

On July 20th, Osprey 2 N50733, pride and joy of Ernie Hummel, experienced a forced landing at Ogden, Utah. All of the Osprey people at Oshkosh this year heard much about the incident, however some of the details are certain to be of interest to the rest of the newsletter subscribers.

The flight from California thru Nevada to Utah, in company with George Pereira in N3GP, was uneventful except for higher than usual outside air temperature. More than 75% of full power on N50733 was required to keep pace with N3GP in cruising flight at 10,000, not a normal situation. The takeoff distance in the high density altitudes prevailing that day were normal, however.

At 2:00p.m. local time the two Ospreys taxied out for a formation takeoff on Runway 16 at Ogden Municipal Airport. The density altitude calculated to a few feet below 10,000, the wind 2E 10 kts. The Ogden airport is situated on a low mesa at the foot of the Wasatch mountains, and has three runways. The takeoff was accomplished in the pre-estimated distance and with gear up the transition to climb was made. At about seventy feet altitude and V stall + 20IAS, I lost about 500 rpm. A small adjustment of the mixture control recovered about 100 rpm. There was not enough runway remaining to land straight ahead, so I commenced a shallow right turn for an emergency return to runway 04. About half way through the turn the engine quit cold. The prop drag and sink rate with the landing gear retracted made it impossible to reach runway 04. After clearing a housing subdivision there was only enough airspeed and altitude remaining to reach an apparently smooth spot of ground. The aircraft was stalled onto this area on the hull. High weeds and other growth covered a rough surface with ditches and hummocks of grass. The initial impact was heavy. The ground speed with wind component was over 100 mph. The left wing apparently snagged on a hummock and a left cartwheel followed. There was an earsplitting crunch as first the left wing spar was splintered at the wing attach fitting, then the right. The rollover continued and the fuselage was broken cleanly thru just ahead of the vertical fin. The one thought I had during the tumbling was that if I was going to survive, the fuselage would have to be "Hell for stout," and that it was, it's one hell of a rugged airplane. It also seemed that the air in the cabin was plenty foul. At initial impact a spare quart of oil I was carrying ruptured and the air in the cockpit was a blizzard of oil. The dry chemical fire extinguisher bottle was broken off at the neck and the entire contents valved off. The cabin air scoops were partially opened for takeoff and in the rollover scooped in a large amount of dust and sand. The battery, while inverted emptied the electrolyte, most of which seemed to be soaked up by my left pant leg, and burned like hell. When the rotation stopped, I released the lap safety belt and fell to the canopy, as the aircraft was inverted and held up by the engine and motor mount. The shoulder strap inertia reel anchorage was torn off the engine mount leg. I was able to crawl out the left rear canopy window area. There was no fire.

After a weeks stay in an Ogden hospital I returned to California. When the shoulder harness failed I was thrown forward, hanging on the lap belt. This action caused a lot of rib damage and two compression breaks in back vertebrae. At this time I am completely recovered.

After the dust settled at the airport and the damaged aircraft was released, one of the best bunches of EAA members anywhere got equipment together and picked up the remains of the aircraft and placed it in a locked hanger. They came to the hospital to visit and were extremely helpful in every possible way.

The aircraft is repairable and I have already started the long task. Some components were hardly damaged at all, among these were the horizontal stabilizer, elevator, rudder, landing gear, canopy, instruments, etc. The engine is not outwardly damaged, and the motor mount only slightly. If any evidence is needed for the toughness of the Osprey 2 fuselage and wood construction, there is an ample amount in my incident. It is conceivable that all metal or composite construction might well have provided vastly different results.

The cause of the engine failure is the subject of much discussion hereabouts. At some future date I expect to complete the power plant investigation. The engine was a rebuilt Lycoming O-320 A2B with 158 hours SMOH. The carburetor had recently been overhauled. The post accident investigation by the engine manufacturers indicated that the engine driven fuel pump outflow fitting was snapped off, however there is also evidence on the engine mount that the fitting was broken off by distortion of the mount in the rollover. Although the cockpit carburetor heat control was backed off the carburetor heat flapper valve was found in the hot position possibly also occurring in the rollover. At such time as any further information is turned up I will forward same to the Newsletter.

It would be difficult to describe the gut-grinding anguish of hearing the thunderous crunching of the Douglas Fir spars splintering as the aircraft cartwheeled. Four years of labor and a lot of materials, plus the help of a number of friends in the building process, were lost in seconds.

The remarks of people viewing the start of reconstruction of the so nearly demolished aircraft have been pointed and pungent. But when George Pereira popped into the hospital room in Ogden with a big grin and announced that the aircraft only needed two new wings and fuselage repair there was never any doubt as to the next step. Doug Sisemore and Darry Capps, both Osprey builders from California, had the aircraft back home a few days after I arrived. One pilot, on viewing the fuselage was heard to say, "Hell, 300 lbs of putty and it'll look like new."

One thought which bugs me continuously is that if I had anchored the shoulder harness reel to the engine mount leg more securely, I might have gotten thru the pile-up with no injuries at all. The estimated 30 G stop was something to remember for a long while. I hope that all Osprey builders and pilots, on the occasion of your next pre-flight inspection, or during installation of your seat belt and shoulder harness, will ensure that a potential high load will be handled satisfactorily.

Here's wishing the best of success and happy flying to all the Osprey people.

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