

AAIB Bulletin No: 1/96

Ref: EW/G95/11/15

Category: 1.3

Aircraft Type and Registration: Rutan Varieze, G-REZE

No & Type of Engines: 1 Rolls-Royce Continental O-200A piston engine

Year of Manufacture: 1995

Date & Time (UTC): 19 November 1995 at 1230 hrs

Location: Breeches Copse, Bembridge, Isle of Wight

Type of Flight: Private

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers - None

Injuries: Crew - Minor Passengers - N/A

Nature of Damage: Aircraft destroyed

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence with Night Rating

Commander's Age: 40 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 284 hours (of which 5 were on type)
Last 90 days - 5 hours
Last 28 days - 4 hours

Information Source: Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and enquiries by the AAIB

After an uneventful flight from Biggin Hill, the pilot called Bembridge and requested airfield information. He was asked to join right downwind for Runway 30 and was passed the current QFE of 1027 mb which he acknowledged and set. The weather was good with a surface wind of 300°/10 kt. After completing his normal checks, the pilot joined the circuit as instructed at 1,000 feet agl. As he had not previously been to Bembridge, he decided to extend downwind to allow himself a long straight-in approach; as he turned finals, he estimated his range as 3 1/2 nm. He noted that the APAPI was not on and began his descent concentrating on the runway perspective for his glide slope; as he descended with power on and landing brake retracted, he noted the cliffs and then the trees below him but maintained his primary focus on the runway. At approximately 2 nm, he was cleared to land and, at this point the approach path of G-REZE looked normal to the Bembridge AFISO. However, shortly afterwards the pilot became aware of the proximity of the trees in his peripheral vision. He immediately applied full power and started to rotate the aircraft into a climb attitude. Unfortunately there was insufficient time to arrest the descent and G-REZE crashed into the trees. In the ATC tower, the AFISO had been visually checking the runway and, when she looked back for the aircraft on finals, G-REZE had disappeared. She immediately alerted the emergency services. The pilot could recall nothing from when the aircraft hit the ground until he was aware of sitting alongside the wreckage.

Subsequently, in a very honest report the pilot stated that the aircraft had been fully serviceable up to the impact with the trees. He acknowledged that the primary cause of the accident was his misjudgement of his visual approach. Factors which he had not taken sufficient notice of included the slight upslope of the runway together with the high ground sloping down towards the airfield. Because of these factors, the APAPI at Bembridge is set for a glide slope of 4° but is not normally switched on in clear weather conditions unless it is requested.