



## MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

**Stephen Stein**  
**Air Safety Investigator**  
**National Transportation Safety Board**  
**Office of Aviation Safety – Western Pacific Region**

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**NTSB Accident Number: WPR16FA157**  
**Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N341AL; Arion Aircraft LS-1**  
**Accident Location: Van Nuys, California**  
**Accident Date: August 2, 2016**

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Note: The following interviews were documented by the Investigator –In-Charge (IIC), Stephen Stein.

### Interview #1 Summary

**Alex Larson**  
Pilot's Former Flight Instructor

Interview date and time: November 3, 2016; 1328 PT

Mr. Larson reported that he has about 2,000 total hours of flight experience, most of which was accrued while providing instruction. The instructor started flying with the accident pilot because he had purchased a light sport airplane and needed someone to transition him from his Bonanza and Grumman Tiger. After about 10 flights, the instructor decided that he was not comfortable signing him off because he could not get him where he needed to be. On their first flight they went to Camarillo, California and the pilot had difficulty with everything; he overcontrolled the pitch attitude of the airplane, was unable to hold altitude, and did not comply with controlled airspace rules. At times when they were approaching airports to land the pilot would come in too slow. In one example, he slowed the airplane so much on approach the airplane began to buffet, a stall precondition.

They practiced a stall once and the instructor observed that the airplane did not provide much warning before the airplane stalled. During a stall, the left wing drops aggressively with little buffet.

The pilot would frequently touch the airplane down on the runway too early during landing attempts, and the airplane would bounce. At Hawthorne Airport, they were practicing touch-and-go maneuvers, and during a landing attempt the airplane touched down on the mains twice and floated (bounced landings), but the pilot pushed the nose down hard and the nose landing gear impacted the runway and separated. After another two flights, the instructor stopped flying with the pilot because his flying performance made him nervous.

According to Mr. Larson, he was never informed that the pilot had been involved in an automobile accident. He observed that the pilot had difficulty entering and exiting the airplane. When working on the radios, the pilot's hands were shaky, but he did not stutter or exhibit a speech impediment. The pilot's right arm was shaking all the time and he infrequently attempted to control the airplane with both hands.



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### Interview #1 Summary

**Morgan Garvey (Witness 1)**  
**Thomas Skupick (Witness 2)**  
Eyewitnesses

Witness 1 interview date and time: August 2, 2016; 1645 PT  
Witness 2 interview date and time: August 3, 2016; 1329 PT

According to witnesses 1 & 2, they observed something dangling from the left main landing gear that appeared to be a wheel fairing. The airplane made exaggerated movements and was flying "erratically, like he [the pilot] was overcontrolling the airplane." The witnesses heard the pilot state that he was returning to the airport on the airport tower control radio frequency. Immediately following the transmission, the airplane entered a steep left turn. The airplane appeared to enter an accelerated stall as the nose continued through the horizon. Witness 1 further added that he witnessed an incipient stall, indicated by an increase in the airplane's attitude. The airplane subsequently rotated one quarter turn to the left and then entered a nose down attitude towards the ground and disappeared below the witnesses' field of view.

Interview #2 Summary

**John Marino (Witness 3)**

Eyewitnesses

Interview date and time: August 5, 2016; 1336 PT

Witness 3 reported that he initially observed the airplane when he looked to his right and noticed it approximately 35 feet above ground level in a climb. The witness reported that the left landing gear was hanging by a brake line and the airplane was in a shallow climb and appeared to be incrementally gaining altitude. The airplane then began a left turn near the south end of the airport. Initially, the turn "looked good," but then the airplane slowed, the airplane banked hard into a knife edge attitude and subsequently "fell." In this moment the airplane yawed to a nose down position and the airplane entered a rapid descent. The airplane disappeared from the witnesses' view. The witness did not recall if the engine was functioning at the time of the event.

Interview #3 Summary

**Sean Archer (Witness 4)**

Eyewitnesses

Interview date and time: August 5, 2016; 1439 PT

According to witness 4, located at the south end of the airport adjacent to the accident site, he heard a small single engine airplane overhead. He remarked that the engine was "cutting in and out" for a moment and then the sound abruptly stopped. Approximately 5 seconds later, the witness heard a "whack" sound. He reported that this event took place about 1354 on the day of the accident.

Interview #4 Summary

**Desmond Shaw (Witness 5)**

Eyewitnesses

Interview date and time: August 9, 2016; 1438 PT

Witness 5 reported that he was in a traffic helicopter at the time of the accident. He started to watch the airplane seconds after the pilot reported that he wanted to return to the airport on the airport's tower control radio frequency. The airplane entered a steep left turn from approximately 350 feet above ground level and the nose appeared to be in a level attitude. Subsequently, the airplane began a descent and impacted an industrial building east of the airport. The witness' pilot notified the tower controller that an airplane had crashed. His pilot reported to the witness that the airplane's attitude through the steep turn resembled an accelerated stall.





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### Interview #1 Summary

**Joe Justice**  
Pilot's Former Flight Instructor

Interview date and time: October 4, 2016; 0810 PT

Mr. Justice stated that one of his flight instructors flew with the accident pilot about 4-5 times after the pilot's automobile accident several months before the pilot's fatal accident and ultimately informed Mr. Justice that the pilot should not fly. During subsequent flights with Mr. Justice, the instructor observed him routinely deviate from his desired altitude by 200-300 feet and perform 40° turns instead of standard rate turns. The pilot required assistance maintaining the airplane's flight profile and when he performed a half-decent landing, the pilot would insist that his performance was acceptable. The instructor ultimately chose not to fly with the pilot.



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### Interview #1 Summary

#### **John Feldhans**

Camarillo Airport, Airport Representative who Responded to Pilot's Incident

Interview date and time: October 3, 2016; 1526 PT

The airport representative reported that when he arrived at the accident site, the pilot and his passenger were pushing the airplane off the runway. Mr. Feldhans stopped them from moving the airplane and started talking with them. The pilot maintained that he did not want to report the incident to the Federal Aviation Administration or the National Transportation Safety Board. He added that he did not require a medical certificate because the airplane met the requirement as a light sport aircraft and he only needed a driver's license to fly it.

Mr. Feldhans recalled that the pilot was "very weak" as his knees and hands bothered him. He seemed to be "there mentally," but not physically. The pilot reported to Mr. Feldhans that the airplane bounced once and then impacted the runway in a slight nose low attitude, which caused the nose landing to collapse. He further remarked that he was in control of the airplane.



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### Interview #1 Summary

**Kirk Savagian**  
Pilot's Former Flight Instructor

Interview date and time: October 24, 2016; 1049 PT

Mr. Savagian reported that he began flying with the accident pilot in September 2015 and ultimately endorsed his flight review in February 2016. During that time, they flew together for a total of about 23 hours. The instructor stated that the light sport airplane was too much for the pilot to begin with, as the pilot had trouble maintaining coordinated flight in the airport traffic pattern. He eventually demonstrated control and consistency in the airport traffic pattern, which is when he decided to sign the pilot off. Mr. Savagian stated that he was told by the pilot that he would renew his third class medical certificate.

When the pilot demonstrated consistency, he was still approaching the runway fast, but was able to keep the airplane over the runway centerline and his radio calls were good. The instructor did not observe any abnormal physiological indications with the exception that the pilot would consistently use this left hand to control the flight stick and his right hand for navigating, but that he was slow and shaky. The pilot also did not appear to be using right rudder.





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### Interview #1 Summary

**Nicholas Ullmann**  
Acquaintance of Pilot

Interview date and time: August 11, 2016; 0927 PT

In a telephone conversation with the NTSB IIC, Nicholas Ullmann stated that he was a full time instructor for 14 years at Proteus Air Services and was the previous CFI to the accident pilot about 10-12 years ago. He stated “that was when he [the pilot] had his mental faculties prior to the terrible car crash which diminished his mental capacity to a horrible degree”. He stopped instructing him after the pilot received his license and after he became involved in a fractional partnership with a group at Santa Monica Airport. Mr. Ullmann stated that Newman sold his share in the group’s airplane and purchased a Beechcraft Bonanza. Mr. Ullmann stated that “it might have been too much airplane for him”. During a flight to Oceana, Ullmann had to “save” the airplane on the landing attempt and directed the pilot to about 50 other procedural errors that he made during the flight.

He stated that he was concerned about the pilot's driving. The day prior to the accident he went into Ullmann's office and asked him to help him push airplane into hangar. A line employee agreed to assist Mr. Newman who drove both of them to the hangar. The line employee noticed

Mr. Newman's hands were shaking during the brief trip. She described his driving as "frightening".

Mr. Ullmann stated that about a week prior to the accident, one of their line employees announced "there's an aircraft sputtered on downwind." He asked for priority/emergency handling and he landed safely after a very short approach. Mr. Ullmann approached the pilot who was at the self-serve fuel pumps. Mr. Newman snickered and stated that "he thinks he ran out of gas." Mr. Ullmann looked inside both fuel tanks and noticed they were both "bone dry". He asked the pilot why he is not going fill up the tanks since he just had a fuel exhaustion incident. The pilot stated that he "doesn't feel like the fuel gauges are working" and added that he needed to practice 3 touch and goes, but planned to refuel the airplane in Camarillo. His former flight instructor arrived at the fuel pumps and scolded the pilot for his actions. Mr. Ullmann believed the pilot's instructor stopped flying with the pilot because of behavioral issues. After everyone left the fuel pumps, Mr. Ullmann returned to his office, and he discovered this was his second priority handling issue that day. During this flight, the pilot encountered engine trouble in the airport traffic pattern while preparing for a FAA 709 examination. The pilot experienced a total loss of power in the traffic pattern, declared an emergency and returned to the field. The air traffic controller asked the pilot if he wanted to proceed to his hangar or maintenance, and the pilot responded that the "engine is fine." He then departed the airport on the flight that Mr. Ullmann previously described, which resulted in fuel exhaustion.

A broken gear incident that occurred in Camarillo triggered a 709 ride with the FAA. He had a safety pilot onboard that Mr. Ullmann was not "fond" of, because the two had been in an incident together. The pilot got in an argument with his safety pilot and told him "[if] you think its great then you go and land it". The safety pilot has a negative reputation and has been banned from Mr. Ullmann's school.



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### Interview #1 Summary

**Paul Fine**  
Acquaintance of Pilot

Interview date and time: August 18, 2016; 0800 PT

Mr. Fine stated that he knew the accident pilot for about 35 years. Mr. Fine started flying in 1960 when he lived in Boston, but did not complete his private pilot training. He met the accident pilot in 1980 after he relocated to the West Coast. About 12 years ago, Mr. Fine began flying with the accident pilot's flight instructor.

Mr. Fine described the pilot's attitude and aeronautical decision making as "close enough," which is a phrase the pilot used frequently. The pilot habitually approached Santa Monica Airport from a "very low" altitude and "dragged" the airplane in. He stated that multiple people cautioned him that his approaches were "too low" and his response was "this is the way I do it." In one example, Mr. Fine was flying instruments with the accident pilot in "hard IMC" with Mr. Fine as the safety pilot. An air traffic controller informed them they were several miles passed their turning point. The accident pilot and Mr. Fine corrected their course, but when they landed the accident pilot told Mr. Fine that he felt the instrument flight was successful. They flew together about 12 years ago and, at the time, he routinely noticed a slight tremor in the pilot's right hand. He

remarked that the pilot would frequently miss buttons on his Garmin 530 when he attempted to use the unit.

Ray Myllala frequently flew with the pilot when he owned a Beechcraft Bonanza. He decided that the pilot was not equipped to fly the airplane and told him to sell it because he was going to kill himself. During the first week after he purchased the Bonanza, he lowered the hangar door onto the elevator. Approximately 3 weeks after the elevator was repaired he inadvertently lowered the hangar door onto the airplane rudder. He subsequently sold the Bonanza. He then purchased the accident airplane and started taking lessons from an instructor with Santa Monica Flyers. During instruction flights the instructor would commonly take over the flight controls to land the airplane. The flight school eventually decided to discontinue their flight lessons with the accident pilot because they "decided they couldn't do anything with him." The pilot began flying with another instructor who was unable to sign him off. He later found an instructor who signed him off after flying with him for 15 hours. Mr. Fine confronted the instructor who reported to him that the pilot "eventually had a good day and landed the airplane, so he signed him off."

A few years ago the pilot was involved in a car accident on Topenga Canyon. As a result, he was treated in intensive care for about 5 months and when he returned to the airport he was unable to hold his head up straight. He was frequently hunched over and was only capable of using about 10% of his right arm and hand. When driving, the pilot frequently used his left hand to pick up his right arm and place it on the gear shift.

Mr. Fine reported that the pilot had a total of three incidents in the airplane not including the accident flight. The first incident occurred in March 2015 during a landing attempt at Hawthorne Airport. The pilot landed hard and damaged the nose landing gear and propeller. The pilot's service center, Bill's Air Center, sent the engine out to be torn down as a result of the event.

The second incident occurred in July 2016 at Camarillo Airport during a landing attempt that resulted in damage to the nose landing gear. A mechanic at the pilot's service facility refused to make the repair, so another mechanic drove out to Camarillo and completed the repair on-site. The pilot then ferried the airplane back to Santa Monica Airport.

The most recent incident occurred about one month prior to the accident during a landing attempt at Santa Monica Airport. According to Mr. Fine, the pilot "came roaring down the runway" and landed long. The pilot brought the airplane to a complete stop in the airport's non-movement area.

### Interview #2 Summary

**Paul Fine**

Acquaintance of Pilot

Interview date and time: August 11, 2018; 1222 PT

Mr. Fine reported that he regularly saw the pilot about three days a week and observed him hunched over with limited use of his right arm until the last time he saw the pilot, which was the day prior to the accident. He further added the pilot had about 10%-15% total use of his right arm and frequently used his left hand to pick up his right arm and place it on the gear shift.



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### Interview #1 Summary

**Ray Myllyla**  
Pilot's Acquaintance

Interview date: August 2, 2016

The pilot's acquaintance stated that he knew the pilot for about 10-15 years. He observed the pilot depart about 1315 on the day of the accident for Van Nuys where the pilot had planned to perform some touch-and-go maneuvers before he returned to Santa Monica airport.

Mr. Myllyla stated that the pilot had been involved in a car accident a few years before his fatal accident. After the automobile accident, the pilot's hands were shaky and he had to attend rehabilitation because of weakness in one of his arms.