

INCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration: Airbus A320-212, G-HAGT

No & Type of Engines: 2 CFM 56-5-A3 turbofan engines

Year of Manufacture: 1992

Date & Time (UTC): 30 September 1993 at 1344 hrs

Location: London Gatwick Airport

Type of Flight: Non-scheduled Public Transport

Persons on Board: Crew - 6 Passengers - 111

Injuries: Crew - None Passengers - None

Nature of Damage: None

Commander's Licence: Airline Transport Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 43 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 9,427 hours (of which 872 were on type)
Last 90 days - 182 hours
Last 28 days - 58 hours

Information Source: Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and statements provided by the Operator

The aircraft had departed from Zakinthos, Greece, with 68 passengers for Gatwick seated in the front area of the cabin and 111 passengers for Manchester in the aft cabin. There was to be a flight deck crew change at Gatwick and, in the absence of any information from Zakinthos, the oncoming flight deck crew were unaware of both the seating arrangements and the positioning of the Gatwick and Manchester baggage in the holds. Nevertheless, prior to the arrival of the aircraft at Gatwick the commander discussed with the traffic officer the required loading for the onwards flight to Manchester. He was then informed that the ongoing passengers needed to be evenly distributed throughout the cabin. This was later confirmed to the commander by the loadsheet presented to him before start-up, which showed the passengers evenly distributed throughout the cabin and the luggage split between the rear two holds (Nos 3 and 4).

The aircraft had already been considerably delayed prior to arriving at Gatwick and after a further delay, caused by the necessity of a baggage identification check and also by reported bad weather en route, the 111 passengers re-boarded the aircraft for the onwards journey to Manchester. Both for

the benefit of the passengers and for commercial considerations, there was therefore some urgency to get the flight under way.

When the passengers were finally boarding the aircraft after the baggage check, the commander was already in the cockpit and he does not recall noticing that they all returned to their original seats in the rear of the cabin. The purser, on the other hand, did note the unusual seating arrangement. However, not having been briefed on the required seating re-allocation she assumed that the baggage had been distributed to compensate for this and so did not pass comment to the commander. The traffic officer also noticed the incorrect seating but believed that the commander was aware of the situation and would rectify it before take-off.

As the aircraft lined up for take off from Runway 09, the commander noted that the wind was more easterly than 175°/11 kt, given by ATC, but the tailwind component was acceptable and he handed control for the take off to the co-pilot, another captain. He then advanced the throttles to 50% and waited for the engines' RPM to stabilise before advancing them to the take-off position. As the aircraft began to roll, the commander became aware that the nose was rising rapidly and, as the application of full forward side-stick control had no effect, he closed the throttles and abandoned the take off. The aircraft was then taxied back to the stand, where the seat numbers of the passengers were noted and the baggage weighed.

The weight and balance of the aircraft was re-calculated using the positions of the baggage and the passengers as they had been for the intended flight. The baggage was 19% heavier than the notional weight previously used but, more significantly, the seating of the passengers caused the aircraft's centre of gravity to be considerably aft of the stipulated limit.