

Accident

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Pitts S-2A, G-TIII	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming AEIO-360-A1A piston engine	
Year of Manufacture:	1979 (Serial no: 2196)	
Date & Time (UTC):	8 June 2024 at 1155 hrs	
Location:	Blackpool Airport	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - 1
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	Damage to right upper wing and propeller strike on Pitts S2-A. Damage to tailplane and fuselage of a parked aircraft	
Commander's Licence:	Light Aircraft Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	51 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	418 hours (of which 3 were on type) Last 90 days - 2 hours Last 28 days - 2 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and further enquiries by the AAIB	

Synopsis

A passenger experienced a panic attack during taxi and accidentally advanced the throttle resulting in a collision with a parked aircraft. Guidance is available from the CAA and other sources to help General Aviation pilots minimise the risks from passengers.

History of the flight

On the day of the accident, the pilot decided to take one of his employees for a flight. The passenger had previously asked to go flying on several occasions.

The pilot prepared the aircraft and briefed the passenger. The pilot reported that he explained what they would do during the flight, how to get in and out and what to do if the passenger felt unwell. He strapped the passenger in, checked his comfort and instructed him to keep his hands on the safety straps and not to touch any controls. The passenger reported to the AAIB that he was feeling "good" at this point.

The passenger was 5 foot 2 inches (157cm) tall and used a booster seat in the front seat of the aircraft. He reported that he felt cooped up and could only see the sky. He stated that he started to feel worried when taxiing and requested not to fly. The pilot obtained a clearance to return to the hangar. When the aircraft was on the apron and about to park, the passenger recalled that he felt panicked and needed to get out. He began to undo his

straps and attempted to open the canopy. During this process, he accidentally advanced the throttle. The pilot reported that the passenger did not respond to his instruction to wait and calm down. The pilot said he had his hand on the throttle during the taxi, but it was ripped out of his grip. He stated that he cut the engine and attempted to brake but could not avoid colliding with a parked aircraft and a vertical post. The pilot and passenger were not injured but both aircraft were damaged.

Accident site



Figure 1

The aircraft after the collision

Personnel

The pilot reported he flies with passengers approximately 60% of the time.

The passenger reported he had no experience of flying in any type of aircraft before but was very keen to try it. The passenger stated he was not under pressure to fly and that he trusted the pilot. He said he had never experienced a panic attack before. The passenger commented that G-TIII may not have been the most appropriate choice of aircraft for his first time in the air.

Relevant guidance

CAA Safety Sense leaflet SS02 *Care of Passengers*¹ provides advice for GA pilots on how to manage the risks associated with passengers. It explains that '*Fear of flying however is common and occasionally a nervous reaction may take place.*' It states that some passengers may '*find the unique environment of noises and other sensations disconcerting.*'

SS02 advises that pilots should '*Explain the controls and the importance of keeping hands, feet and other objects such as cameras clear of them*' and '*consider discussing emergency scenarios.*'

Footnote

¹ <https://www.caa.co.uk/media/51qmj21b/safetysense02careofpassengers.pdf> [accessed 31 July 2024].

The CAA's Skyway Code² offers the '*I AM SAFE*' mnemonic for assessing fitness to fly (Figure 2). It is intended for pilots' self-assessment of their fitness to fly but can also be used to structure a pre-flight discussion with a passenger to assess how they are feeling about the flight.

I AM SAFE

The following mnemonic is recommended for assessing fitness to fly:

I	Illness <i>Do I have any symptoms that might affect my ability to fly?</i>
A	Attitude <i>Am I emotionally ready and fully focussed on the flight?</i>
M	Medication <i>Am I taking any prescription or over-the-counter drugs that might affect my performance?</i>
S	Stress <i>Am I under pressure or have any worries and anxieties?</i>
A	Alcohol <i>Have I been drinking within the last 24 hours?</i>
F	Fatigue <i>Am I tired or not adequately rested?</i>
E	Eating <i>Am I adequately nourished?</i>

Figure 2

'*I AM SAFE*' mnemonic from the CAA's Skyway Code

The AAIB consulted a clinical psychologist who specialises in fear of flying and she stated that claustrophobia, fear of heights, turbulence and the overall stress associated with flying can trigger panic attacks.

She offered the following suggestions for preparing passengers:

'I would suggest the pilot do a pre-flight briefing with the passenger to clearly explain the flight plan, including the types of manoeuvres, duration, and what sensations to expect. The pilot should emphasise safety measures, emergency procedures, and how to communicate any discomfort during the flight. Also important, would be assessing the passenger's experience with flying, particularly aerobatics, and asking about their comfort level before the flight.'

Footnote

² <https://www.caa.co.uk/our-work/publications/documents/content/cap1535s/> [accessed 31 July 2024].

Discussion

The event shows that even passengers who are keen to fly can experience a sudden and unexpected panic reaction with the potential to affect the safety of the aircraft. In this case, it appears that claustrophobia and a lack of forward vision triggered the reaction.

A pre-flight briefing was conducted, and the pilot immediately cancelled the flight when he became aware the passenger was uncomfortable. This averted a more serious outcome, but he was not able to prevent the collision caused by the passenger inadvertently advancing the throttle.

It is not possible to eliminate all risk from unexpected passenger behaviour. The risk can be minimised by thorough preparation focusing not only on the passenger's physical readiness for the flight but also their emotional readiness.

Conclusion

The aircraft collided with a parked aircraft because the passenger inadvertently advanced the throttle and the pilot was unable to stop the aircraft in time.