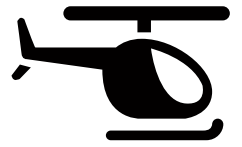


CHIRP

Confidential Human-Factors
Incident Reporting Programme

Aviation FEEDBACK

Edition 87 | February 2021
GENERAL AVIATION



Think once, think twice

As I write this editorial, COVID-19 lockdown v3 is still in force and so there's precious little flying going on in the GA community. My thoughts go out to all, particularly those who are facing life-changing events, but also to the clubs and airfields who are desperately trying to remain solvent and viable.



Director Aviation:
STEVE FORWARD

There are plenty of stresses and pressures about from associated mental health, financial concerns and lack of recency so, once we do get back in the cockpit, it behoves us all to take things carefully, check and double-check, and be acutely aware of distractions and our likely poor performance as a result of being very rusty and out of practice. Even the professional commercial aviators are not immune to this and are currently highly focused on this aspect, so do yourself a favour and take it very cautiously when the time comes – at the very least, have a good think about threat and error management with relation to very limited currency, and investment in an hour's flight with an instructor would probably be money well spent.

On the theme of ensuring proper preparation before flight, a couple of comments and reports in this edition

will catch your eye. The issue of Weight & Balance (W&B) is highlighted in a fairly light-hearted way in one of the comments about previous FEEDBACKs but it's anything but trivial. W&B is often a neglected feature of flying once that PPL(A) has been gained – as students, we're taught how to do it, but there's always a temptation to assume that 'it'll be alright, the instructor/club will look after all that'. As your training fades into the dim, distant past, when was the last time you got the performance charts out and did a proper calculation? It's all very well having a set of 'max and min' calculations for your aircraft and home airfield so that you have an idea of the boundaries of W&B possibilities, but you must look carefully at CofG, loading and AUW if things are even slightly out of the ordinary. There are Apps available to help (such as within SkyDemon or 'Weight & Balance Pro') – these are an →

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easy and convenient way of conducting calculations provided you adopt a cautious approach to the ‘rubbish in, rubbish out’ implications and conduct a sense-check just to make sure you haven’t entered something incorrectly. The LAA have published a number of excellent articles on [W&B](#), do give them a read, and the CAA have just published a [CluedUp GA Update](#) on this topic that also contains some useful food for thought.

On the theme of passenger flying, we get occasional reports of pressure being applied to non-instructor pilots when they carry out introductory flights for their clubs. Some people may not want a full flying lesson and would prefer to spend the money on having more time in the air as opposed to having less flying time with an instructor. The trouble is, they often think that they’ll be allowed to take the controls during such flights and, as CAA regulations make clear, that’s absolutely not allowed unless you’re an instructor pilot. The associated overall CAA guidance is [here](#), of which specific guidance to operators is [here](#), which explicitly states at Para 2.4 that: “An introductory flight should consist of an air tour of short duration. The PIC cannot hand over control of the aircraft to the passengers at any time unless he/she is the holder of a valid instructor’s certificate”. Whilst there’s nothing wrong with PPL holders benefitting from such free flying, take care not to allow yourself to start thinking that you’re an instructor ‘sky god’; there’s a very good reason why they spend so much time gaining that qualification, so don’t allow yourself to become an incident or accident waiting to happen.

Stay safe!

Steve Forward, Director Aviation

COMMENTS ON PREVIOUS FEEDBACKs

Comment No 1 – IMC Training

I read the latest GA FEEDBACK Edition 86 and have a couple of comments on IMC training. The 180° turn and the Emergency Descent Through Cloud procedures are in the Cessna 152/172 Pilot Operating Handbooks (POH), and I note that there are even instructors who are not familiar with these procedures. Read the book! I teach in Canada where five hours instrument training is required for the PPL, and this has caused trouble for EASA PPLs who have either not logged their ‘hood’ time, or do not have the requisite hours, meaning they have to fly additional dual hours to obtain a Transport Canada PPL. Every pilot has to have some dual from time to time, and one memorable flight review I did was for an Extra 300L pilot, (I had a Class 1 Aerobatic Instructor Rating). What did I do? I put the pilot under the hood, and gave him an instrument flying review. This was novel! But it was effective too as aerobatic pilots often shuttle to competitions with little current cross-country experience and can end up with weather below their practice.

“ CHIRP Response ”

All good points, especially the thought about including some instrument time during check flights for those who might not ordinarily think that they could be susceptible during transits in bad weather for aerobatics etc. The POH procedures referred to above are specific to a particular situation in a particular type, in this case Cessna 152/172 emergency operations in cloud following vacuum (main instrument) system failure. They may not be valid for your aircraft or situation, but it is always worth being familiar with the contents of your own aircraft’s POH.

Comment No 2 – Airspace Infringement

Regarding GA FEEDBACK Edition 86 Report No.1 – Class D Airspace Incursion. This pilot does not say whether or not he received an MOR from CAA. It’s usual now, with the high numbers of airspace incursions/year, for ATC to complete and report (MOR) all instances such as this.

“ CHIRP Response ”

We didn’t go into the details of MOR action etc for this report but chose to focus on how the pilot might have done better. It’s worth noting that it’s not optional for controllers to submit an MOR for airspace infringements, they have a legal requirement to do so. But an MOR is merely a vehicle for marking that an incident has occurred. It’s for the CAA to then decide what happens next, and their Airspace Infringement Coordination Group (AICG) reviews each case taking into account the severity and circumstances of each incident; this includes looking at the experience level of the infringer, whether it’s a repeat incident, and other factors ([CAP 1404](#) details the process).

On average, less than about 30-40% of infringements are taken further than a simple note to the suspected infringer that an MOR has been raised. For those that do go further, the CAA publish stats showing what outcomes have resulted. The latest stats for AICG decisions are for [December 2020](#) and show that, of the 39 incidents reviewed, 28 resulted in only an advisory letter or no further action – i.e. only about 30% went to a more formal outcome. This was similar to the figures for previous months. It’s easy to criticise the CAA, but they have a duty to look at infringements, as much as we pilots have a duty not to infringe. Many of these criticisms seem to focus on the initial contact after an infringement has been reported, and there’s no doubt that there will be some pilots who feel hard done





by because of a perceived inference of culpability when they are initially contacted by the CAA. It seems to CHIRP that the way this initial contact is made (as well as the subsequent dismissal of the case where the incident is not pursued), is a vital part of promoting a Just and Reporting Culture whereby pilots suspected of having made an infringement are encouraged to participate in the investigation on the understanding that we all make mistakes and errors at times. Flagrant or repeated breaches must then of course be dealt with appropriately, but even then there appears to be little scope in CAP1404 for formally appealing a decision through an independent body (although it is possible to be accompanied by an advocate when attending the hearing). CHIRP thinks that's a justifiable criticism of the process, albeit it's not clear what independent arbitration body might exist that would have the required authority, competency and airspace understanding to overrule a CAA decision. But there's probably scope for pursuing an appeals path as a route to improving scrutiny of the process, and CHIRP would encourage the CAA to explore the feasibility of this.

Comment No 3 – Weight & Balance

Your comments section in FEEDBACK Edition 86 about flying with passengers reminded me of an incident long before mobile phones or the internet. My friend Jim woke me up at 2am: could I help his relatives who had to return immediately from their holiday in the Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland? Travel by taxi and rail or air would take all next day, but my Arrow could bring them home from the nearby Strathallan airfield in less than an hour. Strathallan had closed some years before, but a phone call to its friendly parachute club brought permission and runway info, and I touched down on their 700-yd runway to find my passengers waiting.

I'll call them Paul and Paula, and they were the biggest people I had ever seen (though 40 years later, I daily see their equal). Not only were they grossly obese, they had two cases and a set of golf clubs complete with electric trolley. Hold that taxi, I said, for this little aeroplane won't lift that lot. They repacked their bare essentials into one case and sent the rest back to await collection from the hotel.

Paula filled most of the back seat. The lap-strap just about made it round her waist and I slid into my seat while Paul puffed his way in beside me, also taking his lap-strap to its limit. Full aft stick was possible only with his seat right back, which was good in that it took him closer to the CofG. Only then did it dawn on me that these very pleasant but huge people might exceed the Arrow's weight limit even with less than half tanks. But they were strapped in and Jim would be waiting to pick them up: anyway, what could I say – sorry, but you're too fat to fly? Uneasily, I taxied to the very end of the grass which, fortunately, was dry and not too long, selected half flap, opened up against the brakes, and off we went.

Gone was the Arrow's usual acceleration, though the engine dials were in the green. A third of the runway went by with no response from the elevator, then half before I felt the oleos lightening and held the Arrow down for maximum ground effect while pointing the nose at the fast-approaching fence as the ASI crept slowly round the dial – 65, 70, 75 until, at last, I could ease back the stick to clear the boundary by no more than a few feet. From CofA flight testing I knew my fully loaded Arrow would climb at almost 1000fpm, but that morning she could barely manage 800. Descent was no problem of course, and we arrived with the delicacy of a sack of spuds although I had approached at 95mph rather than my usual 85-90. As we helped Paula down from the wing I'll swear the poor Arrow joined

me in a sigh of relief, but maybe it was just the oleos extending. Paul and Paula were delighted with their first flight, and I didn't spoil it by telling them how close we had been to disaster. Indeed they were so pleased that they asked to go back to Strathallan two days later, but I'd had enough of heavy haulage and swiftly remembered the aircraft required a maintenance check.

Looking back almost 40 years, of course I should never have taken off with both of them. We must have been 200lb overweight on a fairly short runway and only a stiff breeze and my hundreds of hours on a very tolerant aeroplane had saved us from disaster. For the rest of my flying days I paid scrupulous attention to loading. Four decades on, one in four Britons is classed as obese, something 'light' aviation might bear in mind. In these PC times I dare make no judgment on anyone's physique, but maybe it's time for a set of scales to enter the pre-flight checklist?

“ CHIRP Response ”

Different times...but the message remains the same, flying with passengers requires careful consideration of risk management, briefing, and meticulous attention to weight & balance calculations. The latter is an oft neglected aspect of many routine flying operations too. When was the last time you took out the performance charts to check that you are in limits for the aircraft and to calculate your take-off run? History is littered with incidents and accidents where weight & balance or performance calculations have been neglected or erroneously calculated. Knee-pad 'gizzas', unofficial spreadsheets and rules of thumb are no substitute for getting the books out and properly calculating the figures, and if you're unsure how to do this, don't be shy, ask a friendly club instructor; they'll be delighted to show off their prowess with the graphs.





Reports

Report No.1 – GA1281 – QNH vs RPS

Report Text: Having read the issued advice from the CAA and attended a couple of GASCo evening presentations, I have attempted to take on board the advice NOT to use Regional Pressure Settings. Today, flying close to [military airfield], I called up and asked for a Basic Service (BS). Knowing the East Midlands QNH was 1020, on being given the Barnsley Regional Setting of 1013 I asked for the Local QNH and was told sharply 'SET BARNESLEY 1013'. Doing this would have given a 250ft error on my altitude and thus even using the 'Take 2'¹ recommendation I could easily have been at risk of infringing any airspace I was close to. How can GA pilots be expected to take on board this advice being given if the LARS units refuse to provide the information that we are told to ask them for. Lessons Learned: The CAA don't seem to have told ATC units what they are telling pilots.

GASCo Comment: GASCo were contacted and confirmed that using QNH vs RPS was the current mantra for GA pilots as recommended in the CAA's [Skyway Code](#) and [CAP493](#) Section 1 Chapter 7.

Skyway Code: The Skyway Code says: "Plan to obtain the most relevant and current QNH. The regional pressure setting (RPS) will tend to under-read compared to nearby aerodrome QNH settings, on which airspace dimensions are predicated. Using an accurate QNH reduces the risk of vertical infringements"... "Outside controlled airspace it is standard practice to give the regional pressure setting (RPS) when providing a service. You are not obliged to use this, and, particularly if there is a risk of vertically infringing nearby airspace, you should ask for and set the relevant local QNH. The RPS will be lower and therefore under-read your

actual altitude."... "You should generally use the most current and relevant QNH to your flight. Only use the RPS if there is no other accurate QNH available."

CAA Comment: The Air Traffic Services Unit (ATSU) and Air Traffic Controller highlighted in the report are military and thus outside the CAA's jurisdiction. That said, the military have access to CAA policy and are represented on stakeholder engagement groups in developing new or amended airspace and ATS policy. For civilian Air Traffic Control Officers, MATS Part 1 (CAP 493) Section 1 Chapter 7 states that:

"ATSUs are to have available the Regional Pressure Setting for the ASR in which they are situated and appropriate adjacent regions. These values are to be passed to pilots when requested or at the discretion of the controller. However, a pressure setting shall not be volunteered if a controller is uncertain that it is appropriate to the flight. Airspace below TMAs and CTAs listed in the UK AIP at ENR 1-7-2 does not form part of the ASR Regional Pressure Setting system. Instead, the QNH of an adjacent aerodrome should be used for aircraft at or below the Transition Altitude."

MAA Comment: Military Air Traffic Controllers at aerodrome ATSUs have access to the aerodrome QFE and QNH at that aerodrome, and the RPS at or adjacent to their unit's location; typically, they do not have access to the aerodrome QNH of adjacent aerodromes. Although MAA Regulatory Article 3302 (RA 3302) doesn't fully reflect the CAA guidance, military controllers are aware of the differences in altitude that the use of RPS versus QNH may generate, and the current RAs allow controllers and aircrew the option to operate on either the RPS or aerodrome QNH as appropriate. It is not clear why the controller specifically instructed the aircraft to operate on the RPS as opposed to the QNH, and there may have been numerous reasons for this that were not articulated to the pilot at the time. The MAA closely monitors all military flight safety issues, and have

not seen a trend pointing towards any such confusion, but will monitor this and take any action as required.

HQ Air Command Comment: Under a BS, a controller shouldn't be telling a pilot to set a pressure unless they need confirmation of the pressure being used for coordination purposes (and this should be done with the agreement of the pilot). Ultimately, the pilot should be operating on whatever pressure they feel is the most suitable for their flight and we cannot see any particular reason as to why the requested QNH was not given. What we have noticed is that RA 3302 doesn't fully reflect the CAA guidance and military controllers may not be aware that civilian pilots are told "You should generally use the most current and relevant QNH to your flight. Only use the RPS if there is no other accurate QNH available." The RA states that Aerodrome QNH can be used for "calculating the TL in the vicinity of an airfield, calculating the MSFL and as a landing datum" and that RPS "is used as an altitude pressure datum for Air Systems flying at or below the TA, away from aerodrome circuit and approach patterns." In the LARS context, using the RPS for LARS tracks is common practice for military controllers; however, pilots can ask for any pressure they want (as in a named pressure, Barnsley, Humber, QFE, Aerodrome QNH etc).

CHIRP Response Although military controllers are used to providing a LARS service to civilian aircraft when their capacity permits, they often more routinely control military traffic which regularly fly on RPS or QFE depending on whether they are transiting their airspace or marshalling for an approach to the airfield. Although they will likely be aware of the differences in civilian procedures, it is possible that the controller involved was coordinating the reporter with other military traffic and, perhaps under pressure, was more direct and forceful in their transmissions than desirable. But the point remains that they should not have directed that RPS was set rather than requesting the pilot do so, and only

¹ The 'Take 2' initiative refers to avoiding airspace by 200ft vertically and 2nm horizontally as described in GASCo Safety Evening literature and on their website at [link](#).



then if the pilot was safely able to in respect of nearby airspace. The CAA Airspace Infringement Working Group (AIWG) have in the past seen airspace infringements that have resulted from RPS being passed to pilots by ATCUs, and there are often occasions where the pressure difference between QNH and RPS is significant enough to cause problems near controlled airspace. The Skyway Code advice is clear: *“Outside controlled airspace it is standard practice to give the regional pressure setting (RPS) when providing a service. You are not obliged to use this, and, particularly if there is a risk of vertically infringing nearby airspace, you should ask for and set the relevant local QNH”*.

Report No.2 – GA1284 – Distraction in the descent (Level Bust)

Report Text: On the way to [Aerodrome], I experienced some radio problems with en route ATC intermittently cutting out. I reported this to them after the situation resolved itself and they informed me that they had had reports of their radio having problems, which they were having checked. The radio reception was then good until I was on the approach to [Aerodrome] when I was given radar vectors to the ILS. Because there had been a period during the COVID situation where I had not flown much, I decided to hand-fly the approach rather than use the autopilot so that I could make sure that my skills had not degraded too much; knowing that there was very little other traffic about, and almost no VFR traffic, I thought this would be a good time to hone my skills.

I was cleared to descend to 3,500ft on the approach and started a 500ft/min descent. However, as I was nearing the bottom of the descent I noticed that whilst I was listening to [Aerodrome] ATC they kept cutting out mid-sentence. Thinking that this could be either another radio fault like I had experienced previously or a problem with my comm radio, I tried re-selecting the frequency. This didn't help so I

selected their frequency on Box 2, where I found that I could hear them perfectly. At this time, I noticed that I had passed my cleared level of 3,500ft and was approaching 3,200ft. Still inside Class D airspace, I immediately instigated a climb back to 3,500ft just as ATC asked me to confirm my altitude. This descent too low was very quick and happened for just a few seconds.

I feel that I was distracted by the radio issue and, whilst being aware of the rate of descent, I did not properly monitor the bottom of the descent. Although I was aware of my position at all times and was thinking ahead and preparing for the next phase of the approach, a moment's distraction caused an overshoot of the level for a few seconds. The lesson I learned for the future is that when this radio issue happened, I should have used the resources available to me and selected an altitude capture at 3,500ft on the autopilot which was already set for [Aerodrome] QNH from their ATIS report. I should have done this before I tried to sort out the radio problem.

“CHIRP Response” CHIRP was grateful for this frank and honest report about the reporter's unfortunate experience during their approach to [Aerodrome]. Distraction is an ever-present hazard, especially when perhaps a little rusty and thinking of many other things to do with operating the aircraft as a result. It was most unfortunate that the radio chose that particular time to play up, and it's perfectly understandable that it drew the reporter's attention away from the task in hand to a certain extent. In that respect, although it's a bit trite to say, 'Aviate, Navigate, Communicate' remains a well-worn maxim that is as valid today as ever, especially in these strange times of reduced currency and limited flying due to the COVID-19 hiatus.

Report No.3 – GA1285 – GNSS/GPS Jamming

Report Text: Two recent SkyWise publications² list episodes of GNSS (GPS) jamming: one over a large area

covering some complex airspace (near Bristol and Cardiff), and the other more localised but covering a Class G Airspace / Danger Area boundary. The CAA suggests in a variety of publications that pilots use a moving map display as an aid to infringement prevention. The CAA also encourages the use of Electronic Conspicuity (EC) devices to aid traffic awareness. All the readily available EC devices require a GNSS (GPS) signal to function as does a moving map display. My reason for writing is to reiterate my belief that permitting this type of Jamming over such a wide area is not in the interests of aviation safety.

CAA Comment: Authorisation of GPS jamming is overseen by the military Joint Spectrum Authority (JSA), who have primacy in such matters. The forum by which jamming is agreed is through the Peacetime Controls of Non-Operational Jamming (PCNOJ), which encompasses an arbitration process that includes, inter alia, NATS, CAA, MOD, and Trinity House stakeholders. As one of the stakeholders of this group, CAA receives all notifications of jamming activities within the UK that impact the bands that we manage (predominantly for radar and other navigational aids) and for bands that we do not: for example, licence-exempt or ISM (Industrial, Scientific and Medical) bands such as 433MHz and 2.4GHz etc which are typically managed by Ofcom under a non-interference/no protection basis as described on the Ofcom website. CAA is aware of the implications of jamming for a variety of aviation stakeholders and that GPS is now becoming more central to GA rather than the somewhat niche capability it has been in previous years; large-scale jamming activities can also severely impact drone operations which fundamentally rely on the availability of GPS signals. As a result, CAA ensures that relevant and targeted notifications are generated to notify airspace users of potential interference or interruption. This is achieved through the form of both a NOTAM and a Skywise alert. Where required, an AIC or briefing sheet is also generated. The military

2 <http://skywise.caa.co.uk/jamming-trial-8-september-gore-cross/>



largely dictate jamming activities and, although debated within the PCNOJ, no jamming requests have been denied to date. However, the CAA has engaged with the military to be more specific and focused in the definition of any jamming activities, particularly with regard to time of day (preferably at night), duration, and location/area of coverage. The CAA is also working with the JSA to enable better consideration of the operational impact of GPS jamming. Unfortunately, the CAA sometimes only receives limited notice of jamming activities, and this had been particularly the case during the summer/autumn 2020 period where COVID-19 restrictions caused last-minute changes to plans. Although some limited information about GPS jamming is contained within CAP670, the CAA are in the process of preparing specific educational material about the reasons for, and processes by which, GPS jamming is decided, and this will be linked to improved notice of jamming activities to stakeholders through better communications channels. The CAA also hopes to be able to formulate better advice on the practical effects of GPS jamming on various systems, mindful that actual jamming effects are highly sensitive to local variations in GPS signals and aircraft orientation. Typically, what is notified represents a worst case scenario for impact. The CAA is also working with additional third parties, including the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) who have recently developed a requirement to test/develop a GPS jamming capability to ensure that a robust process is followed akin to the PCNOJ process.

“CHIRP Response” In order to cater for worst-case situations, notifications of GPS jamming are generally fairly broad in their defined areas despite the actual effects of the jamming often being quite localised; notifications also often allow for changes in jamming location within the nominated area rather than a description of blanket jamming per se. Importantly, jamming does not always imply total loss of the system as opposed to just degradation in accuracy, but this will depend on the type of GPS equipment and the jamming techniques being used so it would certainly be worth jamming

notifications clarifying what effect specific trials will have. Although it's true that GA should largely be operating see-and-avoid and not relying solely on GPS-based systems, they are increasingly becoming a key tool for navigation, approaches, airspace infringement avoidance and collision avoidance. CHIRP was heartened to hear that the CAA intended to formulate

‘I looked at the main fuel gauge to see that it was reading empty or thereabouts. Then I saw that the low fuel warning light was flashing rapidly!’

better advice regarding the safety implications when GPS jamming trials are conducted, and it's good news that they appear to be taking positive steps to engage with the military about better defining jamming activities. CHIRP would like to see much more information being made available as to what types of third-party aviation equipment may be impacted, the practical jamming effects that might be expected at a local level from an unreliable GPS signal, and whether jamming trials should be curtailed in poorer weather conditions when there may be more reliance on GPS equipment. In the latter case, although individual events might well “not exceed 2mins in duration and with no more than 5 events per hour”, 2mins might be quite a long time if you're relying on the GPS in poor-ish weather near controlled airspace. GPS jamming can also affect drone/UAS operations (as can the jamming of their control-link frequencies), and the CAA has engaged with the BMFA on these issues in order to inform that community (see [link](#)). Finally, GPS jamming information is published by NOTAM and SkyWise alerts, subscribe now to [SkyWise](#) to make sure you get the latest alerts.

Report No.4 – GA1286 – Combined Complacency

Report Text: My colleague and pilot for the first leg had arrived at the field before me, and had taken the aircraft out of the hangar. Upon enquiry they confirmed that the fuel and oil had been checked. Once in the cockpit, I was busy rigging up my [Electronic Conspicuity] device, with which I am not completely au fait. Power checks completed, we commenced our take-off run. Just before lift-off, I noticed that the electric fuel pump was off. I switched it on and, just as we were passing 200ft in the climb, I looked at the main fuel gauge to see that it was reading empty or thereabouts. Then I saw that the low fuel warning light was flashing rapidly! I switched to a full wing tank and things progressed as normal.

Lessons Learned: The Pilot monitoring must give undivided attention in the critical phases of flight. Focusing on electronic gadgetry must be avoided until in a quieter phase of the flight. If somebody else is doing the pre-flight items, make sure you replicate everything until you are happy. We could have had an engine failure at 200ft to 500ft and had to make a forced landing if we had not spotted our errors.

“CHIRP Response” This was another frank and honest report that CHIRP felt had valuable lessons for all regarding distractions and complacency (not least during the take-off phase), and the importance of using checklists to make sure that actions are not missed. Distractions and false assumptions are ever-present hazards in aviation, especially when you're relying on others to complete tasks as you share the workload of pre-flight activities. There are well-known risks to sharing checks and pre-flight preparations, a thorough pre-flight briefing will hopefully highlight any omissions but the benefit of ‘last-chance’ checks just before take-off should also be mentioned – e.g. “Fuel, Flaps, Instruments, Radio, Speeds, Trims” depending on what sort of aircraft you're in. In this case there were two good saves; firstly when the reporter noticed that the fuel pump was off, and secondly when he had the capacity to



check the fuel gauge as they climbed away and noticed it read zero. All-in-all, this is a timely reminder about the need to guard against distractions and assumptions. Although not the case in this incident, this will be especially pertinent when returning to flying after a long layoff as may be the case once COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

Report No.5 – GA1288 – Listening squawk fortuitously highlighted a potential collision

Report Text: We departed [Airport], which is flanked by East Midlands Class D airspace with its base 2500ft above the A/D and then dropping down to 1500ft QNH to the south. The section of Class D at 1500ft is fairly small and, when routing south, I, along with many other users of the airfield, generally fly below with a listening squawk at least. I must say that they are usually very accommodating to transits etc however, on this day, I was waiting to clear this area so I could directly contact [military airfield] for a MATZ service, so I elected to just stay on the listening squawk. I was distracted slightly by one of my passengers asking to adjust the squelch, which I did. Shortly after, the controller said “Traffic on the listening squawk 10 miles east of East Midlands tracking south/eastbound at 1200ft, traffic 12 o’clock similar level opposite direction”. I immediately looked ahead and initially couldn’t see any aircraft. By then enough time had passed and

there was no response from any other aircraft so I knew this was referring to me, I acknowledged the message and called “Traffic not in sight”. It was at this point I saw the aircraft at almost the same level. I descended immediately and called traffic in sight which passed directly overhead about 200ft/300ft above. It was an Agusta A109 helicopter. The helicopter was presumably not on frequency as there was no communication to/from it before, during or after the near miss. We continued the flight without further incident.

Lessons Learned: There would have been no harm in me asking for a Traffic Service at the very least or asking for a transit. This would have put me in a safer position when approaching the traffic. I also had two passengers onboard competent enough in aviation that I could have asked to keep a scan going for other traffic whilst I adjusted the squelch. There was no communication to/from the helicopter. Perhaps if it had been speaking to East Midlands then the risk of collision would have been further reduced; however, I can’t make too much of that because that is hypocritical of me! When flying in that area now I always try to assess how busy the controller is and then ask for either a Traffic Service or a transit. I would recommend using a listening squawk at the very, very least if near CAS. I viewed it as a bit of a trivial thing initially; however, this has proved to me how useful it really is. I would love to hear the other side of this story and find out what the A109 thought of the situation.

“CHIRP Response” There were a number of lessons in this incident which the reporter had identified themselves, not least the benefits of a Traffic Service and prioritised lookout. Most importantly though, although useful in this case, pilots should not rely on receiving Traffic Information when using a listening squawk; they are intended as a means for controllers to warn of any impending airspace issues but that doesn’t mean that controllers will be monitoring your aircraft minute-by-minute. Another lesson not mentioned was the value of doing something at an early stage to break the geometry of a conflict as soon as you are aware of it rather than waiting to see the other aircraft first. Once they had figured out it was them, a track deviation before calling ATC would have added valuable separation even before the descent. Once the other aircraft had passed, a call to ATC that an Airprox had occurred would also have been appropriate as soon as possible so that the controller could then save any information and recordings, and also potentially highlight to the other aircraft that an incident has occurred to them if they were unaware. Finally, Airprox investigations are very much the business of the UK Airprox Board and should be reported directly to them (even if reported to ATC on frequency) so that they can start tracing action, investigations and the timely retention of radar recordings etc. Reports can be submitted to the UK Airprox Board online at [link](#).

CHIRP

Aviation and Maritime Confidential Incident Reporting

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