

REPORT INTO AN ACCIDENT INVOLVING ASW20BL G-CFHD NEAR TO GRANDSEN LODGE AIRFIELD 21 AUGUST 2023

Background

The pilot (22) was competing in the Junior Nationals and was flying on day three having performed very well on day one and two to the extent that he was leading the field. The pilot normally flew at Bidford where he had accumulated 350 hours gliding experience in a very short period of time. He had previously come into conflict with the club management who withdrew his solo status the previous year, but all of these issues had been resolved and he had recently completed a course of training whereby he could fly with passengers.

During the time the pilot was not allowed to go solo he flew a great deal with an older member of the club and they became close friends. They did a great deal of cross country flying together in that members Arcus. This friend purchased the ASW20 BL specifically so the pilot could compete in it.

The pilot won the Condor online gliding simulator competition.

The day prior to the accident flight there was what was perceived to be a near miss in a thermal on task. The two pilot's impression of the incident differ as to the severity of it thus the competition organisers analysed the traces and found that the closest they got to each other was 120 mtrs with a vertical separation of 37ft. The pilots met face to face the following morning and had a full and frank exchange of views on the issues and parted on reasonably good terms.

On day one and two although the pilot finished well up the field, he felt that he had lost time being too conservative in setting up and flying the final glide. He discussed this with other pilots in the competition and they gave him advice as to how to speed up but on reflection much of this advice lacked a basis in logic and was dismissed when revealed to more experienced competition pilots.

The Accident Flight

A closed-circuit task around a number of turning points progressed very well and the pilot took his best climb of the day to 4500 AMSL around 30 kms from the finish. This his computer said was more than enough to finish the task and indeed it indicated a reserve of around 800 ft of excess height. It has not been categorically proven, but evidence suggests that the Oudie was miss set and the 400 ft height reserve set up was at the 3 km finish circle and not at the airfield itself. This would have misled the pilot into thinking he had a great deal more safety margin than existed.

Thinking he had more than sufficient height in hand, the pilot set off on his final glide at about 110 kts IAS into a headwind of 16 kts at his flying height. The combination of the excessive speed and the headwind soon eroded all his safety margin, and his flight computer indicated a height deficit. He slowed down to 75 kts but continued along the final track. At around 7 kms to go he was at about 500 ft AGL and almost directly overhead Bourn disused airfield. In his statement he was unaware of this excellent landing option. He continued to fly on track, hoping to get a logged point inside the 3 km finish circle and then to land.

As the pilot crossed the 3 km finish circle, he had a long flat field directly ahead of him and a safe landing would have been easily within his capabilities. However, he dismissed this as a landing option as the surface was rough, even though he

completed his pre-landing checks in preparation for landing. He hoped that the field next ahead would be better. He then decided to apply a descent into ground effect which conversation with other pilots had suggested would markedly increase the achievable range. He accelerated into ground effect to 80 kts IAS and consequently lost the option of landing in the field he was over. Looking ahead he could see that Gransden Lodge Airfield was slightly above his current height and was clearly unachievable. Thus, he decided to cross the road at the end of the field below some high-tension wires at about 16 ft AGL and land in the next field. Sadly, a tree he had failed to see caught the left wing during this manoeuvre and the glider rotated through 180 degrees and came to rest facing the direction from which it had come. The glider was very substantially damaged and will be assessed for whether it is repairable. The pilot sustained injuries which are categorised as major.

Recommendations

1. At the root of many of the errors that this pilot made was advice from others that was either erroneous, misguided or misunderstood by the pilot. It is recommended that potential competition pilots, particularly younger pilots, are directed towards published "good practice" and expert advice during coaching by more experienced pilots.
2. At the heart of the safe conduct of cross-country flying is the need to consider contingencies when we get lower and make timely decisions to land. Although it is difficult to abandon a task it is essential to do it before the last viable landing option is lost. It is recommended that this message and the associated human factors are reinforced during a mandatory safety briefing at the beginning of all BGA competitions along with the need for the pilots in command to understand that they alone bear responsibility for the safe conduct of each flight.

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