



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Preliminary Report

Location:	Cleveland, NC	Accident Number:	ERA19FA154
Date & Time:	04/22/2019, 0915 EDT	Registration:	N625J
Aircraft:	Wheeler EXPRESS SERIES 2000	Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

On April 22, 2019, about 0915 eastern daylight time, an experimental, amateur-built Wheeler Express Series 2000, N625J, was destroyed when it impacted terrain near Cleveland, North Carolina. The airline transport pilot was fatally injured. The airplane was privately owned and operated under the provisions of Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and no flight plan was filed for the personal flight, which originated from Statesville Regional Airport (SVH), Statesville, North Carolina, at 0901, and was destined for Twin Lakes Airport (8A7), Mocksville, North Carolina.

According to the airplane owner, the pilot planned to fly the airplane to 8A7 for an avionics upgrade. The owner intended to drive about 44 miles to 8A7 to pick up the pilot and return them to SVH. The owner stated he watched the airplane depart runway 28 at SVH and travel west, then turn back to the east before he lost visual contact. A mechanic located 4.5 miles northeast of SVH noticed the airplane because "the engine was making numerous pitch changes." When he observed the airplane, it was inverted and rolling to level flight. It then performed another complete roll and was flying in an easterly direction when he lost sight of the airplane. A second witness, located 1 mile east of the accident site, stated he heard loud engine noises that changed pitch, and then observed the airplane in a straight-line flight path towards the ground. He did not see any smoke appear, and believed what he observed was a radio controlled airplane.

The airplane owner arrived at 8A7 about 1040 to find the airplane had not arrived. He made several phone calls to the pilot without success. He returned to SVH to see if the pilot had returned, while other pilots at 8A7 departed in airplanes to search the area. At 1300, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued an alert notice (ALNOT) for the missing airplane, which was subsequently found in a field at 1700.

Examination of the wreckage revealed that all major components of the airplane were present at the accident site. The remains of both wings were highly fragmented and were located on the right and left side of the main wreckage in approximately their mounting locations. The wings were detached from the fuselage with both flaps and ailerons completely separated. The upper and lower wing skins were fragmented and pieces were located in the vicinity of the main wreckage.

The empennage was displaced upward and forward, and came to rest slightly aft of the main wreckage. The rudder, vertical stabilizer, and horizontal stabilizer were fragmented.

Control continuity was confirmed from all flight control surfaces to their respective cockpit controls through overload breaks and fractures. The cockpit throttle control assembly was separated. It was found extended full aft, in the closed (idle) position and the throttle shaft handle was bent approximately 90° in the direction of the instrument panel. The cockpit mixture control assembly was found in the full forward, full rich mixture position.

The avionics, engine and propeller were recovered from an estimated 4 ft crater under the main wreckage.

The engine crankcase was broken in multiple locations with significant impact related damage visible to the front of the crankcase. The six cylinders remained attached to the engine; however, the Nos. 5 and 6 cylinders remained only partially attached. All of the engine accessory components were separated from the crankcase except for the fuel pump, oil pump, and starter adapter. One of the magnetos and the majority of the throttle and fuel metering assembly were not located.

The propeller hub remained intact and displayed impact damage. Two of the three propeller blades were broken from the hub; one of the propeller blades was not located. The propeller blade that remained attached to the hub displayed significant S-bending, twisting, and leading edge gouging. A large portion of the blade tip was separated and located in the impact crater. The remaining propeller blade had broken from the hub at the propeller blade shank and a portion of the tip was separated. The blade displayed twisting deformation as well as leading edge gouging.

Both airplane entry door locking assemblies were found with their locking pins in the closed/locked position.

According to FAA airman records, the pilot held an airline transport pilot certificate with a rotorcraft-helicopter rating, a commercial pilot certificate with ratings for airplane single and multiengine land, instrument airplane and glider. The pilot also held a flight instructor certificate with ratings for airplane single-engine, multiengine, rotorcraft-helicopter, and instrument airplane. His most recent FAA second-class medical certificate was issued April 25, 2018. At that time, he reported 17,040 total hours of flight experience, of which 80 hours had been accrued in the last 6 months. The airplane owner reported that the pilot had accrued approximately 10-15 hours in the accident airplane.

The weather conditions reported at 0920, at SVH, about 18 miles west of the accident site, included visibility 10 statute miles, clear sky, wind calm, temperature 13°C, dew point 08°C and barometric pressure 30.21 inches of mercury.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Wheeler	Registration:	N625J
Model/Series:	EXPRESS SERIES 2000 No Series	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Amateur Built:	Yes		
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	SVH, 967 ft msl	Observation Time:	0920 EDT
Distance from Accident Site:	18 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	13° C / 8° C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	Calm / ,
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility:	10 Miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.21 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Departure Point:	Statesville, NC (SVH)	Destination:	Mocksville, NC (8A7)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	35.755000, -80.635000 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Peter C Wentz
Additional Participating Persons:	Robert W Reynolds; FAA CLT FSDO; Charlotte, NC Kurt Gibson; Continental Aerospace Technologies; Mobile, AL
Note:	The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.