

Piper PA-28-140 Cherokee, G-AVBP, 14 August 1996

AAIB Bulletin No: 12/1996

Ref: EW/G96/08/14 Category: 1.3

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Piper PA-28-140 Cherokee,
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming O-320-E2A piston engine
Year of Manufacture:	1967
Date & Time (UTC):	14 August 1996 at approximately 1410 hrs
Location:	Near Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire
Type of Flight:	Private
Persons on Board:	Crew - 2 - Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - 1 (Minor) - Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Beyond economic repair
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	68 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	462 hours (of which 2 were on type) Last 90 days - 10 hours Last 28 days - 5 hours
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form completed by pilot and telephone enquiries by AAIB

The aircraft was being flown from a private airstrip, near Bristol, to Full Sutton. The pilot, who had come to collect the aircraft, had a short check flight with the local Chief Flying Instructor before departing. The aircraft had been refuelled immediately before the flight and the water drain checks had been carried out. The pilot had planned to fly to Full Sutton via Peterborough.

The aircraft departed at about 1400 hrs. The pilot reported that, at about 1520 hrs, when he estimated that he was about 15 miles south-west of Peterborough, the cloud base and visibility deteriorated sharply and he was forced to descend. Wattisham radar advised him to call the Distress and Diversion Cell (D&D) so that a better fix of his position could be made. D&D reported that they had a request to assist in fixing the position of G-AVBP from RAF Cottesmore, who were having difficulty because the aircraft had no transponder and was at a low altitude. D&D were able to

establish an approximate position from the aircraft's RT signals although there was no primary radar contact.

The aircraft was believed to be over the M11 motorway just south of Cambridge and the pilot turned north to follow the M11. Shortly after this, the engine failed and the pilot selected a field for a forced landing. He then selected the other fuel tank and the engine picked up again, but only for a short time. During the forced landing the aircraft struck a hedge at the approach end of the selected field and was severely damaged. Both occupants evacuated the aircraft, but the passenger sustained back injuries which, although described as minor at the time, subsequently proved to be crushed vertebrae.

When the aircraft was salvaged, it was observed that both wing tanks were split open and whilst a considerable quantity of fuel had remained in one tank, the other was practically empty. A number of tests were carried out on engine components, but no fault was found to account for the engine failing.

The aircraft had been in regular use up to 23 July 1994 but, after having been subjected to an annual inspection, had been in store since 23 September 1994. After this date, the aircraft made only one 15 minute flight and had had periodic engine ground runs before another annual inspection on 9 February 1996. Following this inspection, the aircraft had only made one further 15 minute flight on 5 April, before the accident.