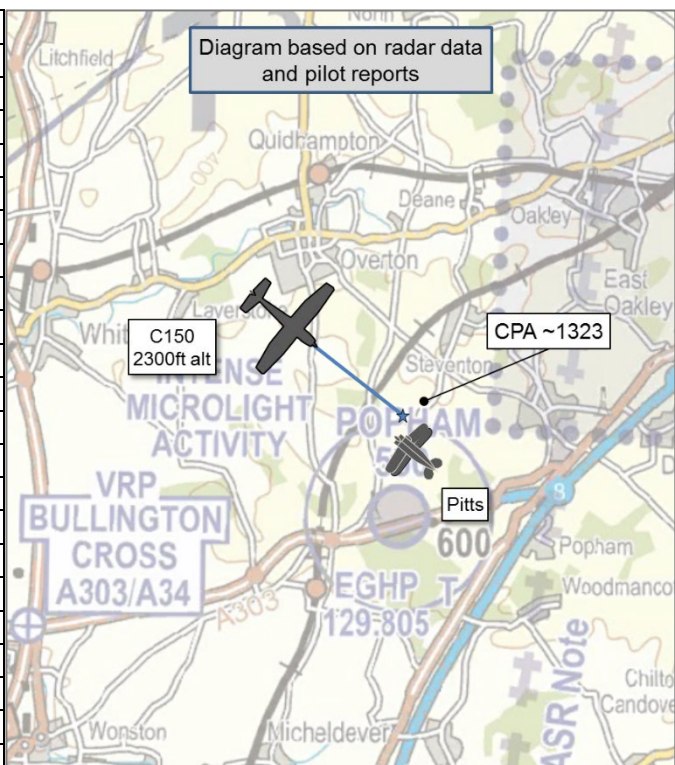


AIRPROX REPORT No 2019143

Date: 01 Jun 2019 Time: 1523Z Position: 5512N 00113W Location: Popham

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	C150	Pitts S-1
Operator	Civ FW	Civ FW
Airspace	Popham	Popham
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	VFR
Service	AGCS	AGCS
Provider	Popham	Popham
Altitude/FL	2300ft	NK
Transponder	A, C	No
Reported		
Colours	White, Red	NR
Lighting	N/R	NR
Conditions	VMC	VMC
Visibility	>10km	
Altitude/FL	2000ft	Not below 3000ft
Altimeter	QFE (999hPa)	NK
Heading	120°	Manoeuvring
Speed	80kt	NK
ACAS/TAS	Not fitted	Unknown
Alert	N/A	Unknown
Separation		
Reported	0m V/100m H	NR
Recorded	NK	



THE C150 PILOT reports that he was joining the circuit at Popham when he saw an aerobatic bi-plane with a distinctive colour scheme in his 1 o'clock, within 200m. It appeared to be conducting aerobatics in the Popham overhead. It was initially above him but was conducting a stall turn and 'fell' through his level. He turned to the left, but the other aircraft had already gone through his level so no further action was required. He recalled that he had remained on the Popham frequency for his short local flight and, as he returned, he heard the Pitts pilot ask to conduct aros above the airfield shortly before he called to join. He was surprised that the other pilot would ask to conduct aros above the airfield because there was other traffic around in addition to the C150. He believed that the Pitts pilot was told that there was traffic joining and to remain above the circuit/joining height.

The pilot assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE PITTS PILOT reports that he had had a smoke system fitted to his aircraft by an LAA Inspector. After fitting the system, the engineer requested a test flight so that he could observe the smoke and confirm everything was in order. The test flight was to include a loop, a vertical climb, vertical descent and a short inverted flight. He advised the Radio Operator of his intention to carry out the test flight to the north of the airfield at 3000ft and said he would advise prior to commencing the test flight, once he had reached 3000ft. On reaching 3000ft, he told the Radio Operator he was commencing the test flight and the answer was 'no reported traffic to affect'. He carried out 3 clearing turns, then commenced the test flight. At the end of the test, he advised the Radio Operator that he was complete and joined the circuit as normal and landed. An adjustment was made to the smoke system and a second test flight completed, this time flying straight and level at 3000ft. At no time during either flight was there any conflicting traffic. Having read the statement from the other pilot he was confident that no such incident had occurred.

THE LAA INSPECTOR reports that he had been informed about the Airprox and could confirm that he was present on the day in question. He had just fitted a smoke system to the aircraft and a test flight was requested and permission given. He watched the Pitts take-off from the north end of RW21 and climb out to the west. He saw it north of the airfield at altitude, where the pilot applied smoke and did a couple of turns and rolls before landing and taxiing back to the hangar. He made a minor adjustment to the smoke system and another test flight was carried out following the same route as before. He did not see any other aircraft in close proximity to the Pitts, and the aircraft was visible to him for the whole time it was at altitude.

A WITNESS reports that he was airborne and flying within the Popham visual circuit when he noticed the Pitts take off and report leaving the circuit to the north. On his approach to land he heard the pilot state that the aircraft was at altitude and commencing a test flight. Popham radio replied 'No traffic to Affect'. After parking his aircraft he noticed the Pitts commencing a further flight. He recollected that the flights had a duration of approximately 8 mins and at no time did he witness any conflict with any other traffic in the area. Furthermore, he was monitoring the frequency whilst in his office after landing and he did not hear anyone report a conflict on the frequency.

THE POPHAM AIR GROUND OPERATOR reports he was on duty at Popham and was approached by the Pitts pilot who said that he was going to carry out a smoke test in the overhead of the airfield. He reminded the pilot that they were very busy and that most arrivals were conducting overhead joins at 2000ft. The pilot replied that he would only be flying straight-and-level, above 2000ft, and that he would give a radio call to see whether there was any incoming traffic. When he called, the AGO advised that they were busy and that there were several aircraft inbound. The pilot stated that he was about to carry out his test. Shortly afterwards the C150 pilot came to the desk and said that he had had a near-miss with the Pitts and that he wanted to report it. The flight movement sheet for that day records a total of 114 aircraft movements and, at the time of the incident, there were 3 aircraft inbound.

THE POPHAM AIRFIELD MANAGER reports that on the day in question he was on duty, working in the northern events field, which is situated roughly central to the airfield circuit pattern. He witnessed the Pitts carry out a variety of aerobatic manoeuvres including loops and stall turns at low altitude. His observation was that he perceived that it was at a level lower than 3000ft.

Factual Background

The weather at Southampton was recorded as follows:

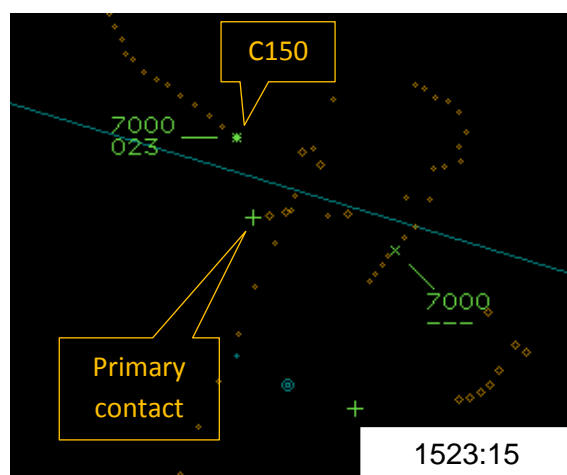
METAR EGHI 011520Z 11006KT 070V150 CAVOK 21/11 Q1018=

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

The C150 could be seen on the NATS radar joining the circuit at Popham from the north-west at 2300ft QNH. The Pitts could not be identified because it was not squawking. However, an intermittent primary return could be seen in the area but unfortunately the contact faded in and out of radar cover and so the exact separation between the two aircraft could not be determined.

The C150 and Pitts pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard¹. If the incident geometry is



¹ SERA.3205 Proximity.

considered as head-on or nearly so then both pilots were required to turn to the right². 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 operation³.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a C150 and a Pitts flew into proximity in the Popham overhead at approximately 1523hrs on Saturday 1st June 2019. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC, both were in receipt of a AGCS from Popham.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilots of both aircraft, radar photographs/video recordings and a report from the air /ground operator involved.

The Board first discussed the actions of the C150 pilot. They noted that he was on the Popham frequency and had heard the Pitts pilot announce that he was going to conduct his aerobatics in the overhead. Some members wondered whether he could have held off until he knew the aerobatics were complete, although they acknowledged that he thought that the Pitts was conducting them at 3000ft and so would reasonably expect the Pitts to be well above. Having decided that the aerobatics wouldn't affect him, he had returned to join the airfield, during which he assessed that the Pitts manoeuvred in close proximity to his aircraft.

Turning to the Pitts pilot, members noted that Popham does not have an ATZ therefore he did not need specific permission to conduct aerobatics other than to avoid the pattern of traffic. That being said, having been advised by the air ground operator that it was a busy flying day and that there were aircraft in the vicinity, members questioned the wisdom of conducting them as he did, and wondered whether there might have been an opportunity to have achieved his flight test when the airfield was less busy. The Board also wondered whether the Pitts was fitted with a functioning transponder because it was not showing on the radar. If one was fitted then, assuming that it was selected on in accordance with the requirements of SERA.13001, the Pitts pilot might wish to check its serviceability.

With regard to the reported Airprox, because the Pitts' track and altitude could not be determined, and given the conflicting reports received, the Board felt that it was unable to draw any conclusions as to the actual events. The Pitts was not transponding, and although there was a primary return in the vicinity of the returning C150, it was not known what height this aircraft was at, nor indeed whether it was actually the Pitts. With differing accounts from various witnesses and airfield personnel, the Board found it impossible to decipher what actually happened without appearing to disbelieve one pilot or the other. Nevertheless, they urged the Pitts pilot to ensure that any future similar activity was fully briefed to airfield users in order to avoid the possibility of any confusion. The Board therefore reluctantly decided that there was insufficient information to assess the Airprox, or to assess the safety barriers.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND RISK

Contributory Factors: The Board thought that there was insufficient information to assess the Contributory Factors.

Degree of Risk: D.

Safety Barrier Assessment⁴

The Board were unable to make any assessment of the safety barriers.

² SERA.3210 Right-of-way (c)(1) Approaching head-on.

³ SERA.3225 Operation on and in the Vicinity of an Aerodrome.

⁴ The UK Airprox Board scheme for assessing the Availability, Functionality and Effectiveness of safety barriers can be found on the [UKAB Website](#).