Steiger not to speak with anyone outside of the Jet Class so I stayed at the jet pit for a couple of hours until I finally returned to the sport area. There was no debrief of the pilots in the race that I recall.

I would like to say that I think that the weather (smoke) was a contributing factor in the 3 Sport maydays in the Gold Sport final on Sunday and in the accident in the Gold Jet final on Sunday. I believe that had we gotten more heat races during the week, some of the mechanical things with the Sport planes would have been worked out before the big power was put on the airplanes in the final race. And I think that Aaron would have had more time on the course at the speeds that he was going on Sunday for the Gold win and may have been better prepared physiologically for the race. We were all very tired after a long week of just waiting around to fly.

Please feel free to call me if you have any questions or need any additional information – I know you have my number (😊). As sad as this event was, I am very glad for the good things that came out of this... no spectators were hurt and the accident involved only one pilot.

Statement from Jerry Kerby, Race 11 L39, Jet Gold medal race participant, Reno Air Races, 18 Sep 22.

Briefing for the flight started at the mass briefing at 0900, where the Airboss briefed weather, safety and the events for the day. The entire jet class then met after the briefing to discuss class specifics for the day. The Gold race participants did a separate brief following to discuss the details of the Gold race. The briefing was much like the previous race briefs discussing the lineup, takeoff, rejoin and then race start procedures. Recovery procedures were reviewed for post race landing.

Takeoff, rejoin, and race start was normal with everyone flying a disciplined race line. I had the number 8 starting position on the outside of the entire formation. Since I was the slowest aircraft in the lineup, the front runners quickly moved far ahead of me on the course. On lap 3 as I was rounding the #2 pylon, the pace pilot called a red flag and told all racers to exit the course and proceed to cooldown. A check in was then made to do a roll call of all players. All but Race 29 checked in. The racers then proceeded orderly to the recovery and landed uneventfully.

Pete Stavrides – Statement

Jet Gold Race Reno, Sunday 18 September 2022.

Mass brief, race heat brief, etc was all uneventful other than the fact that we had sat around and cancelled 3 days of flying in the last 4 days leading to the event which may have been a contributing factor. Additionally, there was heavy smoke the past week and multiple racers had sinus issues. Aaron did not express to me that he had any of those issues. We hung out together off and on most of that Sunday morning as we waited for our event time.

The start down the “chute” was uneventful. I recall thinking to myself how Aarons position on the pace plane was outstanding and I was proud of him for doing such a good job being exactly line abreast on the start. He drifted back a couple feet here and there but immediately corrected. The start was perfect.

For the first 2 laps I was primarily focused on flying a close formation on his right side and staying higher than I did the previous day. He went high once and I went with him. I recall his line being very tight on the pylons, much tighter than I thought it should have been based on our speeds. Even with the tighter line I was flying to match him, G loading was the same as it always was in my aircraft, I don't recall that ever being an issue or feeling different than before.

On the mishap lap (ML), I recall his aircraft moving around a lot more. It was difficult to stay close but I hung in there. Coming around pylon 4 to 5 there was a lot of movement and I recall looking forward briefly to spot the next pylon and was very confused to see that we were heading directly for it, if not to the left of it. I just recall that it was a confusing sight picture. I recall loosening up a little bit so as to not cut a pylon if he brought me with him. I was basically balancing flying a close formation and managing the pylon geometry at the same time. My scan was probably 80% Aaron and 20% pylons/ground. At some point on the backside of the course, nearing pylon 5 or 6 (I cant remember) I saw he was extremely close to a pylon assuming that he had cut it. Then our aircraft got too close together, I didn't know if it was he drifting into me or vise versa. To correct this, I leveled my wings somewhat in an effort to stop the lateral closure while still not turning right, which we never do. I recall watching him go underneath my airplane, at that point I was very concerned. I should have immediately pulled up at that point, but I didn't. I initiated a very slight climb in an effort to stay within the confines of the course altitude limits and also build some clearance. Thankfully, I saw him then re appear on my left side and was relieved. This entire time I was looking over my left shoulder, aft of the 3/9 line. Shortly after he re appeared over my left shoulder, I continued to move head of him. The last thing that I saw was his aircraft going out of my field of view over my left shoulder and also him climbing. Not being able to see him anymore, I then fully transitioned to pylon 6 with a slight decent as I had thought a pass had been made.

Shortly after I heard the black flag call and exited the course.

A couple things stood out to me.

1. The line he was flying was extremely tight.
2. His turns around the pylons were sharp, with heavy loading. As opposed to smooth turns around the pylons in order to minimize wing loading. I don't know why he was doing that. I had done most of Aarons training, and we had always talked about being as smooth as possible on the course and minimizing the G loading and drag of flight controls in the slipstream. I just don't know why this particular race was different, but it was.

Cawthra Joshua

From: Grosof Erik
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2022 4:12 AM
To: Cawthra Joshua
Subject: FW: September 18 L-29 crash near Reno, NV.

[REDACTED]

From: Timothy Swindle [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2022 2:35 AM
To: eyewitnessreport [REDACTED]
Subject: September 18 L-29 crash near Reno, NV.

[CAUTION] This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click any links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

To whom it may concern,

I witnessed the L29 crash near Reno on 9-18, and have included my witness statement below in case it is of any use. I do have a considerable amount of aviation experience (I'm an airline captain), so this statement is only what I saw, without any speculation.

I was watching the accident aircraft racing another aircraft through a 400mm telephoto camera lens, and observed the accident aircraft slow down rather abruptly, and begin to climb, still in a left bank. I couldn't be completely certain from my perspective, but it appeared to me that the accident aircraft also tightened the left turn (towards the inside of the race course) as it began to climb.

Once the accident aircraft had climbed to maybe 300ft AGL, I saw it roll fairly quickly back to the right (with the climb shallowing out as it rolled), and continue that roll until it was in a steep right bank of what looked very close to 90 degrees, at which point it appeared to be neither climbing nor descending.

Almost immediately after reaching the steepest part of the right bank, the accident aircraft rolled fairly quickly back to the left, until it stopped at what looked to me like a nearly 90 degree bank, at which point the aircraft was descending again.

As the aircraft descended, it was slowly rolling back to the right towards a wings level attitude and the descent was shallowing out slowly, but it impacted the ground while still descending in a left bank.

At no point did I see anything come off of or impact the accident aircraft, but because I was watching it through a lens from a considerable distance away, I likely wouldn't have seen anything smaller than a few feet in size.

My phone number is [REDACTED] in the event that anyone wishes to speak with me.

Sincerely,

Timothy Swindle

Jeff Turney Descriptive Narrative of Race 29 Incident during the Reno Air Races

I was the Flight Lead/Pace Pilot of the formation of Gold Jet Racers that participated in the Jet Class Gold Race that took place on September 18, 2022. I was flying in the right seat of the Pace Plane (Phenom 300) with Jay Obernolte who was acting as Pilot-in-Command.

The race formation was briefed @ 1100L that day with all Gold Jet Race participants present.

The pre-race flight briefing covered a discussion of standard procedures including initial radio check-in, engine start, taxi, runway line-up, takeoff interval, formation rejoin, speeds, altitudes, and race release onto the race course in accordance with Racing Jets standard operating procedures (SOP's). A "soft radio check-in" was briefed so that as the Pace Pilot I could ascertain the visibility requirements of 6 miles existed before the formation started engines to begin the race. That requirement was confirmed by Race Control and the formation started engines on time to meet the scheduled taxi and takeoff times for the event.

After takeoff the formation joined to right wing of the pace plane, climbed to 7500' MSL and proceeded around the back of Peavine Mountain which is the standard entry to the jet race course for release. The formation accelerated to 320 KIAS and the racers were released onto the race course. The pace plane then climbed to an altitude of 8500' MSL and orbited above the race course in a right turning orbit to

After release, the racers maintained their respective positions until reaching pylon 4 near the back (north) end of the race course. Race 29 (Aaron Houge) was in the pole position on the inside of the formation followed by Race 77 (Pete Stavrides). Both pilots were flying L-29 aircraft. The racers then began flying around the race course with Race 29 maintaining the lead for 2 laps.

At pylon 5 during the 3rd lap, I witnessed Race 77 pass Race 29 high on the right side in accordance with standard passing procedures. At that point I witnessed Race 29 climb slightly and then roll right at a high rate of roll and pass behind Race 77 in a right turn to the outside and behind Race 77. After passing behind Race 77, I witnessed Race 29 then roll back to left at a high rate of roll and begin to turn back to the left toward the race course. Race 29 remained in a left bank, slightly nose low and remained in that trajectory until impacting the ground between pylon 5 and 6.

I witnessed Race 29 impact the ground and then radioed a "Red Flag" to the remaining racers instructing them to exit the race course and enter "Cool Down" above the race course. As the remaining racers cleared the race course I radioed race control to ensure that Crash Fire assets had been dispatched to the incident site. Upon affirmation I again radioed Race Control and advised them that I could account for the remaining 7 race aircraft and asked that they advise me when the runway was available for recovery. After receiving confirmation that the runway was available I instructed the remaining race aircraft to recover to runway 26 following standard recovery procedures. I remained airborne until the last race aircraft had landed and then landed behind them. The formation then taxied back to the Jet Class pit area on the east end of the airport, parked and shut down.

Jeffrey Turney


Cawthra Joshua

From: dmsterling [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, September 21, 2022 5:18 PM
To: Cawthra Joshua
Subject: Reno accident

[CAUTION] This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click any links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Mr. Cawthra,

I was flying an L39, Race 8 and was flying in the number 7 position in the Gold heat. I removed my camera after the silver race to review that race and never reinstalled it for the gold race so I don't have any footage of the race.

From my perspective the race was normal from the brief to the accident.
I wasn't in a position to see the accident.

I wish I could be of more help.

Sincerely

David Sterling

Sent from my T-Mobile 5G Device

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David Sterling

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Joshua Cawthra

From: Geyer, Charles (FAA) [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 26, 2022 8:12 AM
To: Cawthra Joshua; Thews, Darren (FAA)
Cc: Green, Ronald R (FAA); Rose, Gerald W (FAA); Bruk, Paul R (FAA); Branch, Ryan C (FAA)
Subject: FW: Analysis of air races crash

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[Just a note, the aircraft seemed to start wandering up and down after the turn around pylon #1](#)

[Will](#)

From: Cheek, Larry D (FAA) [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 26, 2022 6:13 AM

[REDACTED]

Subject: FW: Analysis of air races crash

[More info from a pylon judge](#)

From: Bill Baerrese [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, September 25, 2022 11:25 PM

[REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Analysis of air races crash

Burro Bob and cc'd QB's,

I was one of the designated Pylon judges at Pylon Outer-5 for the Reno National Championship Air Races Gold Jet Heat, last Sunday. The crash occurred about 70 feet in front of us in a 90 degree AOB. At impact he cartwheeled and the debris field and fireball moved right-to-left, momentarily getting airborne again. We were not singed, but felt the heat.

Our job at Pylon Outer-5 is to radio-in safety anomalies, report pylon cuts, and scorekeeping. Our view of the mishap was probably one of the closest and least obstructed. In Jet race heats, speeds are typically in the 475+ mph range. (These are usually older highly modified jets calibrated in MPH). Altitude ranges from 30' - 150' AGL. This was a 6 lap race. Vne of the L-29 is 500mph. Pilot Aaron Hogue qualified for pole position at 512mph. That tells me his aircraft must have been certified as Experimental. Or neither RARA or the FAA would have accepted his time. Aron's L-29 radio call sign was Race-29.

Everyone has seen the video and accompanying commentaries. The only thing we at Pylon Outer-5 have to add is the sighting of the L-29's sudden and momentary "wobble" event, during his turn over Pylon Outer-4. It appeared more dynamic than would be expected by wake turbulence or bad air. And appeared to revolve simultaneously around both the longitudinal and lateral axis. At the

same time as this “wobble” event, subsequent post-accident video posted to YouTube suggested the possibility of right aileron separation. To my knowledge none of our close-in Judges observed any part(s) separating from Race-29, or any other racer. Following the “wobble” he recovered high and wide. Then flew an aggressive descending line from Pylon Outer-4 to us at Pylon Outer-5. In our view it appeared he was doing all possible to get back on the inside of the race turn radius. Excessive G-loading would likely have been required and may have resulted in G-LOC. His attitude thereon to point of impact was a shallow steady descent at a 90 degree left AOB. As he approached the sound of his engine was in the high thrust regime. We observed no last-second attempt to recover.

That was the view from up close and personal. That time line was about 20 seconds.

Sadly,

Bill

Bill Baerresen

On Sep 23, 2022, at 10:28 AM, Bob Shawhan [REDACTED] wrote:

Roger,
thank you for the video, kinda what we expected.
I have my thoughts as to that airframe putting along at 512 mph, somewhat associated with the P51 crash about 5 years ago which I witnessed from @ 200 yards away.
Burro,
Bob

On September 22, 2022 at 12:33 PM Roger Leach [REDACTED] wrote:

Good video analysis...

<hqdefault.jpg>

L-29 Crash Reno National Championship Air
Races 18 Sept 2022
youtu.be

Sent from my iPhone

Joshua Cawthra

From: Michael Steiger [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, September 21, 2022 3:54 PM
To: Cawthra Joshua
Subject: Fwd: JET CLASS GOLD RACE accident Description NTSB

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Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: A E [REDACTED]
Date: September 21, 2022 at 10:56:34 AM CDT
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: JET CLASS GOLD RACE accident Description NTSB

Hi Mike

REPORT to regards the accident during the jet gold race 09/19 for NTSB analysis .

I started as RACE 777 on 4th position on Gold Jet class race on Sunday and I passed Race 54 and end up in 3rd position on the begging of the race Visibilty was great probably more then 10 miles on nice sunny afternoon Sunday .

Race 29 and 77 , got ahead of me after lap 2 and which seems to be in positon I could not even get close to pass the 2nd positon anymore so I was just holding what I had to keep my 3rd place until end of the race .

Around Pylon 3, I noticed RACE 29 , start to going up , litte bit to the left and inside the track , then he went down slowly and turned right by around maybe 60 degrees from his position . When he turn to a heading maybe going Northeast and went away from race track , I just though he would go be back to the track as he didn't radioed any issue as far I remember . Around Pylon 6 I heard PACE PLANE call For RED FLAG RED FLAG ...so we all pull the aircraft from the race course . Once I turned east around over runway 8 into COOL DOWN position still climbing left ...I found out there was a Fire in the ground around Pylon 5 . Initially I thought probably was Aaron who landed off airport and end up in his aircraft cathing on fire . Once I landed I heard people saying he flown into the ground in turning position and the aircraft exploded in contact with the terrain ...I just could not believe what happened .

Will have the video in dropbox today so you can share with NTSB the access link .

Alex