AIR PROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE　　　　　January 2026

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Straight-in…to trouble?

If there's traffic and you don't spot it you could end up in a very uncomfortable place

Photo for illustrative purposes :
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Circuit integration issues keep cropping up and I've written about them a number of times, yet they continue to be an issue — more than a quarter of the cases (6 out of 22) assessed this January by the Airprox Board involved aircraft joining the circuit.

Two of these six concerned aircraft joining from a long final and coming into close proximity with circuit traffic either on base leg or on Final, so I thought it timely to revisit the subject.

The one I have chosen this month is a particularly close encounter – **Airprox 2025175** — and very similar to one that occurred in July 2024.

It happened on approach to RW24 at Leeds East airfield and involved two Cessna 152s – one established in the circuit and one joining from a long final. Both pilots were in receipt of an Air/Ground Communication Service from Fenton Radio, but only the Cessna arriving on a long final was equipped with any form of additional electronic conspicuity equipment (which didn't detect the circuit traffic).

The pilot of the joining Cessna was aware there was circuit traffic, having monitored the frequency for a while, and also knew that overhead joins were not permitted due to an aerobatics competition. However, the pilot of the Cessna already in the circuit reported they did not hear any calls from the other pilot until their 'Final' call.

Ultimately, the Cessna in the circuit passed in front of the aircraft on the straight-in approach and, shortly afterwards, the pilot of the aircraft on the straight-in approach caught sight of the other aircraft and initiated a go-around. Separation between the two at their closest point of approach (CPA) was negligible and entirely fortuitous –neither pilot had seen the other aircraft prior to the CPA.

The first thing to note here is that Leeds East is served by an Air/Ground Communication Service, so deconfliction in the circuit and landing order is entirely down to the pilots to sort out.

Now that might sound preferable to many pilots(!), but this is where uncertainty and assumption tend to creep in. So how do we maximise our chances of integrating into the pattern correctly and, above all, safely?

Situational awareness is key to this – not just our own, but also that of other pilots already in the circuit or arriving and departing. This makes transmitting accurate positional calls and intentions absolutely vital. All pilots build a mental model of the position of other traffic from these calls, primarily so they know where to look, but also so they have an idea of whether that traffic is a factor for them.

Take the example I have chosen here – the pilot of the joining aircraft did know there was traffic in the circuit, but the pilot of the circuit traffic had not heard the 'Long Final' call from the pilot of the joining aircraft. This meant the pilot of the circuit traffic was, essentially, blissfully unaware that there might have been conflicting traffic as they turned from base leg onto final.

Of course, we are all taught to have a good look up the final approach before turning, but if we don't expect there to be anything there, are we likely to notice if there is another aircraft or are we just going to confirm our expectations?

As for the pilot of the joining aircraft, while they had been aware of the circuit traffic, they reported that they hadn't heard any calls for a while and wondered if it was still there.

So, what to do? Continue on the basis that you will see it if it is there? This course of action seems sensible but, as we can see in this Airprox (and other similar encounters) if the traffic is there and we don't spot it then we could end up in a very uncomfortable place.

Something to consider is asking for the position of the traffic – the AGO can pass the last reported position, but the other pilot can also respond with an updated position call.

At this point it's worth referring briefly to which calls in the circuit *should* be made

(and where), and which *could* be made to aid everyone's situational awareness. The CAA's Safety Sense Leaflet No 22 (Radiotelephony) provides, on page 8, some useful guidance as to which calls are expected to be made and which calls could be added to aid the situational awareness of others.

'Downwind' and 'Final' are the minimum, and the leaflet suggests that 'Late Downwind' and 'Base' could be added if necessary. It would probably have helped the pilot of the joining aircraft if the pilot of the circuit traffic had called 'Base', but let's remember that the pilot of the Cessna in the circuit had no idea that there was an aircraft on final approach because they had not heard the 'Long Final' call. In this case, the absence of any call didn't mean the absence of an aircraft, so the only way for the pilot of the arriving aircraft to fully understand the situation was for them to have asked for an updated position on the circuit traffic.
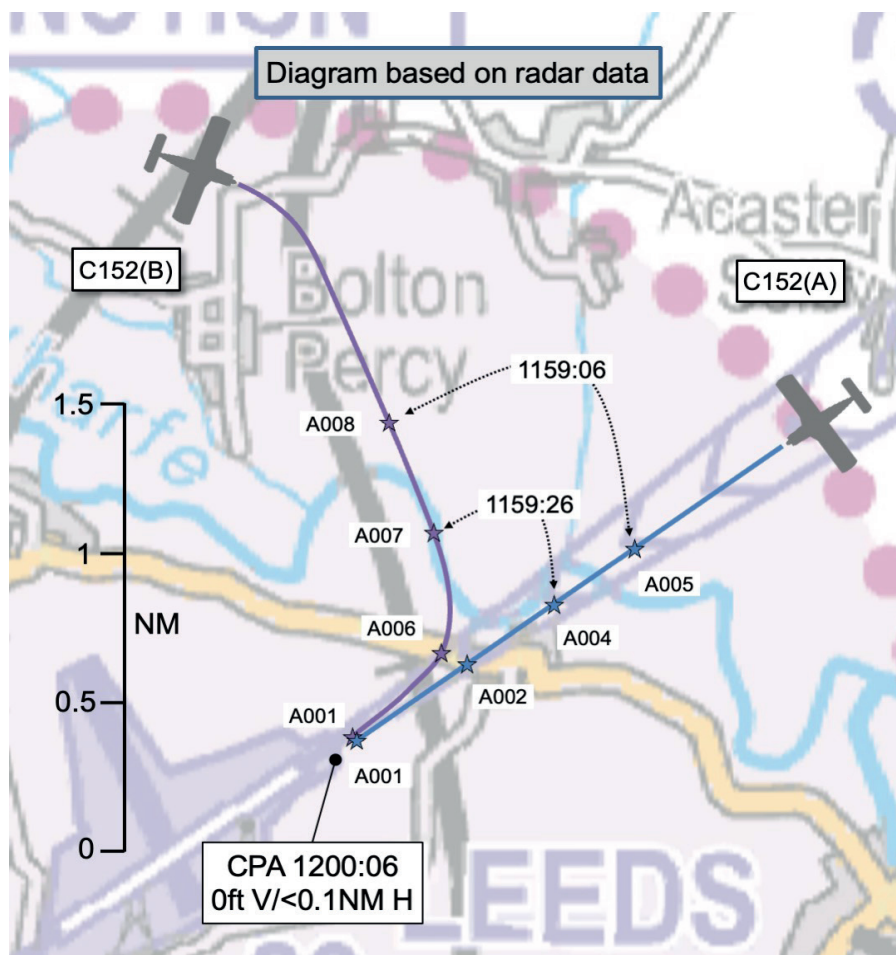
It's also important to be accurate with these position calls. The 'Downwind' call should be made abeam the upwind threshold; if you can't get that call in due to RT loading or for any other reason, the 'Late Downwind' call should be made any time after passing the approach end of the runway. Why is this important? Because a call of 'Late Downwind' will indicate much closer proximity to Base Leg and Final than a 'Downwind' call, thus providing other pilots with much greater awareness of the actual traffic positions.

A final thought – circuit integration is all about awareness and anticipation, ***not necessarily*** about sighting the other aircraft and fitting in with what you can see. When joining a circuit, always fly defensively and as if there is traffic that you don't know about or haven't seen. If in doubt, discontinue the approach and get into a position where you can get a better idea of what is going on (for example, in the overhead).
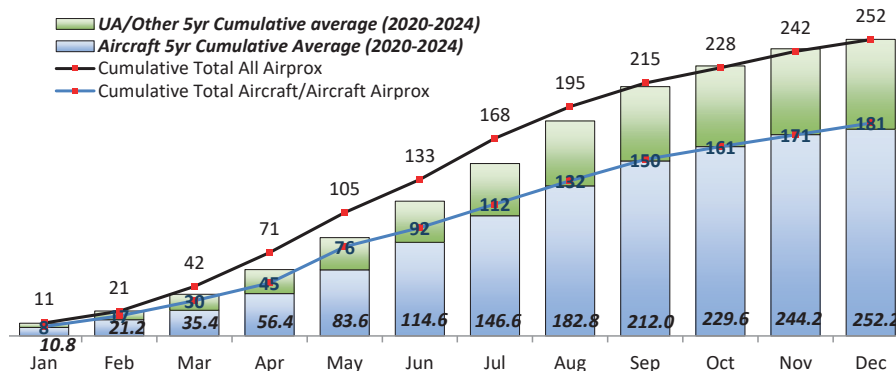
BOARD SUMMARY

This month, the Board evaluated 22 Airprox, including two UA/Other events, both of which were reported by the RPAS operator. Of the 22 full evaluations, eight were classified as risk-bearing – two as category A and six as category B.

The Board did not make any Safety Recommendations at January's meeting, but did highlight the importance of maintaining situational awareness in and around the circuit, including ensuring that other pilots are kept informed of your intentions and/or any deviations from what you have announced. This enables everyone to build

Diagram based on radar data

C152(B)   C152(A)

1159:06
A008

1159:26
A007
A005
A006   A004
A002
A001   A001

CPA 1200:06
0ft V/<0.1NM H

2025 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution

- UA/Other 5yr Cumulative average (2020-2024)
- Aircraft 5yr Cumulative Average (2020-2024)
- Cumulative Total All Airprox
- Cumulative Total Aircraft/Aircraft Airprox

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
All Airprox	11	21	42	71	105	133	168	195	215	228	242	252
Aircraft	8	21.2	30	45	76	92	112	132	150	161	171	181
Aircraft avg	10.8	21.2	35.4	56.4	83.6	114.6	146.6	182.8	212.0	229.6	244.2	252.2

a more accurate mental picture of where to find other aircraft in the circuit.

The graphic above should be the final numbers for 2025, but it is still possible that an Airprox will be reported to us a number of weeks after the actual event.

Last year saw a significant reduction in total reports (the top curve) and aircraft-to-aircraft events (the lower curve) from 2024, representing an overall reduction of around 15%. There are many factors that influence reporting, but I am encouraged by this reduction, and long may it continue!

Next month we'll be issuing the annual 'Airprox Digest' magazine, and we'll be taking a closer look at the barriers to Airprox (and,

therefore, mid-air collision) and where some of the weaknesses lie.

In particular, we'll consider where the vast majority of Airprox occur and why some of the barriers don't perform as well as we might hope. In the meantime, please do visit our website (https://www.airproxboard.org.uk/home/) and take a look at what's available and where you might be able to learn from others' experiences.

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