

Aircraft type and registration: Piper PA30 Twin Comanche G-BKCL (light twin engined fixed wing)

Year of manufacture: 1968

Date and time (GMT): 19 July 1983 at 0830 hrs

Location: Wycombe Air Park

Type of flight: Private (business)

Persons on board: Crew — 1 Passengers — Nil

Injuries: Crew — Nil Passengers — N/A

Nature of damage: Substantial damage to starboard wing and propeller

Commander's Licence: Commercial pilots licence (FAA) Private pilots licence (CAA)
Instrument Rating (CAA + FAA) Night Rating (CAA) Assistant
Instructors Rating (CAA)

Commander's Age: 61 years

Commander's total flying experience: 1400 hours (of which 600 were on type)

Approximately 15 minutes after departure from Fair Oaks, whilst en route to Conington, the cabin door opened. The pilot decided to divert to Wycombe Air Park, which was an airfield familiar to him. Because he was concerned that the door might become detached from its hinges, he flew the aircraft with one hand whilst holding the cabin door with the other. Upon arrival at Wycombe the controller was out of the tower changing the runway marker. The pilot noted one other aircraft in the circuit, but was unable to alert it to his difficulties because of the high noise level in the cockpit which made RTF communication difficult. The aircraft ahead made a slow circuit and landed, but took a long time to clear the runway. The pilot was reluctant to attempt an overshoot and because of the delay in clearing the runway by the preceding aircraft and the proximity of a helicopter hovering to one side of the runway an approach was made for a short field landing. During the approach, which was made with one notch of flap selected, the air speed indicator fluctuated considerably and appeared to be reading high relative to the pilot's expectations. At approximately 10 feet from the ground the stall warning sounded and the aircraft dropped, landing heavily and damaging the starboard wing and starboard propeller.

The pilot was of the opinion that the abnormal airspeed indicator readings during the approach were caused by turbulence created by the open door.

There is a considerable amount of anecdotal evidence which indicates that doors coming open during flight on light twin and single engined aircraft can give rise to handling problems which can, particularly on some low wing types, be severe.

It appears that, even though the aircraft remains controllable during cruising flight, difficulties may arise during the approach and landing because of changes in aircraft attitude and configuration, the possibility of erroneous ASI readings and possible reductions in tailplane and elevator effectiveness. Loss of elevator authority may not become fully apparent until an attempt is made to flare the aircraft.

The pilot of this aircraft had experienced a door opening on a (different) PA 30 some years previously. On that occasion he had been able to keep his airspeed high during his approach and did not experience any significant problems.