



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Avalon, CA	Accident Number:	WPR25FA007
Date & Time:	October 8, 2024, 20:05 Local	Registration:	N73WA
Aircraft:	Beech 95-B55	Injuries:	5 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

On October 8, 2024, at 2005 Pacific daylight time, a Beech 95-B55, N73WA, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Avalon, California. The pilot, two pilot rated passengers, and two student pilot passengers were fatally injured. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flight.

On the afternoon of October 8, a flight instructor and two student pilots were preparing to depart Catalina Airport (AVX), Avalon, in a rented, single engine airplane. The rental airplane experienced a magneto malfunction during preflight, which prevented them from departing. The stranded pilots contacted the flight school they had rented the airplane from and were informed another airplane would fly to AVX from Santa Monica Municipal Airport (SMO), Santa Monica, California, to pick them up and fly them back to SMO.

Catalina Airport is a non-towered airport located on a flat plateau with descending terrain on either end of the runway. The reported airport elevation is 1,601 ft mean sea level (msl). Airport operating hours are 0800-1700 and the single concrete runway, runway 4/22, was not equipped with runway lighting and night operations are not permitted.

Information provided by the flight school indicated that the responding airplane was not operated by the flight school and belonged to an acquaintance of the owner of the flight school. The airport manager at AVX stated that he gave the pilots permission to land at AVX after closing hours, and relayed to them they had to depart before sundown at 1831. The airplane subsequently landed at AVX at 1820. The pilots shut down both engines, loaded the stranded pilots, and attempted to restart the engines. During restart the right engine would not start due to insufficient battery power. The occupants exited the airplane, and an extension cord was then attached to an on-board battery charger.

The pilots were informed by the airport manager that since the time required to charge the battery would extend beyond sunset that a post-sunset departure would not be approved. The

pilot / airplane owner informed the airport manager that he had to go and intended to depart anyway. The airport manager advised him that, while he could not stop him, his departure would be unapproved and at his own risk. The airport manager then went to his residence, and about 2000, heard what sounded like a normal departure.

Airport security video captured the airplane taking off on runway 22. The video showed dark night conditions were present as the airplane came into view during the takeoff roll about 2004. It was not possible to discern in the video if the airplane was airborne or not prior to reaching the end of the runway. As the airplane reached the departure end of the runway it descended out of view of the camera.

Preliminary ADS-B data showed that the airplane may have become airborne around midpoint of the runway and maintained a low altitude until reaching the departure end of the runway. The ADS-B data showed the airplane continued a slight descent after takeoff followed by a right turn until the data ended about 0.6 miles west of the departure end of runway 22

The airplane impacted the east face of a ridgeline about 0.7 miles west of the last recorded ADS-B target and about .96 miles west-southwest of the departure end of runway 22 at an elevation of about 1,230 ft msl. Ground scars were consistent with the airplane striking the ground on a 280° heading in a wings level attitude with the landing gear extended. The main wreckage came to rest in a ravine about 450 ft west of the initial impact point.

The wreckage was recovered and transported to a secure location for examination later.

According to the airport manager, the sky at the time of the accident was clear from the airport surface and above, and there was a light breeze from the North Northwest, approximately perpendicular to the runway. An hour post-accident he observed cloud tops approximately 200 feet below airport elevation off the departure end of the runway. The wreckage was located below the cloud tops.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Beech	Registration:	N73WA
Model/Series:	95-B55	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Unknown	Condition of Light:	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:	AVX,1601 ft msl	Observation Time:	18:51 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	1 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	26°C /4°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	3 knots / , 180°
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility:	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	29.89 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	
Departure Point:	Avalon, CA	Destination:	Santa Monica, CA (SMO)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	4 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	5 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	33.402534,-118.43729 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Baker, Daniel
Additional Participating Persons:	John Bosley; FAA; Long Beach, CA Ernie Hall; Textron Aviation; Wichita, KS J Ferrell; Continental Aero; Mobile, AL
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	