



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	FRESNO, California	Accident Number:	LAX02LA270
Date & Time:	August 31, 2002, 10:25 Local	Registration:	N87204
Aircraft:	Ercoupe (Eng & Research Corp.) 415-C	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Minor, 1 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The airplane made an off field landing and collided with poles following a loss of engine power. An annual inspection had just been completed on the airplane and the purpose of the flight was to check the airplane out. Upon returning to the airport the engine began to run rough and lose power. During the attempted landing on a road the left wing hit a pole and the airplane began to weave. The airplane hit another pole and departed the road into soft dirt. The main landing gear dug into the soft dirt and the prop nosed into the ground. Both wings and the fuselage sustained substantial damage. A post accident examination of the engine did not reveal any anomalies, and it test ran successfully to 2,000 rpm.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: a loss of engine power for undetermined reasons.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF ENGINE POWER
Phase of Operation: DESCENT

Findings

1. (C) REASON FOR OCCURRENCE UNDETERMINED

Occurrence #2: FORCED LANDING
Phase of Operation: EMERGENCY DESCENT/LANDING

Occurrence #3: ON GROUND/WATER COLLISION WITH OBJECT
Phase of Operation: EMERGENCY LANDING

Findings

2. OBJECT - POLE

Factual Information

On August 31, 2002, about 1025 Pacific daylight time, an Ercoupe 415-C, N87204, made an off airport landing following a loss of engine power about 5 miles southeast of Fresno, California. The owner was operating the airplane under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91. The private pilot was not injured, and one passenger sustained minor injuries. The airplane sustained substantial damage. The personal local flight departed Chandler Airport (CHD) in Fresno about 1015. Day visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan had been filed.

The pilot stated that an annual inspection had just been completed on the airplane, and he was taking the owner up to check the airplane out. They added about 10 gallons of gasoline to the airplane and departed. They were returning to CHD, and the engine began to run rough and lose power. They decided to land on a road. The touchdown was on the road's centerline. However, the left wing hit a pole, and the airplane began to weave. The airplane hit another pole and departed the road into soft dirt. The main landing gear dug into the soft dirt, and the prop nosed into the ground. Both wings and the fuselage sustained substantial damage.

A Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) airworthiness inspector supervised the examination of the engine. The fuel screens were clean and the carburetor box was clear. Fuel was present in the carburetor bowl. Maintenance technicians removed the top spark plugs from each cylinder. All gaps were similar and none of the plugs exhibited any mechanical damage. Technicians rotated the engine and obtained spark from each magneto in firing order. The accessory gears turned freely. None of the valves or cylinders exhibited internal mechanical damage. They rotated the engine, and the valves moved in firing order with the same amount of relative lift. The fuel lines were clear; no contamination was present. Technicians supplied a temporary fuel supply to the right wing supply line. The engine successfully ran smoothly to 2,000 rpm. It was not prudent to run at a higher rpm due to prop and nose gear damage.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	66, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Multi-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Valid Medical-w/ waivers/lim	Last FAA Medical Exam:	November 17, 2001
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	January 26, 2002
Flight Time:	730 hours (Total, all aircraft), 4 hours (Total, this make and model), 572 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 13 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Ercoupe (Eng & Research Corp.)	Registration:	N87204
Model/Series:	415-C	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	377
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	August 23, 2002 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1260 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	18 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	1425 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	C-85
Registered Owner:	FLOYD C. STEWART	Rated Power:	85 Horsepower
Operator:		Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	FAT,336 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	6 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	09:55 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	180°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	9 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	8 knots / 0 knots	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	150°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	29.95 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	30°C / 13°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	FRESNO, CA (FCH)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	10:20 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class E

Airport Information

Airport:	Fresno Chandler Downtown FCH	Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:	278 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	Unknown
Runway Used:		IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Minor, 1 None	Latitude, Longitude:	36.884445,-119.815277

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Plagens, H.
Additional Participating Persons:	DON MAHAFFY; Federal Aviation Administration; Fresno, CA
Original Publish Date:	July 29, 2004
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=55621

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

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](#).