



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

Location:	Sparks, NV	Accident Number:	LAX06LA024
Date & Time:	11/02/2005, 0940 PST	Registration:	N26XL
Aircraft:	Schleicher ASH 26 E	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

Analysis

During cruise flight while in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC), the pilot lost control of his glider and experienced an in-flight breakup. The wings separated from the glider, and the pilot bailed out. The flight was planned as an attempt to set a cross-country glider record using standing lenticular wave conditions along the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The pilot was on an instrument flight plan and was cleared for a block altitude between 18,000 and 28,000 feet. The pilot reported experiencing internal canopy icing that interfered with his view through the canopy. When wiping the canopy clear of frost, he observed that the glider was approaching clouds and would shortly be in instrument conditions. The pilot turned on his emergency standby gyro (electric turn and bank), but it did not spool up completely before he entered the clouds and lost control.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's inadvertent flight into instrument meteorological conditions which resulted in a subsequent loss of control and an in-flight breakup. A contributing factor was the spool up delay for the emergency turn and bank indicator.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT ENCOUNTER WITH WEATHER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - CLOUDS

Occurrence #2: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

2. (F) FLIGHT/NAV INSTRUMENTS, TURN AND BANK INDICATOR - NOT OPERATING
3. (C) AIRCRAFT CONTROL - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - INADVERTENT - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #3: AIRFRAME/COMPONENT/SYSTEM FAILURE/MALFUNCTION
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings

5. (C) WING - OVERLOAD
6. DESIGN STRESS LIMITS OF AIRCRAFT - EXCEEDED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #4: MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings

7. BAIL-OUT/EMERGENCY EJECTION - PERFORMED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

On November 2, 2005, about 0940 Pacific standard time, a Schleicher Alexander GMBH & Company, ASH 26E (powered glider), N26XL, experienced an in-flight breakup near Sparks, Nevada, following the pilot's loss of control. The airline transport pilot bailed out of the glider and was seriously injured. The glider was destroyed. The pilot owned and operated the glider, which had a standard airworthiness certificate in the utility category. Instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) existed at the pilot's cruise altitude, approximately 20,700 feet mean sea level (msl). The personal flight was performed under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91, and an instrument flight rules flight plan was in effect. The flight originated from Inyokern, California, about 0618.

The pilot reported to the National Transportation Safety Board investigator that the flight was planned as an attempt to set a cross-country glider record using standing lenticular wave conditions along the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The pilot obtained approval to fly in an airspace block between flight level 180 and flight level 280. The pilot monitored the weather in detail for about 2 weeks before the flight. He reported that upon departure he motor-climbed to approximately 9,000 feet msl and encountered the wave condition exactly as forecast. He shut down the engine and proceeded on course in visual meteorological conditions (VMC). During cruise flight he experienced internal canopy icing that interfered with his view through the canopy. When wiping the canopy clear of frost, he observed that the glider was climbing into a "layer of moisture." He determined that his only alternative was to turn on his emergency standby gyro (electric turn and bank), maintain heading and position, and climb through the "ledge" of moisture. However, the gyro did not come "up to speed" while the wings were level and before encountering IMC conditions. The pilot additionally reported that what happened next is subject to conjecture. In any case, the wings separated from the fuselage shortly after he encountered IMC. The pilot exited the cockpit, cleared the fuselage, and opened the emergency parachute.

A few days after the accident the pilot was interviewed by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspectors. The pilot told them that after the glider entered the clouds, its airspeed increased and he lost orientation.

The FAA's recorded radar data indicated that during the last 8 minutes 13 seconds of the glider's flight, the glider's altitude varied between 18,800 feet and 20,700 feet according to its Mode C altitude encoding transponder. The last Mode C radar hit occurred at 0939:30. At this time the glider's altitude was 20,700 feet.

The main wreckage of the glider came to rest at the following GPS coordinates: 39 degrees 34 minutes 09.6 seconds north latitude by 119 degrees 43 minutes 08.6 seconds west longitude. The main wreckage site was about 2.6 nautical miles north-northeast of Sparks, Nevada. The pilot was located about 1.6 nm and 004 degrees from the main wreckage.

An examination of the main wreckage revealed that the two wings and the center section of the fuselage were missing. The alignment pins for the wings appeared bent. The rudder was attached to the vertical stabilizer. The horizontal stabilizer and the elevator were also missing.

The Reno airport, elevation 4,415 feet msl, is located about 4.8 nm south of the accident site. At 0956, Reno reported the following weather conditions at the airport: wind from 190 degrees at 29 knots with gusts to 38 knots; 10 miles visibility; few clouds at 10,000 feet and

broken clouds at 15,000 and 25,000 feet.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Airline Transport; Flight Instructor; Commercial; Flight Engineer	Age:	50, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Multi-engine Land; Single-engine Land	Seat Occupied:	Single
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Glider	Restraint Used:	Seatbelt, Shoulder harness
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane Multi-engine; Airplane Single-engine; Glider; Instrument Airplane	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Without Waivers/Limitations	Last Medical Exam:	04/01/2005
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	01/01/2006
Flight Time:	20500 hours (Total, all aircraft), 330 hours (Total, this make and model), 13200 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 120 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 45 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 0 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Manufacturer:	Schleicher	Registration:	N26XL
Model/Series:	ASH 26 E	Aircraft Category:	Glider
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal; Utility	Serial Number:	26-181
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	1
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	12/01/2004, Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1158 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	255 Hours	Engine Manufacturer:	Midwest
ELT:	Installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	AE50R
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	50 hp
Operator:	On file	Air Carrier Operating Certificate:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Observation Facility, Elevation:	RNO, 4415 ft msl	Observation Time:	0956 PST
Distance from Accident Site:	5 Nautical Miles	Condition of Light:	Day
Direction from Accident Site:	180°	Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Few / 10000 ft agl	Temperature/Dew Point:	18° C / -7° C
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 15000 ft agl	Visibility	10 Miles
Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	29 knots/ 38 knots, 190°	Visibility (RVR):	
Altimeter Setting:	29.83 inches Hg	Visibility (RVV):	
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Inyokern, CA (IYK)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	IFR
Destination:	Inyokern, CA (IYK)	Type of Clearance:	IFR
Departure Time:	0618 PST	Type of Airspace:	

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious		

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Wayne Pollack	Adopted Date:	03/26/2007
Additional Participating Persons:	Jack Roche; Federal Aviation Administration; Reno, NV		
Publish Date:			
Investigation Docket:	NTSB accident and incident dockets serve as permanent archival information for the NTSB's investigations. Dockets released prior to June 1, 2009 are publicly available from the NTSB's Record Management Division at pubinq@ntsb.gov , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/ .		

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