Accident

Aircraft Type and Registration:	LAK-17B FES Mini, G-CLTX
No & Type of Engines:	1 Sportine Aviacija FES-LAK-M100 electric motor
Year of Manufacture:	2017 (Serial no: 004)
Date & Time (UTC):	16 August 2025 at 1309 hrs
Location:	South Wales Gliding Club, Monmouthshire
Type of Flight:	Private
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1 Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - 1 (Serious) Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Damage to fuselage, wings and tail
Commander's Licence:	Light Aircraft Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	80 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	2,050 hours (of which 312 were on type) Last 90 days - 26 hours Last 28 days - 10 hours
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and enquiries made by the AAIB

Synopsis

During a winch launch there was an uncommanded deployment of the glider's airbrakes. This was not noticed by the pilot, but the aircraft's sink rate and low airspeed caused him to immediately attempt a landing. His options were limited, the aircraft was too low to avoid a row of trees ahead and risked a stall if the pilot had pitched up to clear them. The aircraft hit the tree tops and was brought to a stop. He was injured in the process and the glider sustained damage. The accident was caused by the airbrake handle becoming unlocked during a minor technical corrective action in the cockpit earlier in the day. The unsafe condition of the handle was not noticed by the pilot. The handle moved rearwards during the winch launch and the airbrakes deployed as a result.

History of the flight

During a glider winch launch there was an uncommanded deployment of the airbrakes which was not immediately noticed by the pilot. At the top of the climb, he released the cable and commenced his post launch checks. Whilst he was doing this his attention was drawn to the variometer which was showing an excessive sink rate. He also noticed a lower-than-normal airspeed. At the same time a radio call warning of the airbrake position was made from the ground, but this was not heard by the pilot. Realising something was wrong, he attempted to increase his airspeed by lowering the nose, but this had little effect and the pilot decided to return to the airfield.

The aircraft height had reduced significantly and his options on the ground were now limited. The aircraft was now too low to avoid a row of trees nearby which were in line with his attempted base leg to land downwind. The glider collided with the tree tops which absorbed the glider's energy. The glider came to a stop lodged in the treetops about 15 ft from the ground. The pilot was injured and the glider sustained damage to the fuselage, tail and wings.

Pilot's analysis

The pilot described a sequence of events which he considered to have led to the accident. Prior to the accident flight the glider was being prepared for a winch launch. The inexperienced individual attaching the cable was having some difficulty in properly engaging the launch cable ring in the hook. As the winch tensioned the cable ring 'flicked' vigorously out of the hook. In case the glider had sustained damage to its underside near the hook, the glider was moved from the queue for examination. This found that the hook control cable had derailed from its guide pulley. The pilot gained access to the pulley and cable in the cockpit and with some difficulty, was able to rerail the cable.

The glider was then again prepared for a winch launch with the pilot and ground assistant taking time to ensure the cable and hook functioned and was attached correctly. The launch then went ahead. During the winch launch at about 600 ft agl the airbrakes deployed. He concluded that it had probably become unlocked during the release cable rerailing activity and that the pitch angle during the launch caused the unrestrained handle to move rearwards deploying the airbrakes. In hindsight the pilot realises that he had focussed on the cable and hook activity and had not checked that the airbrake lever was locked after the cable rerailing or during the pre-flight check.