Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Salinas, California	**Accident Number:**	WPR26LA173
Date & Time:	April 17, 2026, 17:00 Local	**Registration:**	N143AW
Aircraft:	Pipistrel Alpha Trainer	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:	Fuel exhaustion	**Injuries:**	2 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Instructional		

Analysis

According to the flight instructor and student pilot, they performed a preflight inspection which included viewing the visual fuel quantity indicators inside the cabin, which they observed the level to be full. The flight instructor reported that he did not check the fuel quantity by removing the fuel caps. After flying for about 39 minutes in the airport traffic pattern performing several takeoffs and landings, during an initial climb, the engine had a total loss of power about 250 ft above ground level. The flight instructor assumed the flight controls and chose an empty street near the airport to initiate a forced landing. Subsequently, the airplane landed hard, which resulted in substantial damage to the fuselage.

Post accident examination of the airplane revealed that the fuel tanks contained no usable fuel, and the fuel system was intact with no evidence of leaks. The fuel sight gauges were a purple, transparent color, which would have likely made it difficult to see if fuel was present in the system.

The pilot's operating handbook indicated that fuel quantity should be checked both in the cabin and through the fuel cap on each wing during a preflight inspection.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The flight instructor's inadequate preflight inspection which resulted in a total loss of engine power due to fuel exhaustion.

Findings

Aircraft	Fuel - Fluid level
Personnel issues	Preflight inspection - Instructor/check pilot
Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Pilot

Factual Information

History of Flight

Prior to flight	Aircraft inspection event
Initial climb	Fuel exhaustion (Defining event)
Initial climb	Loss of engine power (total)
Landing-flare/touchdown	Off-field or emergency landing

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Flight instructor	**Age:**	31,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Multi-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	**Restraint Used:**	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	**Second Pilot Present:**	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane single-engine; Instrument airplane	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Without waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	January 27, 2026
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	July 1, 2025
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 1843 hours (Total, all aircraft), 21 hours (Total, this make and model), 1705 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 58 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 17 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 0 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Student pilot Information

Certificate:	Student	**Age:**	18,Male
Airplane Rating(s):		**Seat Occupied:**	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):		**Restraint Used:**	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):		**Second Pilot Present:**	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):		**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Without waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	October 23, 2023
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 164.8 hours (Total, all aircraft), 13.3 hours (Total, this make and model), 13.5 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 15.2 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 13.3 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 0 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Pipistrel	**Registration:**	N143AW
Model/Series:	Alpha Trainer	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:	2020	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Special light-sport (Special)	**Serial Number:**	1030 AT 912 LSA
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	**Seats:**	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	March 23, 2026 Condition	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	1320 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	381 Hrs at time of accident	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Rotax
ELT:	C126 installed, not activated	**Engine Model/Series:**	912 UL 2-01
Registered Owner:	On file	**Rated Power:**	80 Horsepower
Operator:	On file	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KSNS,73 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	0 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	16:53 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	133°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	13 knots / 20 knots	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	None / None
Wind Direction:	290°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	N/A / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	30.02 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	20°C / -3°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Salinas, CA	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	
Destination:	Salinas, CA	**Type of Clearance:**	VFR
Departure Time:		**Type of Airspace:**	Class D

Airport Information

Airport:	Salinas Municipal Airport SNS	**Runway Surface Type:**	
Airport Elevation:	84 ft msl	**Runway Surface Condition:**	Dry
Runway Used:		**IFR Approach:**	None
Runway Length/Width:		**VFR Approach/Landing:**	Forced landing

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 None	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:		**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	2 None	**Latitude, Longitude:**	36.667411,-121.61363

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Mills, Grant
Additional Participating Persons:	Bradley Rossignol; Federal Aviation Administration; San Jose, CA
Original Publish Date:	August 27, 2026
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=202929

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The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, "accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties … and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person" (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB's statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available here.