

SERIOUS INCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Reims Cessna F172M, G-MOFO	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming O-320-E2D piston engine	
Year of Manufacture:	1974 (Serial no: 1192)	
Date & Time (UTC):	9 January 2022 at 1947 hrs	
Location:	Newcastle International Airport	
Type of Flight:	Training	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	None	
Commander's Licence:	Light Aircraft Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	72 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	233 hours (of which 4 were on type) Last 90 days - 13 hours Last 28 days - 5 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot	

Synopsis

During a night flight, the pilot misidentified road lights for runway lights and drifted south of the airport. While the pilot was establishing his position, the aircraft descended to approximately 300 ft agl.

History of the flight

The incident flight was the pilot's first night solo during a Night Rating course. While downwind for a right-hand circuit, the pilot lost sight of the runway, misidentified lights from the nearby A1 dual carriageway and drifted off course to the south. While attempting to reacquire the runway lights he inadvertently allowed the aircraft to descend. On realising he was lower than intended the pilot initiated a climb. Coincident with this, Newcastle ATC called for the pilot to climb when they saw the aircraft's transponder Mode C altitude reducing toward 500 ft. Ground elevation in the area of the descent was approximately 200 ft amsl. Once safely level, the pilot turned back toward the airfield. With assistance from Newcastle ATC, he regained visual contact with the runway and landed from an abbreviated left-hand circuit. Salient points from the pilot's SkyDemon track log are reproduced at Figure 1. After a "debrief and a long ground brief on Newcastle features and radio procedures," the pilot's instructor cleared the pilot to continue his night-flying training.

AAIB comment

The pilot's inadvertent descent highlights the increased risk from distraction, in this case looking for the runway lights, in situations where external visual cues are reduced.

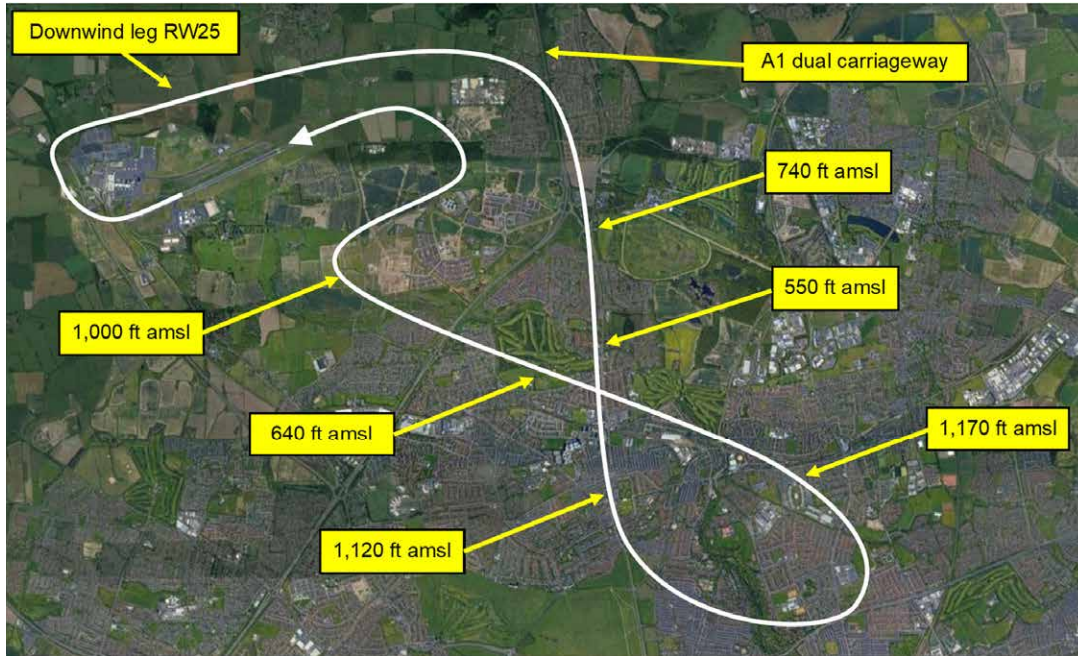


Figure 1

Approximate track and altitude of G-MOFO reproduced from SkyDemon recording
(Imagery ©2022 Bluesky.CNES / Airbus, Getmapping plc, Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky.Landsat /
Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, Map data 2022)