

Accident

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Europa, G-CBWP	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Rotax 912-UL piston engine	
Year of Manufacture:	2002 (Serial no: PFA 247-12930)	
Date & Time (UTC):	1 March 2025 at 1500 hrs	
Location:	East Kirkby Airfield, Lincolnshire	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Damaged beyond economical repair	
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	62 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	53 hours on type Last 90 days - 6 hours Last 28 days - 2 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and further enquiries by the AAIB	

Synopsis

During a flight to East Kirkby Airfield, which was an unfamiliar location to him, the pilot found that the geographical features of the airfield were visually similar to surrounding fields. Whilst on the approach, the pilot believed he became focussed on his approach speed at the expense of maintaining his position in relation to the glidepath. He landed in a rough field short of the runway threshold and attempted to go around but had insufficient speed to takeoff again. He tried to steer away from a hedgerow ahead but clipped the right wing, spinning the aircraft nose into the hedge. The pilot was uninjured, but the aircraft was damaged beyond economical repair.

History of the flight

The pilot had planned a flight from Full Sutton to East Kirkby Airfield but was unfamiliar with the destination. He checked the information in an airfield guide, checked the TAF and METAR for Humberside, and set off in good weather conditions. On the approach, the pilot called on East Kirkby's Safetycom frequency but received no reply. The pilot had difficulty identifying the airfield as there was a cluster of similar green fields at the location and the runways did not stand out. He made a pass over the area at 500 ft and eventually noticed the different shades of green which marked the runways on the airfield. There were no runway numbers or windsock visible. From a circuit height of 500 ft, he aligned the aircraft with what he believed was Runway 26. He landed but found the grass surface was very rough, at which point he realised he had landed in a field short of the runway threshold. He attempted a go-around but there was insufficient room to achieve the necessary takeoff

speed. He steered left, to avoid the hedge ahead (Figure 1), but clipped the right wing which spun the aircraft into the hedge. The pilot was uninjured.



Figure 1

East Kirkby Airfield showing landing direction (green) and path of the aircraft (red)

Accident site

The aircraft was recovered from the accident site (Figure 2) but was subsequently assessed as beyond economical repair, due to extensive damage to the mounting structure of the wings.



Figure 2

G-CBWP after it had come to rest

Aerodrome information

East Kirkby Airfield is the former RAF East Kirkby Aerodrome site and has two unlicensed grass strip runways. The concrete runways can still be identified but are not in use, with trees and buildings covering much of the former runway surfaces. There is an LPG storage and cylinder recharge site on a large concrete area to the north-east of the airfield, at the threshold of Runway 24. There is also an aviation heritage centre to the north, adjacent to the airfield.

Analysis

The pilot stated that he was unfamiliar with the layout of the airfield and was confused by the surrounding fields, which looked approximately the same size and colour as the airfield, and the perimeter vegetation was very similar. He could not identify any of the features of an airfield that he would normally expect to see, such as a control tower, other aircraft, hangars, runway numbers or windsock. The low circuit height also contributed to his confusion, because at that height, the airfield runways appeared even more indistinguishable from the surrounding fields. With the benefit of hindsight, the pilot considered that had he looked at an overhead satellite view of the airfield prior to the flight, he may have been able to identify key geographical features to assist in identifying the airfield and the appropriate approach path.

He also stated that the Europa monowheel aircraft can be difficult to land, so he had to “concentrate fully” on achieving the correct approach speed. The pilot believed that whilst concentrating on the approach speed, it was at the expense of maintaining awareness of his position in relation to the runway and glidepath.

Conclusion

The aircraft landed in a field short of the runway threshold because the pilot was unable to distinguish the runway from the surrounding fields. On the approach, he did not maintain awareness of his position relative to the glidepath, because he was focussed on his approach speed.