

ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	AS350B Ecureuil, G-JESI	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Turbomeca Arriel 1B turboshaft engine	
Year of Manufacture:	1980 (Serial no: 1205)	
Date & Time (UTC):	3 August 2013 at 2110 hrs (approx)	
Location:	Field near Fenny Drayton, Leicestershire	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Aircraft destroyed by fire	
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	52 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	4,500 hours (of which 2,850 were on type) Last 90 days - 28 hours Last 28 days - 9 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and AAIB enquiries	

Synopsis

The helicopter had been airborne for approximately 25 minutes on a private flight from a private site near Milton Keynes to Manchester when the pilot became aware of an acrid burning smell in the cockpit. This was accompanied by smoke emanating from behind the lower left side of the instrument panel. Flames appeared and the smoke worsened so the pilot took immediate action to land in a field and vacate the helicopter, which was then destroyed by the subsequent fire.

History of the flight

The pilot had taken off for a routine flight from a private site near Milton Keynes to a private site in Manchester. The helicopter was being flown on autopilot and had

been airborne for approximately 25 minutes. As the pilot was referring to his tablet device, he noticed an acrid 'electrical' burning smell in the cockpit. He saw smoke coming from the lower left side of the instrument panel and drifting towards the left side of the cockpit. Believing it to be an electrical problem he spent a few seconds trying to locate the source of the smoke but then noticed a small flame behind the panel, but could not positively identify the source of the fire. He selected 'Nuneaton Disused' as a suitable diversion landing site which was shown on his GPS and the closest to his current position. He considered this to be the safest option and turned to commence an approach. The pilot selected the master switch to OFF to isolate the electrical

system but by this time the instrument panel was now on fire. He made a MAYDAY call, but was not heard as the electrical power had been isolated. Smoke was filling the cockpit so he opened the slide window which had the effect of drawing the smoke from the left side to surround him and start to affect his breathing and obscure his view of the instruments. In order to counter this he opened the cabin door and the smoke cleared enough for him to identify a suitable open field and carry out a successful landing.

On landing he immediately vacated the helicopter. The fire worsened so he moved to a safe distance away from the helicopter and called the emergency services. The fire rapidly increased and completely destroyed the aircraft.

AAIB comment

The remains of the helicopter were examined in detail by AAIB at Farnborough. It was noted that all the cabin and cockpit components had been completely destroyed in the fire. An examination of the recovered items was carried out and found the damage attributable to the post-incident fire. The few items that may have been in the vicinity of the approximate seat of the fire, as described by the pilot, were more closely examined but owing to the extensive fire damage it was not possible to establish what initiated the fire. However, given the description of the events by the pilot it is most likely to have been related to the electrical system components or wiring behind the left side of the instrument panel.