

ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Piper PA-32RT-300T Turbo Cherokee Lance II, G-LUNA	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming TIO-540-S1AD piston engine	
Year of Manufacture:	1979	
Date & Time (UTC):	28 June 2009 at 1355 hrs	
Location:	English Channel, 9 miles offshore from Lydd Airport, Kent	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - N/A
Nature of damage:	Aircraft sank after ditching	
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	46 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	667 hours (of which 25 were on type) Last 90 days - 10 hours Last 28 days - 4 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and subsequent AAIB enquiries	

History of flight

The pilot reported that the aircraft was refuelled to full tanks before departure from Lydd Airport. Having levelled at 2,000 ft, and seven miles from Lydd, he switched the fuel pump on and changed the fuel selector from the left to right tank. Ten or fifteen seconds later, the manifold pressure dropped and the rpm decayed. The pilot immediately selected the mixture to fully rich, and re-selected the left tank. The engine continued to run, but at low power and with sounds of misfiring. The pilot selected the alternate air source but the engine did not recover, and then stopped. He made a MAYDAY call and selected 7700 on his transponder, whilst making several unsuccessful attempts to re-start the engine.

The pilot flew towards a ship, opened the cabin door, selected the landing gear manual override¹, and prepared to ditch. The ditching was carried out with full flap and with the aircraft fully stalled, onto the top of the five metre swell (the wind was approximately 210/9 kt and the ditching was carried out on a heading of 240°). The aircraft touched down tail first, and bounced. On the subsequent impact, the fuselage briefly submerged before it floated. The pilot, uninjured, put on his lifejacket and exited the aircraft onto the wing. He waved to the ship but it continued its passage; its crew had seen the ditching and contacted another ship

Footnote

¹ To prevent the landing gear extending automatically at low air speed.

behind them by radio with instructions to rescue the pilot. After approximately two minutes, the aircraft pitched 45° nose down, and sank. The pilot was rescued by the second ship, transferred to a lifeboat, and then airlifted to hospital by helicopter; he had been in the water for 20 minutes and was treated for mild hypothermia. The aircraft was not recovered, and no technical investigation into the engine failure was possible.

The pilot commented that he thought the engine failure might have been caused by debris in the fuel injectors, a faulty fuel selector, or contaminated fuel. No other aircraft which refuelled at Lydd reported problems. He added that he intended in future to wear his lifejacket for flight over water.