Cameron A-210 Balloon, G-FLYE

AAIB Bulletin No: 6/2004	Ref: EW/G2004/03/16	Category: 3
Aircraft Type and Registration:	Cameron A-210 Balloon, G-FLYE	
No & Type of Engines:	None	
Year of Manufacture:	1997	
Date & Time (UTC):	28 March 2004 at 1100 hrs	
Location:	Brindley near Nantwich, Cheshire	
Type of Flight:	Public Transport (Passenger)	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - 8
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	Minor burn damage to the envelope	
Commander's Licence:	Commercial Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	38 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	675 hours (of which 28 were on type)	
	Last 90 days - 6 hours	
	Last 28 days - 6 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot	

History of the flight

The balloon departed from Plassey near Wrexham for a one hour pleasure flight over the local area. Weather for the flight was good with a surface wind of 230°/8 kt, visibility in excess of 10 km and broken cloud at 4,000 feet. The departure and flight were uneventful and as normal after 45 minutes the pilot selected what he thought was a suitable field for landing. He commenced an approach with the passengers in their landing positions (facing opposite the direction of landing) but at a height of about five feet, the pilot noticed that the field contained crops and climbed the balloon away.

Having cleared that field the pilot identified another landing area, which was a large rectangular grass field orientated north-east which was also the landing direction. On the left edge of the field was a road with a row of poles supporting three electricity cables running parallel to the road between the road and the edge of the field. The right edge of the field had a hedge interspersed with trees on the other side of which, was what appeared to be a village green or common land.

An approach was made over a road and some trees at the southern end of the field with the passengers again in their landing positions. The point at which the balloon would touch down was clear of the obstructions presented by the wires and trees on the edges of the field and as the balloon neared the ground the pilot carried out a 'round out' burn to arrest the rate of descent. The balloon landed with a ground speed estimated by the pilot of about 7 to 9 kt and began to drag across the field. The pilot

initiated the 'ripping out', which is a mechanical device which expels the air from the envelope allowing it to collapse.

At that point, the pilot noticed a set of three electricity wires running across the field immediately in the path of the balloon to a pole hidden behind the trees on the right hand side of the field. This effectively reduced the obstruction free landing area of the field. The pilot continued the 'ripping out' and the passenger basket was dragged onto its side with the balloon envelope collapsing over the wires. There were a couple of bangs and a flash, which happened after the balloon had stopped moving. Before leaving the basket the pilot confirmed that the pilot light on the burner was out and that the gas tanks were switched off and disconnected.

After ensuring that it was safe to do so the pilot evacuated the passengers and moved them clear of the scene. Having confirmed that none of the passengers was injured, the pilot contacted his support crew and informed the emergency services of the accident.

Conclusion

The pilot considered that due to the power line support pole being hidden in the trees, he did not see the wires running across his landing direction. The nearest pole on the left side appeared only to support wires running along the edge of the field but in fact it was also the other support pole for the wires running across the field. Had he seen the wires across the field he would have rejected the site as a landing area.

The parachute vent system fitted to the balloon for performing the 'ripping out' did not collapse the envelope quickly enough to prevent it collapsing over the wires. There are other vent systems, which are faster acting and he thought that had the balloon been fitted with a faster system, the wires might have been avoided.