

Notation #8736

Earl F. Weener, Member, Concurring and Dissenting

Generally, I agree with the report and probable cause determination of Notation 8736. This investigation ultimately reveals a crew that made decisions which resulted in minor injuries to passengers and substantial damage to what was otherwise a perfectly sound aircraft. While I concur that probable cause of this rejected takeoff of US Airways Flight 1702 was the captain's decision "to reject the takeoff after the airplane had rotated" and the flight crew's "failure to follow standard operating procedures," I believe that a critical piece of the puzzle remains inadequately examined. During the moments leading up to the rejected takeoff, the crew repeatedly heard an aural RETARD alert. There is no dispute that the crew did not understand what the alert, in those circumstances, was intended to convey. Moreover, the insistent nature of the alert affected the crew and drew their attention during this critical decision-making period. The first officer, in interviews, stated that once the RETARD aural alert began she did not "call any V-speeds" during the takeoff because the crew was "distracted with the aural RETARD alert." Further, the co-pilot reported thinking that she had just wanted the aural RETARD alert "to shut up."

Based on crew interviews and NTSB simulations, there is every indication that the airplane would have been capable of continued flight. Therefore, had the pilot continued after take-off, he essentially would have been able to recover from the initial deviations from SOPs. It remains unclear why the pilot became convinced that an otherwise sound airplane was not safe to fly. The co-pilot recalled her perception that the RETARD alert was very loud and seemed to become more rapid as the plane accelerated. The RETARD alert was not only a distraction to the crew at this crucial moment, it encouraged the crew to take the incorrect action during takeoff.

The extent of the RETARD alert's impact on the crew's decision making is unclear, but it obviously was forefront in their minds. We have underemphasized the impact of the RETARD alert on the crew actions. It is my belief that the RETARD alert contributed to the pilot's decision to reject the take-off after the airplane had rotated and that the alert should be considered a contributing factor to the probable cause. This inclusion should not and does not diminish the fact that the primary probable cause remains the pilot's failure to follow his training and continue with the take-off, nor should it be interpreted to reduce the impact of the other contributing factor, the crew's failure to follow standard SOPs.

