

Joshua Cawthra  
Senior Aviation Accident Investigator  
Aviation - Western Pacific Region

**Date:** September 14, 2022  
**Subject:** WPR22FA331  
**Contact:** David "LD" Hughes - Witness / Crew Chief

During a telephone interview, Mr. Hughes reported that the airplane after the completion of the air races in 2016 was initially flown to Paso Robles, California, but then relocated by the pilot to Shafter, California, where it had set in storage from 2016 to 2022. He said that the oil was drained out of the tank, but not the bottom of the engine, as they figured the airplane would not fly again.

In preparation of the airplane to race again at the 2022 National Championship Air Races in Reno, they removed the sparkplugs, found rust in the barrels, and decided to send the engine to Anderson Aeromotive for further inspection. Mr. Hughes stated that the theory was, if it was free of issues, they would put it back on, run it, and go to Reno. He added that the only other item changed was a propeller regulator, which was shipped to Canada for the AeroProducts propeller.

Mr. Hughes stated that when they received the engine from Anderson Aeromotive, they reinstalled the engine only, and there were no changes to the airframe or any of the systems. When it was time to run the engine, Sherman came over, did a series of ground runs, and they finished cleaning the airplane up and getting it ready to go. Mr. Hughes said that they pulled the airplane out, tied it down, ran it at takeoff power for 2 minutes, which Sherman said it was running great, gauges, were good, and they decided to fly it.

Mr. Hughes described the takeoff as a "very lazy" takeoff for the airplane, which he recalled that the airplane used about 2,000 to 3,000 ft to become airborne, and that Sherman continued adding power, but used a very low setting for that engine during takeoff. He added that in layman's terms, the takeoff looked lazy. After

takeoff, the airplane entered a left turn, and the landing gear retracted. Mr. Hughes said that it was very hot out, over 100 degrees on the ramp, and about 30 to 40 seconds after takeoff, the pilot turned the spray bar on.

As the airplane spiraling up and on the north side of the airplane, the pilot transmitted via radio and said "the oil pressure is down to 25 LD" to which Mr. Hughes told him to land to the south. Mr. Hughes said that over a 10-20 second time period, he saw the airplane nose up to slow down, put the gear down, and initiated a left turn, and he recalled saying he looked fast. Mr. Hughes stated that the pilot started an "S" turn from left to the right, and at the start of a second S turn, the airplane stalled, and "rolled up on its back" about 2,000 ft above the ground. Mr. Hughes stated that the airplane went into an almost straight down dive, and as it did about 30-degree lateral roll to the right, it continued in a nose down attitude until about 500 ft. He recalled that the airplane appeared to start a flare for a field, and didn't round out, stalled, and impacted the ground in a flat attitude.

Mr. Hughes said that for that engine, oil pressure was usually 95 lbs on takeoff, and idle is 50 lbs.

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Date: September 7, 2022

Subject: WPR22FA331

Contact: Lyle Strader- Witness

During a telephone interview, Mr. Strader reported that he was one of the crew on the airplane, and that LD was the crew chief. He stated that the accident flight was the first flight on the airplane since it was out of maintenance. He added that the engine had come back from Anderson and had 4 hours of run in time on it, and that they said it's good to go. The airplane had 2 ground runs on the engine post installation, for a total of about 40 minutes, however he wasn't completely sure. Mr. Strader said that the first ground run was just a low power run, and that the second ground run, which was conducted on the same day, was high power run. He said that everything appeared to run good and a day or two later was the first flight of the airplane since 2016.

Mr. Strader stated that on the day of the accident, the pilot performed a run up, which everything was good, prior to taking off on runway 30. After takeoff, the airplane started a climbing left turn, which Mr. Strader was watching the airplane using binoculars. Mr. Strader recalled that LD asked him if he saw any smoke, to which he "nope, nothing" and that the gear was up.

Mr. Strader continued to watch the airplane while it was heading south, still climbing and in range of the airport, as it made left turn to the east and north. Shortly after, the pilot reported via radio that the oil pressure was 25 or 26 pounds and was asked by LD to confirm and repeat. The pilot confirmed the transmission, and LD told the pilot to "get on the ground now, land." Mr. Strader stated that there was no smoke or oil trail behind the airplane. The airplane was on a northerly heading, and downwind for runway 12, about 3-5 seconds later, he heard the engine make "2 pops" and then went silent. The airplane then turned left to a westerly heading, and

was descending rapidly, as a turn to final for runway 12 was made. Mr. Streader stated that during the turn to final, the airplane rolled left and descended nose low into the ground.

Mr. Strader estimated that the entire flight was perhaps 5 to 7 minutes in length, and that he did not see anything separate from the airplane, no smoke, no trail of anything, but he could just hear the wind noise.

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Contact: Curtis Noble - Witness

During an in person interview, Mr. Noble reported that he was located on the west end of runway and just north of it on a dirt road. He stated that the airplane departed just east of his position, and that it was a normal departure and steep climb, as the airplane banked to the south to circled around the airport.

Mr. Noble stated that the airplane was climbing, and almost directly overhead his location, when the "engine popped" and lost power. He said that the airplane continued to the west, and watched turn toward the airport, to southeasterly heading, started to come down toward the runway. Mr. Noble stated that the airplane had a descent glide, and that he through it would make it to the runway, but just before the orchards, the airplane "suddenly took a left wing dive" a "few hundred feet" above the ground.

He added that he didn't see anything abnormal when the engine quit. It was just quiet.

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