

## ACCIDENT

|  |  |                   |
|--|--|-------------------|
| <b>Aircraft Type and Registration:</b> | Piper PA-28-161, G-OBFC  |                   |
| <b>No &amp; Type of Engines:</b>       | 1 Lycoming O-320-D3G piston engine   |                   |
| <b>Year of Manufacture:</b>            | 1995   |                   |
| <b>Date &amp; Time (UTC):</b>          | 15 April 2007 at 1200 hrs  |                   |
| <b>Location:</b>                       | Henstridge Airfield, Somerset  |                   |
| <b>Type of Flight:</b>                 | Private  |                   |
| <b>Persons on Board:</b>               | Crew - 1   | Passengers - 1    |
| <b>Injuries:</b>                       | Crew - None  | Passengers - None |
| <b>Nature of Damage:</b>               | Severe damage to port wing and stabilator  |                   |
| <b>Commander's Licence:</b>            | Private Pilot's Licence  |                   |
| <b>Commander's Age:</b>                | 54 years   |                   |
| <b>Commander's Flying Experience:</b>  | 137 hours (of which 60 were on type)<br>Last 90 days - 7 hours<br>Last 28 days - 3 hours |                   |
| <b>Information Source:</b>             | Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot                                     |                   |

## Synopsis

The aircraft became high on its approach to a relatively short runway, at an airfield with which the pilot was unfamiliar. The aircraft landed some distance along the runway, and the pilot was unable to bring it to a stop before it struck a boundary fence, causing substantial damage to the aircraft and some damage to the fence. The pilot identified a number of contributory factors, culminating in the fact that he did not abandon the landing whilst it was still safe to do so.

## History of the flight

The Bournemouth based club aircraft departed from Bournemouth Airport at 1115 hrs for a flight to Henstridge Airfield, 23 nm to the north-west. The weather for departure was fine, but the visibility deteriorated

considerably in haze as the aircraft flew further inland. The pilot had planned to fly to the town of Sturminster Newton, 4 nm from Henstridge, and then on to the airfield, but had difficulty in identifying the town in the deteriorating visibility. He therefore flew back up his route as far as the larger town of Blandford Forum and, having positively identified his position, set course once again for Sturminster Newton. At this point the aircraft was flying at approximately 2,000 ft agl, and it was just possible for the pilot to keep the ground in sight.

Henstridge was subsequently identified, and the pilot changed radio frequency from Bournemouth Radar to the Henstridge Air/Ground station. The pilot was informed that Runway 25 was in use, with a right-hand

circuit that was clear of other traffic. As the aircraft approached the airfield from the south at about 2,000 ft agl, the alternator warning light illuminated. Although this extinguished when the alternator switch was cycled, the pilot remained concerned about the possibility of an electrical failure in the hazy conditions, and was therefore keen to land without undue delay.

The pilot flew overhead the airfield before turning right to join downwind, keeping close to the airfield because of the poor visibility. This led to the aircraft being high on its final approach, and it remained high despite the use of 40° of flap and ‘S’ turns on finals. The pilot also considered that the wind, which was otherwise light and variable, may have been giving up to 8 kt of tailwind at the time of landing.

The aircraft touched down at least one third of the way into the 750 m runway, and the pilot commenced heavy braking. By the time he considered rejecting the landing, the aircraft had lost too much speed, though it was decelerating too slowly to avoid a collision with the boundary fence. The pilot steered the aircraft to the right just before the fence, but the left wing tip struck it and the aircraft yawed rapidly to the left before coming to rest. The left wing tip sustained major damage in the collision, and the wing failed at its junction with the fuselage, causing fuel to spill from a ruptured fuel line; the fence was also damaged. Airfield personnel

were on the scene very quickly and assisted the aircraft occupants. The pilot and his passenger were uninjured and able to vacate the aircraft via the main door. There was no fire, but the fire service attended and dealt with the fuel spillage.

### **Contributory factors**

In his report, the pilot attributed the accident to a number of factors, which together formed a classic accident chain of events. These were the poor visibility, the non-standard circuit at an unfamiliar airfield, a shorter runway than the pilot was used to, and the distraction of the alternator warning light, which added a perceived time pressure to the landing.

Nevertheless, the above factors did not make an accident inevitable. The final factor, as the pilot recognised in his honest report, was the fact that the unsatisfactory approach and landing was continued beyond the point at which it could safely have been abandoned.

### **Safety action**

The pilot’s flying club commented that the pilot was a fairly regular flyer who remained current on single-engine piston aircraft, but who was probably less current with operations to relatively short runways. As a result of this accident, the club initiated a review of its recurrent training policy for those pilots who wished to conduct operations into or out of short runways and airstrips.