

Robert Gretz
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: 4/16/23

Subject: ERA23FA194

Contact: H Kevin Crouch, Petroleum Associates, Murphy, NC

The following was extracted from an email by Mr. Crouch;

“At approx. 10:15am as I was going to the T-Hangers at the east end of KRHP I saw 4-5 people pulling the Velocity out of the big hanger. A short time later John Leder and I headed for the taxiway to Runway 26 in N9108G, C=182. John was the pilot and I was in the right seat. As we pulled onto the taxiway from the T-Hangers I saw the Velocity heading for the taxiway. After John completed his run-up and we were pulling out to the runway the Velocity was almost to the end of the taxiway. As we were on our takeoff roll I noticed a few people standing in front of the big hanger. Flightaware says we took off at 10:36am.

John filed IFR to KDKX so we were going to stay in the pattern to gain altitude and punch through the clouds. As we were on the downwind leg headed back towards the airport i saw the Velocity just taking off. Looking at flightaware our position was right around the time we hit 3000'. I immediately told John that I had the Velocity in sight and that it didn't look right. When I first saw him he was airborne but not over the runway like he should have been. He was to the left of runway 26 and veering left towards the highway. He was over the field, not over the runway, before he passed the FBO. It wasn't like the nose was pointed in the direction he was drifting which caught my eye as something not right. As he continued to fly I noticed his altitude didn't seem to be changing. I lost him just before turning base. I picked him up again when we turned base. He was across the highway with his nose at I'm guessing about a 150 degree heading. His flight still looked unusual and his altitude had not seemed to change. He was low. I am not sure if I saw him across the highway during the first sighting or not. i feel like he was across the highway when I lost

him the first time but I'm just not sure. After picking him up the second time he was over an open field but then just disappeared. I thought I just lost him or he went behind something. We were about to go into a cloud so I dismissed him as not being a factor in our flight.

Before we got to Knoxville my phone rang. It was a friend calling about a plane crash over on Fairview. I knew then that it had to have been the Velocity. My wife called and said her aunt, who lives about 1/4 mile from the crash site had heard it crash close by.

When we flew back in from Knoxville the wreckage was right about where i thought it would be..

I talked to Eddie Wood before I left the airport and he gave me his account. I then proceeded to the crash site. After seeing the flight path I knew I had seen him go into the first trees and that's where he disappeared from my sight. It matched exactly what I saw. I did not see the final crash into the big poplar tree or the fire. I feel like I should have recognized that he had gone down but I didn't. Knowing they had been putting the plane together and that another Velocity had flown in made me think it could have been a test flight and in the back of my mind might explain the unusualness..

Again, I feel like something was wrong the whole time I was seeing him. Between the unusual attitude of the plane and the lack of altitude gain it just never looked right. If you have any questions or need anything else, feel free to contact me. If you would, please confirm receipt of this email.

--Kevin Crouch...”

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Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: 4/17/23

Subject: ERA23FA194

Contact: James Benley, Seattle, WA

The following was extracted from an email by Mr. Bentley:

“Hi Robert,

I finally looked closely at the take off video I took, and it shows he is having significant issue getting enough speed to take off. The video is bad because I was watching the airplane and not the phone screen. but you can see he comes off the ground and gets just out of ground effect then hits the runway again with the rear mains, and then does that same thing one more time before he gets airborne. I am baffled as to why he did not abort takeoff...”

Robert Gretz
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: 5/18/23

Subject: ERA23FA194

Contact: Philip Hodge, Andrews, NC

Mr. Hodge was interviewed via telephone. He was travelling west on Andrew Jackson Highway (rt 19), parallel to the runway. He enjoys watching airplanes and watched the accident airplane depart. For a moment, he was driving abeam the airplane about the same speed. Immediately after takeoff, the left wing "dipped hard." The pilot recovered, but the left wing "dipped hard" again about 5 second later. The engine sounded loud. The airplane then made a left turn, skimmed trees and impacted a hill.