

Greg Hughes
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: October 21, 2025

Subject: WPR26LA028 / Record of Conversation

Contact: [REDACTED], via telephone

The pilot stated he believes the initial incident sequence was as follows: He performed his engine run-up at 88AZ (Grapevine) on a "really thin runway." When he made a hard left turn to pivot the airplane and line up on the runway, the tail dragger's aft end swung around, and he applied hard right rudder pedal to stop the swing. He thinks the steering arm locked to the right. The wheel itself was probably still castering, he said, and had not been engaged by the pawl to release it. He did not notice the issue during takeoff because the aircraft typically requires significant right rudder input due to torque. As soon as the tail came up, he believes the tailwheel was stuck in the offset position.

He said he noticed an apparent rudder issue during the climb-out phase of flight after departing, requiring constant left rudder input to maintain coordination. For safety reasons he decided to continue climbing as he was over rough terrain. Once established straight and level, he confirmed the rudder was stuck, as the aircraft yawed all the way to the right when he released left rudder pressure. He had his passenger attempt to visually check and photograph the tailwheel through an open back window of the airplane, but the pictures were inconclusive. He observed that right rudder pedal movement seemed to be stuck, and he had to push hard on the left rudder pedal to get the airplane to fly coordinated. He was unable to apply left rudder beyond that centering point.

He decided against further manipulating and exercising the rudder controls in flight in order to avoid breaking a chain, and contacted Deer Valley Tower, declaring a pan-pan for a stuck rudder. He requested the wide, 8,000-foot runway at Deer Valley, which is his home airport. The engine and all other systems were functioning

normally. He made a low pass near the tower so ATC personnel could make a visual inspection, but that yielded no new information. He climbed to burn off fuel because the airplane had approximately 25 to 30 gallons onboard. He decided that landing with the ability to push the left rudder almost to center was the safest option to prevent the aircraft from skidding or flipping sideways.

Upon landing, he held the tailwheel off the ground as long as possible, landed on the main wheels, and shut off the engine. As the aircraft slowed and the tailwheel touched down, the airplane turned hard to the left and ground looped. The ground loop resulted in substantial damage to the right wing (affecting the three to four outboard ribs), a buckled fuselage, and a damaged tail (horizontal stabilizer buckled). The propeller struck the surface with the engine already shut off. The pilot and passenger exited the airplane immediately after it stopped, and neither was injured.

Following the incident, the pilot found the tailwheel steering arm stuck to the right. With assistance from the firefighters who helped lift the tail, he freed the steering arm by kicking it, enabling him to straighten the tailwheel so he could taxi to his hangar.

He later removed, disassembled, and inspected the Scott/ABI 3200-series tailwheel in his hangar and observed that a flat spring on the right side was extended out more than the corresponding left side, and appeared slightly curved or bowed, though not broken. He said the FAA inspector also observed the assembly and that they had removed a lot of dirty grease during his inspection.