I had flown December 27th to avoid the SoCal Storms – down to Punta Pescadero, southern Baja with no problems. Flew home a day early and all went well until I got to Banning Pass - 3.5 hours on the plane that day – entered at 3500’ and found lowering skies. Got to Banning Airport and made a 180 degree safety turn and decided on going around the back of Big Bear and beyond. Soon after I noted a change in tone – one moment maybe 2550 then 2480 rpm – steady for the next 5 minutes. (typical climb rpm)

I was in a climb, got to high desert’s edge when engine shut down like I’d slapped the mag and electronic ignition switches off. Actually checked them it was so sharply cut off. Looking out at the snow line abeam I turned for Yucca Valley and decided I couldn’t make it. Saw the Circuit Breaker to electronic ignition was out so I pushed it in. The engine went to full power, 2600 rpm (now descending) until the CB popped again after 5-10 seconds. Pushed it in and got 10 more seconds of full power, popped again. Turned off the Ignition to see if it was fouling the Mag. Mag was dead - had performed faultlessly for months at run-ups every flight. Held Carb Heat on in case it was icing anyway. Got another splutter later with CB pushed in but holding it in did not get me my engine back more than the few seconds. Made it over the rocks to a high key at Yucca Valley- made my pattern call. I think I switched tanks, just in case - 10 gallons or more per side - but I know I threw on the fuel pump.

Turned a downwind but saw no windsock or wind indications. If I was a prince of the FAA I'd ask the airport to put up a good windsock. Palm Springs had no wind and was switching runways to the usual approach from the East not 10 minutes earlier so I presumed low wind and confirmed an East approach to Yucca. Going a little fast, turned Base and found I was blowing toward Blythe. Turned final and decided it was nip and tuck to reach the runway, actually heard/felt the prop stop – then I saw the gullies in front of the threshold and decided no matter what, I didn’t want to land short there – might have made it, but I was seeing very little forward movement for my descent. Lesson learned, even if it is a very short runway and you think you have the best glider in the world, use the old 1/3 down the runway target taught in the USAF – I didn’t as this plane has such great glide. Gullies at any speed in this plane are dangerous - I'd have to be King of the FAA to get cleared approaches - the Freeway New Jersey barries at both ends of John Wayne scare the living beJesus out of me - for any airpalne up to wide body.

Looked to a street angled to the left which had no gullies, then saw a guy pulling out of his driveway fully 2 blocks away – may have tried too hard for an early landing – clipped a 3/8" alum wire of SCE right at the bottom fuselage and gear legs. Came down from about 50 feet hard - splayed the gear so far my fuselage touched down. Left main broke about 6" from fuselage, both gear splayed enough for the fuselage to slam the road. I just love the Temperfoam seats in my plane - an addition many of us have added!

Nose wheel came off, left lean of the gear resulted in slow curving turn to the left and eventually slid off the road about 100’ from slapdown point and rode into Yucca Tree just right of nose. Yucca was about 14" in diameter, cut off canard, driving instrument panel 1" left, yucca then moved pilot seat 1+" left, which actually bowed the left (opposite) longerons and split leading edge of left strake from fuselage, no fuel leak. It also entered the front of the right baggage compartment in the right strake and drove my Oxy bottle back and the bottle bounced off my passenger’s chest and landed on her lap. I was told it took 6 guys to get the fuselage off the Yucca’s grip. Canopy was fractured and frame was sitting 1" inboard but was openable. Smelled a little gas, but got out rather fast and found this wonderful plane had saved my and my passenger’s life, no likelihood of fire as leaking, I had a very sore lower back and was alive on the front of that bullet – the more I think of it, the sharper the nose you can make, the better for trees - another modification! THANK YOU BURT RUTAN again! I got a wonderful 2220 hours out of that wonderful plane and nearly broke even on 2500 hours to build it. (There was no water nearby – I’ve told everyone I’d rather land in water with a plane that floats than anything but a paved strip due to high touchdown speeds.) That gear is the biggest reason I suggest avoiding Canard full retract systems – sure it might have avoided hanging on the wire, but the prop could have as easily stopped forward movement – the prop was damaged by something including the wire that was wrapped (about 10' of wire) around the gear at point of rest.

There was about 35 knots headwind at Yucca Valley - much to my surprise - no smoke, no sock observed and not trees seen blowing - Yuccas don't blow. I was sure I had had carb icing for about 2 hours of discussion with Sheriff, Highway Patrol and nice people who know planes like mine. One guy opened the left tank and said, you have no gas in here – he refused to look at the fuel indicator window which showed 11 gallons as it was tilted – the right tank had about 10 too. (This is a direct reading window.)

On later thought, the heavy rain at Banning had been coming in on me through th edge of the cockpit, it was dripping down the panel for a while. I had some neat electrical flapper switches for both Mag and Electronic Ignition and I think the water shorted the mag switch first (minor drop in rpm) and then shorted the electronic ignition minutes later – blowing the CB adjacent. I’ve never heard or experienced icing shutting down with no degredation and then the engine coming to full power when an ignition is revitalized and shutting down again when the circuit breaker pops. Flying Alaska and Seattle in the Winter, I've only had carb icing twice in the O-320-E3D where the induction goes through the oil sump.

Banning was bumpier than anything I’ve been in – but rain, even with the engine at low power settings at 140 mph doesn’t tell you which way the wind is blowing or how hard. With wind near calm at Palm Springs, I fooled myself while "flying the plane".

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