

ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Cameron A-300 hot air balloon, G-VBAD	
No & Type of Engines:	N/A	
Year of Manufacture:	2012 (Serial no: 11623)	
Date & Time (UTC):	18 May 2018 at 1800 hrs	
Location:	Near Launceston, Cornwall	
Type of Flight	Commercial Air Transport (Passenger)	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - 12
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - 1 (Serious)
Nature of Damage:	None	
Commander's Licence:	Commercial Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	56 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	373 hours (of which 85 were on type) Last 90 days - 20 hours Last 28 days - 19 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and further enquiries by the AAIB	

Synopsis

A passenger fell off the basket onto the ground whilst attempting to board before flight and was seriously injured.

The operator now briefs passengers to take extra care when climbing in or out of the basket and offers boarding before inflation for those they consider would benefit.

History of the flight

The pilot planned to operate a commercial flight with twelve passengers aboard. Prior to takeoff the pilot gave the passengers a safety briefing and offered to 'pre-load'¹ any passenger that felt they would not be able to climb into an upright basket; two passengers requested this. At the time the weather was clear with the wind from 320° at 5 kt.

The envelope was initially cold inflated², but was then deflated because the Velcro tabs that secure the parachute valve, at the top of the envelope, were not securing it enough for a successful inflation. After this was rectified, the envelope was re-inflated and the remaining passengers started to board. During this time the pilot, who was occupying the

Footnote

¹ Pre-loading is when passengers board the basket while it is on its side. The basket is then moved upright when the envelope is inflated.

² Cold inflation involves inflating the envelope with a large fan.

central compartment of the basket (Figure 1) was monitoring and controlling the envelope with the burners, while a member of ground crew, who was standing on the basket's rim, checked connections and the routing of control lines. When the penultimate passenger was climbing into the basket, the crew member briefly observed her and believed she was coping. However, she then fell from it, onto the ground, and was seriously injured.

The crew member quickly went to her assistance and, realising the severity of her injuries, informed the pilot that an ambulance would be required. The pilot deflated the envelope and went to assist the injured passenger, who was subsequently taken to hospital in an ambulance.

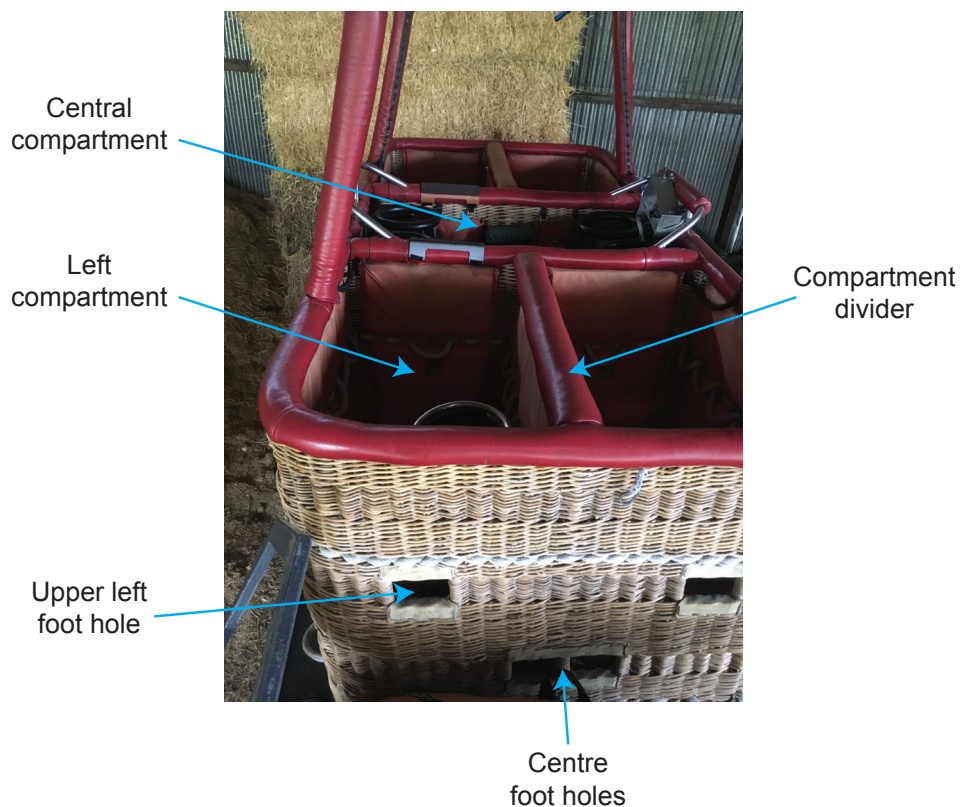


Figure 1
Layout of basket

Passengers' comments

As part of the investigation all the passengers were contacted by the AAIB.

Injured passenger and husband's comments

The injured passenger stated that she did not accept the offer to pre-load as she felt that she would be able to "comfortably climb in".

Her husband stated that after the second inflation the pilot seemed to be in a bit of a rush to get the passengers in the basket, as he believed the pilot wanted weight in it to avoid it moving. A few other passengers made similar comments.

The injured passenger commenced the climb into the basket with the intension of going into the left of the two passenger compartments. Her husband was next to her. Initially she put her right foot into the left of the two centre foot holes, followed by her left foot in the upper left foot hole, while holding on to the padded edge of the basket. He then helped her lift her right leg over the edge of the basket, which then went into the right compartment. She was now leaning over the left end and side of the basket with her left foot still in the upper left foot hole and her right leg in the right compartment. As she tried to move her right leg over the divider into the left compartment she lost her grip, rolled forward over the left edge and fell to the ground suffering a broken arm.

Discussion

The injured passenger appears to have had some difficulty climbing over the edge of the basket into her assigned compartment and subsequently lost her grip and fell to the ground. She may have felt some pressure to get in without delay. However, had she accepted the offer to pre-load, as two other passengers had, she may have found it less hazardous to board before the envelope was inflated.

Safety actions

The operator has stated that it now briefs passengers to take extra care when climbing in or out of the basket and suggests to some passengers that pre-loading might be a better option for them than climbing in after the envelope has been inflated.