

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012023

Date/Time: 26 Feb 2012 1155Z (Sunday)

Position: 5414N 00113W (Sutton Bank GLS - elev 920ft)

Airspace: London FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Falke 25 MG Unknown LA

Operator: Civ Club Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 300ft NK
aal

Weather: VMC CLBC NK

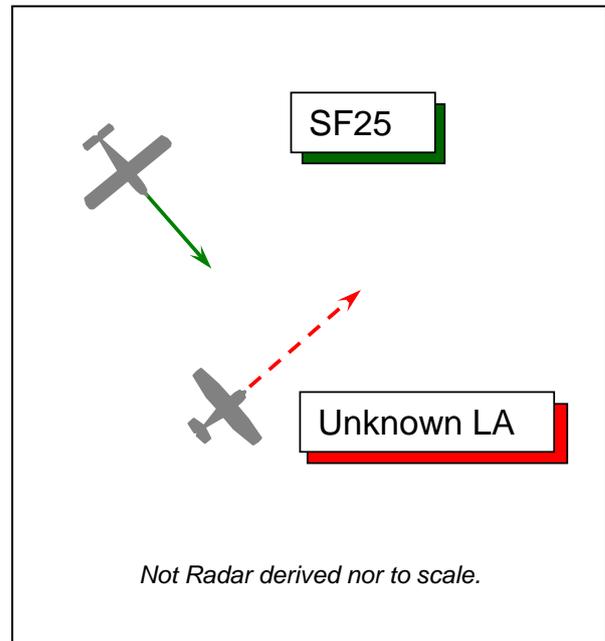
Visibility: 4nm NK

Reported Separation:

35ft V/80m H NK

Recorded Separation:

Not recorded



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE FALKE SF25 SELF LAUNCHING MOTOR GLIDER (SF25 MG) PILOT reports he was airborne to establish the prevailing cloud base for the club's duty officer-in-charge of gliding operations, but also to practise bad weather ccts at 500ft QFE. He was in communication with Sutton Bank on the A/G Station frequency of 129.975MHz. SSR is fitted, but selected 'off' and the Mode C was unserviceable. His SF25 MG is coloured green and white; a HISL is not fitted.

After take-off from RW24 at Sutton Bank glider launching site (GLS), once clear of the escarpment, he commenced a climbing turn to the L onto the cross-wind leg heading 150° at 60kt climbing through 300ft aal (about 1220ft ALT), some 300ft clear beneath the overcast cloud with an in-flight visibility of 4nm. At this point [he did not specify the sighting distance] an unknown high-wing single-engine light ac (LA) flew from R to L about 80m ahead and 35ft above him, so to avoid it he lowered his MG's nose. When the unknown LA (coloured red and white) had passed, he continued his climb and turned LH downwind for RW24 at reduced speed in order to monitor the LA's flight path. The LA flew along RW02 in a gentle climb until it reached the base of cloud O/H the threshold of RW20, whereupon it turned R through about 160°. He called the pilot of the unknown LA on the Sutton Bank A/G frequency requesting his intentions but received no reply before it departed from the vicinity heading SE'ly.

He assessed the Risk as 'medium' but his main concern in reporting this Airprox is that without prior radio contact the pilot of the unknown LA flew across the downwind leg and departed via the final leg of a prominent glider launching site, ignoring standard cct joining procedures. It was fortunate that the 3 gliders awaiting aerotows were precluded from launching by the low cloud base. However, a group of four ac comprising one microlight and three flexwings had landed at the site shortly before the incident, having first established radio contact, stated their intentions and followed standard cct joining procedures. Had their arrival coincided with the other ac's radio silent transit the consequences could have been more serious.

Fortunately winch-launching operations, (the wind being W'ly) were not possible due to the low cloud base O/H the site. He reported the Airprox to the club safety officer on landing.

THE GLIDING CLUB'S FLYING DIRECTOR commented that the 'big sky' theory saved the day again. Sutton Bank is a busy glider launching site without an ATZ. The pilot of the other ac displayed poor airmanship and lack of common sense during this incident.

UKAB Note (1): The UK AIP at ENR 5-5-1-6 promulgates the glider launching site at Sutton Bank as active from Sunrise to Sunset, for aerotows and winch launches to 2000ft above the site elevation of 920ft amsl.

UKAB Note (2): A primary contact that might be the SF25 MG 'pops up' WSW of the reported Airprox position for 3 sweeps and is last shown heading ESE before fading. The Radar Analysis Cell (RAC) at LATCC (Mil) detected 4 potential ac tracks on the Swanwick radar recording that might be the reported ac, however, none of these tracks were displayed consistently throughout the period of the Airprox. One of the recorded intermittent tracks is a microlight (ML) resembling the description of the high-wing Cessna-type monoplane reported by the Falke SF25 MG pilot. This white high-wing ML with the registration written in red down each side departed from Bagby A/D to the SE and was initially perceived to be the reported ac. However, subsequent to receipt of the ML pilot's comprehensive report and analysis of the attached GPS flight data, comparison with the recorded radar data revealed that this ML was not the reported ac. Further attempts to trace the reported ac have subsequently proved fruitless; consequently, the identity of the reported ac remains unknown.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included a report from the SF25 MG pilot and radar video recordings.

It was unfortunate that despite the best efforts of the RAC, the reported LA remains untraced. While the SF25 MG pilot's report was comprehensive, it was difficult for the Board to arrive at meaningful conclusions on the Cause and Risk with just one pilot's report and only very limited radar data that did not illustrate the relative geometry and minimum separation. Some Members perceived that there was insufficient information available; nonetheless, the overwhelming majority considered that this Airprox could be assessed on the basis of the SF25 MG pilot's report alone.

It was not clear if the reported LA pilot was aware that he had overflown Sutton Bank GLS or seen the SF25 MG. If he had been aware of the GLS beforehand, then this Airprox illustrated poor airmanship on the part of the reported LA pilot as he would not necessarily be aware that winch launching had been curtailed because of the prevailing weather. The danger of over flying an active GLS below the maximum promulgated height of the winch cable was self-evident and pilots should plan their flights to ensure that they give active glider launching sites as wide a berth as feasible. Members understood the SF25 MG pilot's main concern that the reported LA pilot had flown through the cct area of the GLS without prior radio contact. If he had strayed off his planned track, or was lost, then a call on the RT (if the ac was radio equipped) could have alerted the GLS operator and other pilots operating in the vicinity to his presence. However, such advice was predicated on foreknowledge of the RT frequency in use at the specific GLS and Members were not confident that these were well known to GA pilots. Whilst the frequency for Sutton Bank (129.975 MHz) could be easily found on their website - <http://www.ygc.co.uk/oursite.php>— and is shared with nearby Rufforth, those in use by the other various GLSs in the UK might not be so easy to determine. The question of the promulgation of GLS frequencies was discussed further and the GA gliding Member advised that there are only a limited number of frequencies that are commonly used for gliding within the UK and he helpfully agreed to provide them.

On the limited information available, however, the Board could only conclude that this Airprox had resulted because the untraced light aircraft pilot flew over an active GLS (below the maximum promulgated height of the winch cable) and into conflict with the Falke SF25 MG.

Turning to the inherent Risk, there was no reason to doubt the veracity of the SF25 MG pilot's report where he had estimated the minimum separation at about 80m when the unknown LA flew from R to L ahead and 35ft above him. Whilst these distances suggested to some Members that safety had

been compromised, it was evident that the SF25 MG pilot had time to lower his ac's nose to avoid the unknown LA, which did not suggest to other Members that robust avoiding action had been necessary. The Board was fairly evenly divided on this point and so on the basis of the limited information available and following a vote, it was concluded by a majority that there was no actual Risk of collision.

[Post meeting Note: Gliding in the UK is allocated a small number of simplex frequencies at 25KHz spacing which are available for use by all glider pilots and all gliding sites throughout the UK. The frequencies below are assigned on a shared basis and are not afforded any protection against mutual interference.

129.900MHz Ground to ground safety management

129.975MHz Common Field Frequency. Safety and sporting use within 10nm and 3,000' of a gliding airfield

130.100MHz Gliding safety/sporting use

130.125MHz Gliding safety/sporting use

130.400MHz Gliding safety/sporting use

When using Common frequencies, it is necessary to correctly address the airfield concerned as other sites in the area could answer if not.]

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The untraced light aircraft flew over an active glider launching site (below the maximum promulgated height of the winch cable) and into conflict with the Falke SF25 MG.

Degree of Risk: C.