



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

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AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

What you see isn't necessarily what you get...



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See and Avoid isn't only about seeing, there might be a bit more to it

You might wonder why I've talked in a few recent Insight articles about many of the tools available to reduce the likelihood of an Airprox, but I have seldom mentioned the 'See and Avoid' barrier.

The answer to that is because we all know that lookout is, on the whole, an absolutely vital part of our daily flying.

Much of what I have talked about (pre-flight planning, communications, use of electronic conspicuity (EC) equipment etc) contributes to situational awareness which, in turn, can inform us of where to direct our lookout.

But 'seeing' is only half of the story – once a potential threat is sighted, a pilot needs to assimilate what the other aircraft is doing and then take appropriate action to satisfy the 'avoid' element of the See and Avoid barrier.

This month's Airprox for discussion is report **2025244**, which occurred about four miles east of Gransden Lodge gliding site and six to seven miles west-southwest of Cambridge airport. It involved a Cirrus SR22 on an IFR instructional flight and an Extra EA300 conducting aerobatics.

The Cirrus pilot had secured a Traffic Service from Cambridge Radar, but this was reduced by the controller due to 'limited surveillance performance' (in other words, the radar was not performing as well as might have been expected). Meanwhile, the Extra pilot wasn't receiving any kind of service from

an ATS provider, but was listening on the Fowlmere Traffic frequency.

Only the Cirrus was fitted with additional electronic conspicuity equipment – in this case a TAS capable of warning of proximate traffic equipped with an operational transponder – and both aircraft were transponder-equipped.

The Cambridge controller passed Traffic Information on the Extra to the Cirrus pilot when it was in their one o'clock, passing right-to-left and at a range of about three miles, and also mentioned that it was conducting aerobatics (the controller knew this due to the 7004 squawk that the Extra pilot had selected).

The Cirrus pilot called visual with the Extra at this point, however the Extra pilot entered a loop when their aircraft was in the Cirrus pilot's 11 o'clock (having not previously seen the Cirrus) and only spotted the aircraft after going over the top of the loop. The actual separation between the aircraft was recorded as 0ft vertically and about 0.1 miles horizontally.

The first thing I'd like to draw attention to here is one of the notes printed on all CAA VFR charts, namely '*Pilots are strongly recommended to contact aerodrome ATSU before flying within 10nm of any aerodrome marked with instrument approach feathers...'*

This Airprox took place only six to seven miles away from Cambridge airport, which is marked with instrument approach feathers. The note goes on to say '*...Note that the feathers only align with the main instrument*

runway. There may also be approaches to other runways as well...'

Although Cambridge only has one instrument runway, the point here is that it isn't just about avoiding the feathers – the recommendation is 'within 10nm of [the] aerodrome'. Now, it's only a recommendation, and pilots are free to follow that recommendation or not, but in this case had the Extra pilot been talking to the Cambridge controller then it's likely that they would have been warned about the approaching Cirrus before they entered their aerobatic manoeuvre.

But I did say at the start of this article that I wanted to talk about the 'See and Avoid' barrier, so let's have a look at how that performed.

For it to work, this barrier needs only one of the pilots involved to firstly see the other aircraft and then to avoid it.

Of course, much depends on when the other aircraft is sighted – if it's seen early enough then it's likely that all that's needed is a change of heading or altitude to either preserve or increase the separation. Conversely, if it's sighted very late then it is likely that a much more positive and/or urgent manoeuvre will be required.

In this case, the Cirrus pilot responded to the controller's information with a 'traffic in sight' call, indicating that they had seen the Extra. At this point, the Cirrus pilot estimated

that their current track and altitude would take them safely behind the Extra – a perfectly reasonable strategy when a pilot encounters another aircraft crossing their nose.

But the crucial piece of information in this case was that the Extra was conducting aerobatics, which made its heading and altitude unpredictable, so the pilot needed to be especially cautious.

It isn't just about the rules or our perception of which rules apply (for instance, [\(UK\) SERA.3210](#) Right-of-way or [\(UK\) SERA.3205](#) Proximity), it's also about what the most pragmatic course of action is.

An aircraft performing aerobatics – whether it's in a manoeuvre at the time or not – is going to be unpredictable, so the prudent thing to do is to give it as wide a berth as possible. This might not always be compatible with what we are trying to achieve, but it's usually better to be safe than sorry.

Then there's also the question of whether or not the other pilot has sighted our aircraft. Remember that the rules relating to the avoidance of aerial collisions are predicated on the assumption that the pilot that has to give way has knowledge of the presence of the other aircraft.

That doesn't have to mean that they have sighted it – there's nothing preventing a pilot taking action based on their situational awareness (in fact, the UK Airprox Board positively encourages that) – but since we are talking about See and Avoid then we'll concentrate on that.

We know the human eye is fallible and that we won't see everything 'out there', so why should we assume that the other pilot has seen our aircraft? The lesson here is to fly defensively – don't rely on the other pilot to avoid your aircraft and always be ready to take action to preserve or increase separation in any situation.

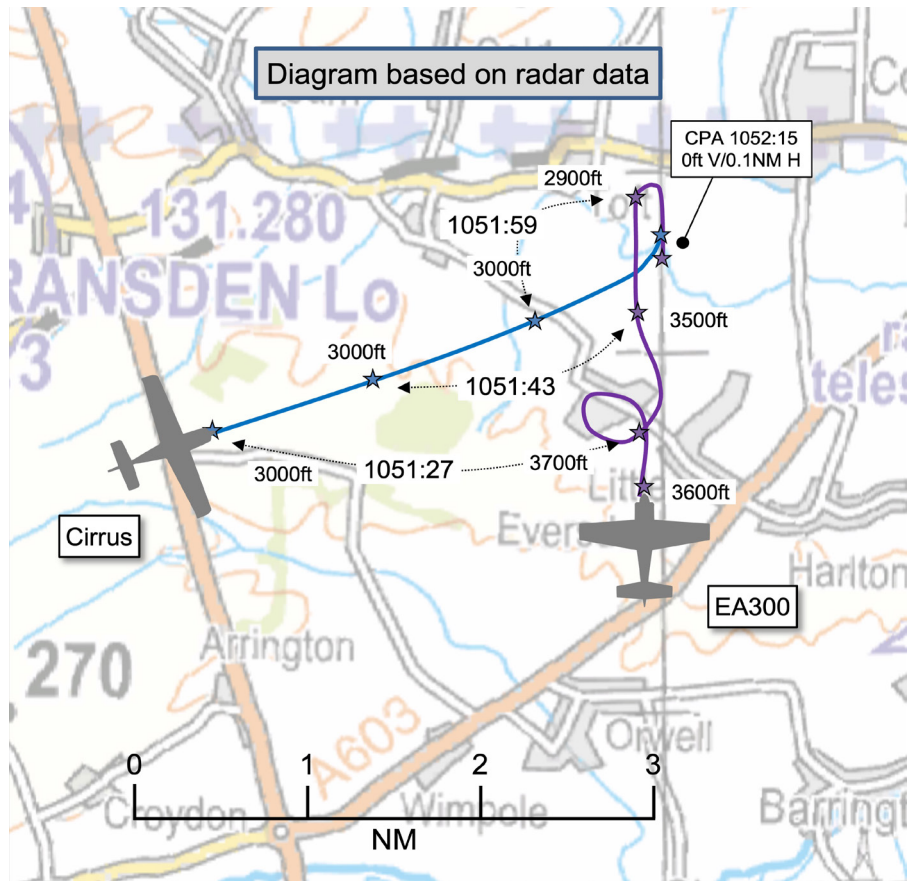
Finally, be confident that any action you take will be sufficient to maintain the safety of all the aircraft involved.

BOARD SUMMARY

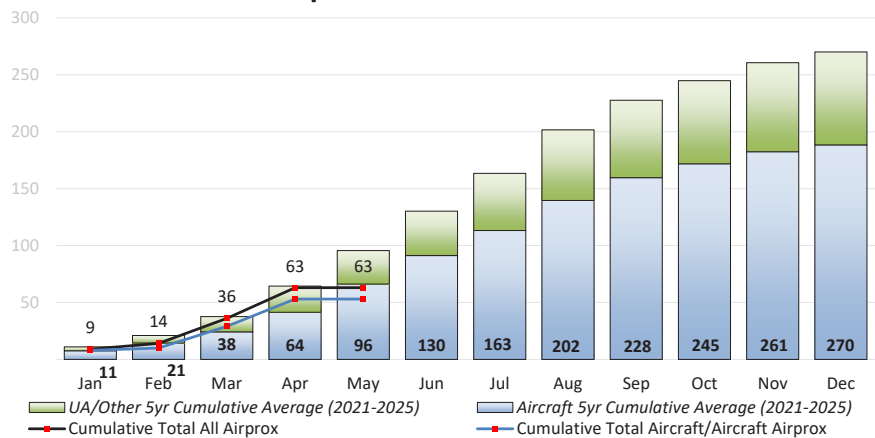
This month, the Board evaluated 19 Airprox, including four UA/Other events, all of which were reported by the piloted aircraft. Of the 15 full evaluations, five were classified as risk-bearing – all as Category B.

The Board also made one Safety Recommendation at the April meeting following an Airprox in Northern Ireland between an R44 helicopter conducting a pipeline survey and an untraced microlight.

During the discussion, it became obvious that a local microlight site publishes information on its website that doesn't



2026 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution



match what is within the UK AIP and other popular flight guides, so the Board made a recommendation to that site to ensure that its published information is coherent – including the name of the site.

The graphic above shows that it continues to be a bit of a slow start to the year in terms of reported Airprox. Although the first couple of months of the year had fewer reports than we would usually expect, April appears to have bucked that trend, and we are now seeing a more usual level of reporting for the first quarter.

With improving weather now hopefully settling in, I expect flying rates to increase with an associated uptick in the level of Airprox reporting.

Naturally, as the new season really gets underway, we are all a little 'rusty' from not having flown much, if at all, over the winter. We should all be mindful that we will probably be a bit slower at everything, including recognising and processing potential conflicts while airborne, so do take some time to look back at a few of these Insight articles and ask yourself what you can do to be better prepared to deal with (or avoid) an Airprox situation.

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