



# AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

December 2019



## AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

# Action – not distraction

**Being taken by surprise happens, but it's crucial not to lose a sense of who or what's happening around you**

**A** Bulldog pilot on an air experience flight at Prestwick was performing right-hand circuits and had been instructed to hold at the end of the downwind leg to allow a Citation flying an RNAV approach to land.

He had intended to fly a left-hand orbit to comply, but just as he was establishing

downwind his passenger suddenly felt unwell and needed a sick-bag urgently. While getting one out and attending to his passenger the pilot inadvertently entered a right-turn and, although he had previously been visual with the Citation, he became so distracted by the passenger that after about 180° he was horrified to see he had drifted very close to the

runway centreline. In a frank and honest report ([Airprox 2019162](#)) the pilot said the cause was becoming distracted by the plight of his passenger to the extent that he lost situational awareness; while ensuring that the passenger was cared for and the aircraft was under control, he had mistakenly turned the wrong way in his orbit and had allowed a dangerous

loss of separation. Although it's easy to give armchair advice with the benefit of 20:20 hindsight, the old prioritisation axiom of 'Aviate, Navigate, Communicate' is as relevant as ever, even if you're very experienced.

The dangers of distraction are well known and this incident is a lesson that the No.1 priority always has to be an awareness of what the aircraft is doing, followed closely by an appreciation of where you are even when there's an emergency.

Those of us who have been unlucky enough to have a passenger pebble-dash the cockpit will attest to how unpleasant the experience is, but that's nothing compared to potentially crashing while trying to fish out a sick-bag during a critical phase of flight.

And it's not just pilots who need to be alert to the dangers of task fixation. In this case, the Citation was handed over late to the Tower controller from Approach, and this led to the Tower controller focusing more on what the Citation was doing to the detriment of monitoring the Bulldog. As a result, the controller lost situational awareness on the Bulldog and did not notice it deviating from its track towards the approach path and into conflict with the Citation. Had he done so he might have been able to issue a warning to the Bulldog pilot to correct his orbit/path.

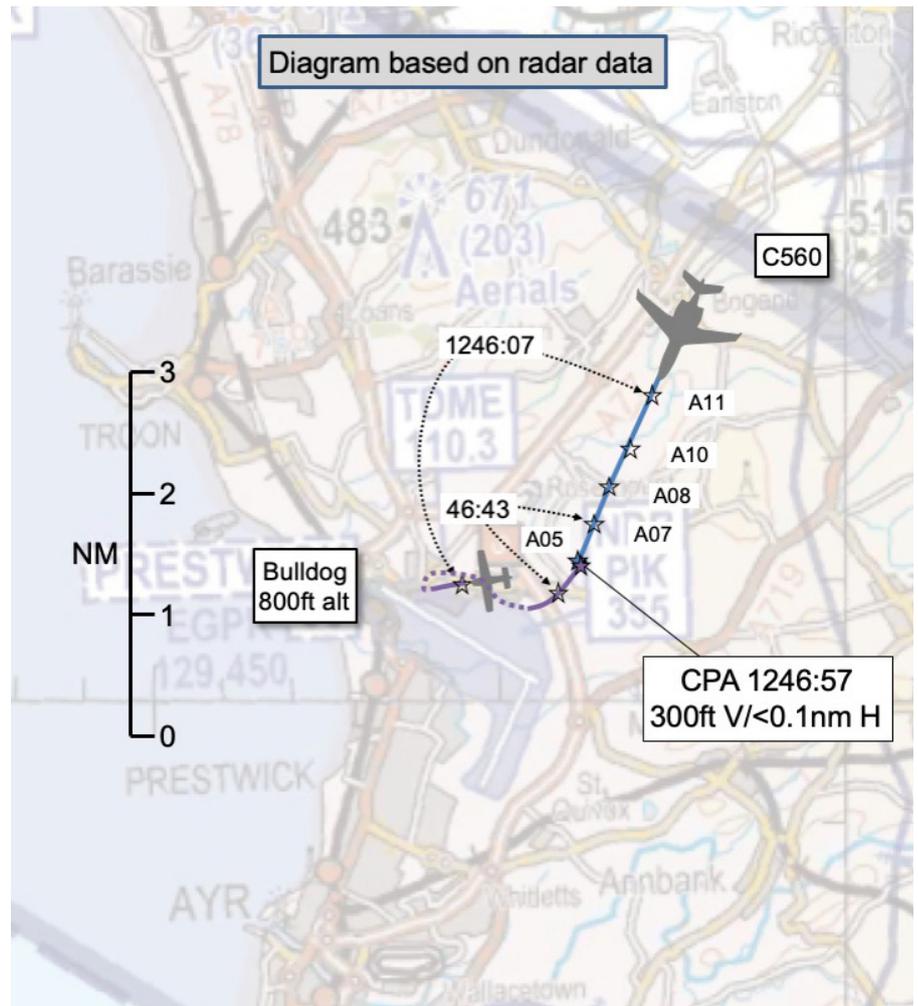
Full details of the incident can be found at the link within this note or at [airproxboard.org.uk](http://airproxboard.org.uk) in the 'Airprox Reports and Analysis' section within the appropriate year and then in the 'Individual Airprox reports' tab.

#### UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

During its November meeting 29 incidents were reviewed by the Airprox Board, of which 12 were drone/object-related.

Of the 17 aircraft-to-aircraft incidents, five were assessed as Category B (where safety margins were much reduced below the norm through either chance, misjudgement or inaction; or where emergency avoiding action was only taken at the last minute).

There was, however, a welcome reduction in reported incidents in October and November, probably due to the reduced flying over those months as a result of the poor weather. Although this relieved some pressure on the UKAB team, 2019 has been our busiest year for manned-aircraft-to-aircraft incidents in



recent times and remains well above our expected five-year averages.

Another welcome outcome has been that drone/object reporting has also reduced in recent months compared to last year. Although the poor weather will have affected these as well, there was also a noticeable reduction in the summer months after the new drone regulations regarding Flight Restriction Zones (FRZ) came into force in March, and it might be that awareness has been raised as a result.

November's most frequent Airprox theme was inaction, flying into conflict or flying close enough to cause the other pilot concern (eight incidents). All of these Airprox occurred despite the pilot either having gained sufficient situational awareness or sighting the other aircraft in enough time to have done something to change their flight path. As such, most of these incidents were avoidable and largely reflect the risk perception and airmanship of those involved.

The next most prevalent theme was controllers making errors or not fully

following procedures (five Airprox); most were associated with inadequate or late traffic information which correspondingly reduced the situational awareness of the pilots concerned.

Poor planning or sub-optimal execution/modification of the plan by pilots featured in four events, and there were four instances where late- or non-sighting of the other aircraft was the primary contributory factor. Pilots could have requested a better ATS (which would likely have provided them with situational awareness of the other aircraft) in three incidents; distraction from the task featured in two events; pilots not properly following processes and procedures caused two Airprox; and there was one incident where the key factor was not integrating into the circuit properly.

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