

Accident

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Piper PA 46-350P, N3117J	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Pratt and Whitney PT6A-35 engine	
Year of Manufacture:	2005	
Date & Time (UTC):	18 May 2025 at 1730 hrs	
Location:	Kilkeel (Greencastle) Airfield, County Down	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - 3
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	Substantial damage to wing and parts of fuselage	
Commander's Licence:	Commercial Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	44 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	2,512 hours (of which 656 were on type) Last 90 days - 33 hours Last 28 days - 20 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot	

Synopsis

The pilot lost sight of the runway centreline on rotation, with the aircraft drifting to the left and the wheels entering long grass next to the mown runway strip. He was unable to recover directional control and the aircraft hit an adjacent hedge and earth bank causing considerable damage. There were no injuries.

History of the flight

The pilot, together with three passengers, had planned to fly from Kilkeel Airfield in Northern Ireland to Fairoaks Airport near London, where the aircraft was based. Kilkeel Airfield has a single grass runway, which the airfield's website states is 750 m long and 5 m wide. The pilot reported the grass on either side of the runway strip as being very long. He described a dashed line down the runway to delineate the centreline, but no markings along the edge of the strip. The mown area opened out approximately halfway along the length of the runway to allow access to aircraft for parking and refuelling.

The pilot stated he had started his take off run from Runway 19 with the aircraft performing as expected. He commenced rotation just prior to the start of the wider mown area and believes the aircraft had then yawed slightly to the left. The aircraft had just become airborne when the strip narrowed again, with the left main gear wheel entering the long grass along the edge. This caused the aircraft to decelerate and yaw rapidly to the left, with

all three wheels contacting the ground again. The aircraft continued to yaw to the left, despite the pilot applying right rudder, and decelerated as it passed through the long grass. The pilot was unable to prevent the aircraft from hitting an adjacent hedge and earth bank, which broke off part of the wing and caused substantial damage to the fuselage. The passenger compartment, however remained intact and the pilot and passengers were able to exit, unaided and uninjured, through the main exit.

The pilot commented that on rotation the long nose of the aircraft obstructed his view forwards, and this coincided with the loss of peripheral guidance caused by the strip widening out into the parking area. This made it an increasing challenge to maintain directional control in an aircraft which produced significant torque on takeoff. He stated that, in hindsight, he should have rotated later to maintain better visual awareness of his position relative to the centreline. Despite being experienced at flying to grass runways, the pilot also stated he would restrict his flying to those with wider cleared strips in the future.