

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

The Skyranger and FWP 149 pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard¹. An aircraft operated on or in the vicinity of an aerodrome shall conform with or avoid the pattern of traffic formed by other aircraft in operation². The Skyranger did not generate a secondary radar track because an SSR transponder was not fitted. A primary track was also not generated in the area of CPA, presumably due to the low altitude and RCS of the Skyranger.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a Skyranger microlight and a Piaggio FW 149 flew into proximity at about 1655 on Wednesday 15th July 2015. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC, both using SAFETYCOM.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted only of reports from both pilots.

The Board members first considered the pilots' actions and noted that Ashcroft airfield Tower was not manned at the time. Members commented that this placed the onus for visual acquisition of other aircraft operating on or in the vicinity of the aerodrome entirely with the pilots. The Board noted that the Skyranger crew were engaged in a timed climb profile, with the associated potential to be 'heads-in' whilst reading instruments and taking notes. Members felt that their report of seeing the FWP149 '... cross their flight path from right to left ...' indicated a late sighting of the other aircraft, no doubt hindered by the high workload and nose-high attitude of the Skyranger in the climb. For his part, the FWP149 pilot reported seeing the Skyranger at a range of 300m, which members agreed was also a late sighting, possibly hindered by the surmised near-constant bearing of the Skyranger and potential lack of contrast against the ground as it climbed towards the FWP149.

Members discussed the responsibilities of each pilot and agreed that it was for the joining FWP149 pilot to integrate with aircraft which were already in the circuit at Ashcroft. He reported that he had planned to 'join crosswind' for RW27, and members wondered whether this was the same as conducting a 'crosswind join', which implied flying over the upwind threshold of the runway. Furthermore, members commented that the fact that the Skyranger was climbing out from RW31 whilst the FWP149 pilot was joining for RW27 indicated the potential for complexity at uncontrolled airfields such as Ashcroft, which, in turn, indicated the need to adhere to strict RT discipline and a 'defensive' method of joining in order to mitigate against the threat of conflict.

Although members agreed that the FWP149 pilot was no doubt looking out, his choice of joining crosswind, tracking to the west of the airfield, had not placed him in the best position to gain SA on circuit traffic before attempting to integrate with it. Some members commented that his position 2nm to the west of the airfield had in fact inevitably placed him in a position of conflict with any traffic he did not see. The Board noted that previous similar Airprox had resulted in members agreeing that an overhead join afforded the best chance of integrating successfully with existing circuit traffic, especially when there was no ATC and an associated risk of missing radio calls from those already established within the circuit (or which may not even have radios and would therefore not make any calls). In this case, although the Board agreed that the FWP149 pilot had not integrated effectively, members noted that both pilots had reported taking timely and effective avoiding action and so they assessed that in the event, there was no actual risk of collision.

¹ SERA.3205 Proximity.

² SERA.3225 Operation on and in the Vicinity of an Aerodrome.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: During his join, the FWP149 pilot did not integrate effectively with the Skyranger.

Degree of Risk: C.