

Sukhoi SU-26M2, RA44531

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Aircraft Type and Registration: Sukhoi SU-26M2, RA44531		
No & Type of Engines:	1 Ivchenko Vedenyev M-14P piston engine	
Year of Manufacture:	1989	
Date & Time (UTC):	28 May 2002 at 1950 hrs	
Location:	Knatts Valley, Kemsing, Kent	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Landing gear, propeller, oil cooler and fuel tank damaged	
Commander's Licence:	Airline Transport Pilots Licence	
Commander's Age:	38 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	4,500 hours (of which 75 were on type)	
	Last 90 days - 60 hours	
	Last 28 days - 20 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot	

The purpose of the flight was for the pilot to undertake aerobatics practice. Weather conditions at the time were good, with visibility in excess of 20 km, nil weather and a westerly wind at 10 to 15 kt.

The aircraft was in formation cruise at 2,400 feet amsl, when the pilot selected the M2 fuel tank on exhaustion of the main tank. (The SU-26M2 is equipped with two fuel tanks in the fuselage. The main tank has a 65 litre capacity and the M2 tank a nominal 32 litre capacity. It can also operate with a third, belly-mounted tank, but this configuration is not approved for aerobatics and it was not installed for this flight). Soon after changing tank selection, the fuel pressure dropped and the engine suffered a significant power loss. The pilot maintained some power by pumping the primer, but had no option but to execute a forced landing. The pilot chose the nearest suitable field and carried out a forced landing into wind. The approach was satisfactory but, on touching down, the wheels contacted the wheel ruts left by an agricultural vehicle, causing the landing gear to collapse.

Damage was sustained by the landing gear, propeller and oil cooler. The pilot, who was uninjured, secured the aircraft and evacuated successfully. Although there was some fuel leakage onto the ground from the M2 tank, which had been ruptured by the landing gear as it collapsed rearwards and upwards into the tank, there was no fire. Police attended the aircraft with a fire extinguisher. The pilot attributed his lack of injury to the strength of the airframe, combined with the fact that his aerobatic harness had performed correctly.

By coincidence, when inspecting the ruptured M2 tank, a 1.5 inch diameter rubber disc was found inside. It had the characteristics of being the centre part of a 'home-made' gasket which appeared to have been cut out to form the aperture, but after the gasket had been installed. It is believed that this piece of rubber had fallen into the tank and blocked the tank outlet, interrupting the flow of fuel to the engine. It was not possible to establish when the gasket had been installed.

This aircraft was involved in a previous accident in February 2000 (AAIB Bulletin No. 10/2000 refers), when it was substantially damaged in a forced landing following a loss of engine power after the pilot changed fuel tank selection. On that occasion, he was changing from the main tank to the belly tank and the accidents, therefore, do not appear to be related.