

Aerospatale AS350B Squirrel, G-PLMB

AAIB Bulletin No: 2/2004	Ref: EW/G2003/08/48	Category: 2.3
Aircraft Type and Registration:	Aerospatale AS350B Squirrel, G-PLMB	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Turbomeca Arriel 1B turboshaft engine	
Year of Manufacture:	1980	
Date & Time (UTC):	29 August 2003 at 1230 hrs	
Location:	1.5 nm south-west of Fort Augustus, Scotland	
Type of Flight:	Aerial work (filming)	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - 2
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	Damage to tail rotor blades and lower fin assembly	
Commander's Licence:	Commercial Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	53 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	2,348 hours (of which 556 were on type)	
	Last 90 days - 131 hours	
	Last 28 days - 66 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot	

The aircraft was being used to film marine traffic on Loch Ness and the Caledonian Canal. After completing the filming along Loch Ness the aircraft descended to 200 feet agl, in accordance with its clearance, to film a cabin cruiser travelling south-west along the Caledonian Canal just to the west of Fort Augustus. While doing so the aircraft carried out one and a quarter orbits to the right. Having finished that filming, the pilot turned the aircraft left from a north-westerly heading onto a southerly heading and then saw a set of power cables about 65 metres ahead, across his track. He took avoiding action by applying aft cyclic to climb over the cables but was informed by the cameraman, sitting in the rear of the cabin, that the aircraft may have contacted them. The pilot landed the aircraft in a nearby field and shut it down.

Subsequent examination revealed that both tail rotor blades and the lower vertical fin had sustained wire strike damage but had remained intact. One of the power cables, which was carrying 132,000 volts, was severed. This cable had been strung 314 feet above ground level because of the local topography and the clearance required for vessels on the Caledonian Canal. The company which maintains the power cables has since placed orange reflective 'bird flight diverters' on the repaired cable to increase its visibility.

The pilot concluded that the accident was a result of allowing himself to be distracted from his primary role as the commander and pilot of the aircraft by the secondary task of filming.