

Anthony Longobardo Statement – Piper Pacer N9975D

On April 20th 2017, my passengers JJ and Natalie Wessels and I decided to take my 1959 Piper Pacer N9975D flying. The airplane is a tailwheel converted Tri-Pacer with a 180hp O-360-A4A Lycoming engine in it. I pre-flighted the airplane as I always do checking the oil level, sampling the fuel sumps for contaminants, checking fuel levels, flight controls surfaces, brakes, etc.

The airport weather was wind under 10kts, favoring runway 17, temperature about mid-60 degrees F. The airport is paved and the runway is approximately 3500' long at approximately 2600' MSL. I taxied out at approximately 6:35 pm local time for one intended lap around the pattern. I did a standard run-up, which checked fine, including the magnetos. Fuel selector was set on both tanks, and mixture set correctly for the altitude of the airport.

JJ was in the right front seat and Natalie was in the back. As we were flying with the gull-wing doors open, I double checked to ensure that everyone's seat belts were fastened before we took off.

I took off at approximately 6:45pm local time and all was normal as I checked the tach and other gauges at application of full throttle during the initial takeoff roll. Shortly after takeoff, at probably less than 100 ft AGL and the usable runway just behind me, I noticed engine power decreasing. The plane was not climbing as it should. I quickly checked fuel, carb heat, mixture, throttle, and mags, and could not get anything to change.

It was clear to me at that point that the engine for some reason was not producing enough power to climb or maintain the 75 feet or so of altitude above the ground that we had. I had to make a slight right or a slight left to avoid the hills just off the end of the runway. To the right was Lake Isabella at high water levels currently, but the thought of a water ditching did not seem promising especially with darkness an hour and a half or so away. Therefore I focused to the left of me and began looking for an open spot I might make an emergency landing at. Also, with a somewhat high deck angle because of trying to maintain lift without stalling, I could see best out the left side of the plane's open doorway. I could not see very well looking forward with the cowling and dash blocking my immediate forward and downward view. I headed for as open of a spot as I could see, while quickly losing precious altitude. The main wheels clipped a tree right before the small clearing and flipped the plane over. We all managed to somehow crawl out of the plane and one of my passengers called 911.

With everything happening so quickly, I told my passengers we were losing power and going down. I did not have time to declare an emergency over the radio at the uncontrolled airport.