

AIRPROX REPORT No 2014117

Date/Time: 22 Jul 2014 1416Z

Position: 5129N 00032W
(London Heathrow)

Airspace: London CTR (Class: A)

Aircraft 1 Aircraft 2

Type: A320 Unidentified
model helicopter

Operator: CAT Unknown

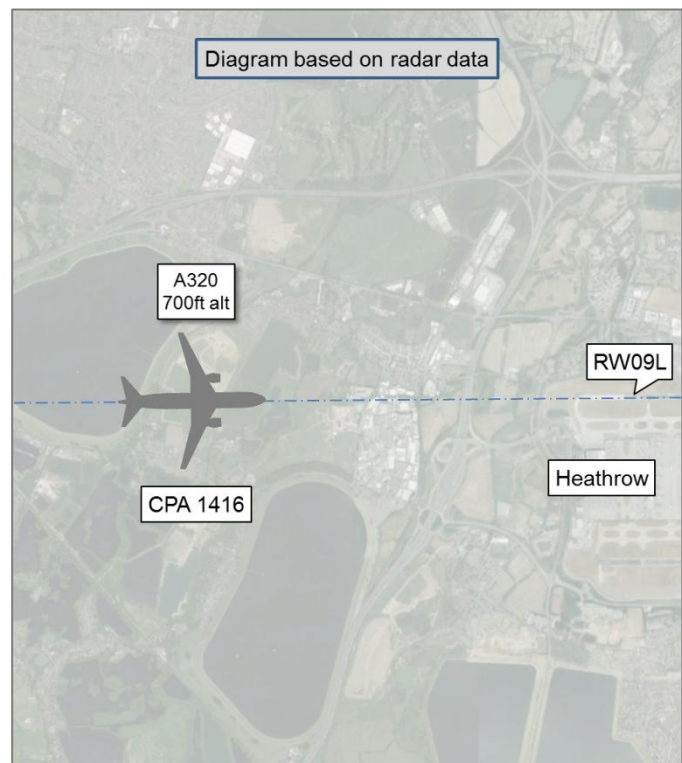
Alt/FL: 700ft
QNH (NK hPa)

Conditions: VMC

Visibility: NK

Reported Separation:
20ft V/0m H

Recorded Separation:
NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE A320 PILOT reports being on short final to land on RW09L at Heathrow. The blue and white aircraft had external lights selected on, as was the SSR transponder with Modes A, C and S. The aircraft was fitted with TCAS II. The pilot was operating under IFR, in VMC; the Air Traffic Service was not reported¹. He stated that a small black object was seen to the left of the aircraft as they passed 700ft in the descent, which passed about 20ft over the wing. It appeared to be a small radio-controlled helicopter. The object did not strike his aircraft and he made a normal landing but it was a distraction during a critical phase of flight. ATC was informed of the object's presence and following aircraft were notified.

THE MODEL OPERATOR: Despite extensive tracing action and the proactive assistance of local model-flying-club members, it was not possible to trace the operator of the model aircraft in question.

Factual Background

The weather at Heathrow was recorded as follows:

METAR EGLL 221420Z 04007KT 340V070 9999 FEW048 27/14 Q1022 NOSIG

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

The Air Navigation Order 2009 (as amended), Article 138² states:

'A person must not recklessly or negligently cause or permit an aircraft to endanger any person or property.'

¹ The pilot was in receipt of an Aerodrome Control Service from Heathrow Tower.

² Article 253 of the ANO details which Articles apply to small unmanned aircraft. Article 255 defines 'small unmanned aircraft'. The ANO is available to view at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk>.

Article 166, paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 state:

'(2) The person in charge of a small unmanned aircraft may only fly the aircraft if reasonably satisfied that the flight can safely be made.

(3) The person in charge of a small unmanned aircraft must maintain direct, unaided visual contact with the aircraft sufficient to monitor its flight path in relation to other aircraft, persons, vehicles, vessels and structures for the purpose of avoiding collisions.'

(4) The person in charge of a small unmanned aircraft which has a mass of more than 7kg excluding its fuel but including any articles or equipment installed in or attached to the aircraft at the commencement of its flight, must not fly the aircraft

(a) in Class A, C, D or E airspace unless the permission of the appropriate air traffic control unit has been obtained;

(b) within an aerodrome traffic zone ...; or

(c) at a height of more than 400 feet above the surface unless it is flying in airspace described in sub-paragraph (a) or (b) and in accordance with the requirements for that airspace.'

Summary

An Airprox was reported when an Airbus A320 and a suspected radio controlled model helicopter came into proximity at 1416 on Tuesday 22nd July 2014. The A320 pilot was operating under IFR in VMC, in receipt of an Aerodrome Control Service from Heathrow Tower.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of a report from the A320 pilot and radar photographs/video recordings. The model helicopter did not appear on radar and, from the A320 pilot's description, was probably of a size that could not be considered likely to do so.

The Board members were satisfied that the A320 crew had seen a model helicopter and were of the unanimous opinion that the operator of the model had chosen to fly it in an entirely inappropriate location. That the dangers associated with flying such a model in close proximity to a Commercial Air Transport aircraft in the final stages of landing were not self-evident was a cause for considerable concern. Members reiterated that anyone operating an air vehicle, of whatever kind, had to do so with due consideration for regulation and for other airspace users, and preferably under the auspices of an established association or club. The Board were heartened to hear of work being undertaken by the CAA to bring the issue of remotely piloted aircraft operations to wider public attention, an example being the recent issue of CAP1202³, giving advice for the conduct of such operations. The UKAB Secretariat also pointed out that a link to 'CAA UAS/UAV Information and Guidance' could be found on the Airprox Board website⁴.

The Board concluded that the cause of the Airprox was that the suspected model helicopter had been flown into conflict with the A320, and that the risk amounted to a situation that had stopped just short of an actual collision where separation had been reduced to the minimum.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A suspected model aircraft was flown into conflict with the A320.

Degree of Risk: A.

ERC Score⁵: 1.

³ <http://www.caa.co.uk/docs/1995/CAP%201202UAVsafetyrules.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.airproxboard.org.uk/>

⁵ Although the Event Risk Classification (ERC) trial had been formally terminated for future development at the time of the Board, for data continuity and consistency purposes, Director UKAB and the UKAB Secretariat provided a shadow assessment of ERC.