

Piper PA-28-140, G-AXTD

AAIB Bulletin No: 3/99 Ref: EW/G98/04/20 Category: 1.3

Aircraft Type and Registration: Piper PA-28-140, G-AXTD

No & Type of Engines: 1 Lycoming O-320-E2A piston engine

Year of Manufacture: 1969

Date & Time (UTC): 29 April 1998 at 1550 hrs

Location: Harbledown Wood, Dunkirk, Canterbury, Kent

Type of Flight: Private

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 - Passengers - 2

Injuries: Crew - 1 (Serious) - Passengers - 2 (Minor)

Nature of Damage: Aircraft destroyed

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 58 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 2,453 hours (of which 400 were on type)

Last 90 days - 18 hours

Last 28 days - 6 hours

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

The pilot's report stated that he carried out two local circuits of Canterbury airfield on Runway 20 in order to maintain current flying practice. Two passengers were also on board. The circuits were both left hand with no other circuit traffic present. The airfield is unlicensed and does not have any Air Traffic Control facility.

Runway 20 is unlicensed with an operating length of 670 metres surfaced with rolled chippings. The first 487 metre section is uphill with a further 183 metre level section to the end of the runway. At the overrun end of this runway, the ground drops away sharply to the main A2 trunk road, which

is equipped with road lighting on poles. The height of the lighting poles in the overrun area has been reduced in order to minimise the obstacle height to aircraft operating from the airfield.

The pilot reported that on landing after his second circuit, he decided to roll and do one further circuit. With about 800 feet of runway remaining and a residual speed of 45 mph, full power was selected, the carburettor heat was selected to cold and the flap reduced to the first stage (10°). The fuel state was reported as a full right tank and half full left tank.

With about 150 feet to run to the end of the runway, the pilot noted that his airspeed was 60 to 65 mph, a shortfall of 5 to 10 mph on his desired lift-off speed, but with insufficient distance remaining to abandon the takeoff. The aircraft left the end of the runway and flew over the road such that its right wing hit one of the road lighting poles. This caused the aircraft to swing to the right and it continued across the road into the tops of the trees on the south west side of the road. The aircraft came to rest in woodland with the nose and right wing area being severely disrupted, spilling aircraft fuel in the immediate vicinity but there was no fire. The cabin area was intact but there was some rearward movement of the right side of the instrument panel above the control yoke.

An aftercast from the Meteorological Office indicated that, at the time of the accident, the surface wind was from 060° at 10 kt, visibility around 8 km, scattered cloud base 3,000 feet amsl, temperature +13°C, dew point +7°C, QNH 1005 mb. With this wind condition, an aircraft operating from Runway 20 would be subjected to a crosswind component of 6.4 kt and a tailwind component of 7.6 kt.

An eyewitness at the airfield reported that the aircraft seemed to make a longer than usual initial take-off run. On the first approach, the aircraft seemed too high and floated almost up to the top of the uphill section before touching down. The subsequent lift off seemed very late and the aircraft was very low over the trees. On the second approach, the aircraft again appeared to be high and touched down near the top of the upslope. The power was applied about half way along the final 183 metre flat section and the aircraft did not appear to get airborne before the end of the runway. The witness indicated that one of the passengers (who did not hold a pilot's licence) was occupying the front left seat of the aircraft. The licenced pilot (who did not hold a flying instructor rating) occupied the right seat and was believed to have worn only his lap harness. The second passenger occupied a rear seat.

The pilot was the most seriously injured of the occupants, sustaining suspected broken ribs and minor lacerations to face and hands. He was assisted from the aircraft by the two passengers, using the door on the right side of the fuselage.

A passing motorist stopped to assist and then alerted the emergency services, returning to the roadside to guide their arrival. However, by the time the emergency services arrived at the scene, the three aircraft occupants had commenced to walk through the woods away from the wreckage. They later returned to the accident scene by bus from further along the A2. They were then taken by ambulance to hospital.

At the hospital, some three hours after the accident, the pilot agreed to a Police request to allow a voluntary blood test sample to be taken. The result of this test indicated that the pilot's blood alcohol content was 88 mg per 100 ml blood. The maximum permitted for motor vehicle drivers in the UK is 80 mg per 100 ml. The CAA has taken action against this pilot.