

SERIOUS INCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Cameron Z-350, G-VBFH
No & Type of Engines:	None
Year of Manufacture:	2007 (Serial no: 10985)
Date & Time (UTC):	8 August 2012 at 1930 hrs
Location:	13 nm east of Lancaster
Type of Flight:	Commercial Air Transport (Passenger)
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1 Passengers - 15
Injuries:	Crew - None Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	None to balloon; electrical power lines damaged
Commander's Licence:	Commercial Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	63 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	2,153 hours (of which 553 were on type) Last 90 days - 41 hours Last 28 days - 10 hours
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot

Synopsis

During an approach to a landing site the balloon struck power lines. The lines and supporting poles were partially obscured and not seen until late. The pilot took action to land the balloon and, while the balloon contacted the lines, no damage occurred to the balloon and its occupants were uninjured.

History of the flight

After an uneventful flight, the pilot prepared the balloon and his passengers for landing. Recent wet weather had made the ground soft, so the pilot needed to choose a field with road access and where he could land near to the gate. He selected a field in a valley which appeared ideal, with a dry stone wall on the approach side and a lane with access to the left.

As the balloon approached the landing field the pilot saw poles supporting electricity power lines which ran across the direction of travel. The poles had not been visible until relatively late, being hidden by trees beforehand. The balloon was either level or in a shallow descent at this point, with no possibility of climbing above the power lines. The pilot shouted to his passengers to adopt landing positions and operated the balloon control line to deflate the envelope and start an immediate descent.

The balloon contacted the power lines above basket height. Two wires were pushed together and an arc occurred, after which they broke. The balloon made a landing some 100 m further on, with the basket

remaining upright; none of those on board were injured and the balloon was undamaged.

The pilot observed that the balloon had been travelling slightly faster than was expected on approach, reducing the time available to see obstructions such as the

wires, which were difficult to see against the similarly coloured background. The supporting poles were partially hidden by trees and, as the power line finished at a nearby farmhouse, there was not an extended line of poles to each side, reducing the chance of seeing them still further.