

Europa, G-LABS

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Category: 1.3

INCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Europa, G-LABS	
No & Type of Engines:	1 Rotax 912-UL piston engine	
Year of Manufacture:	2002	
Date & Time (UTC):	15 February 2003 at 1624 hrs	
Location:	Fairoaks Aerodrome, Surrey	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - 1
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	Damage to propeller and scratching to left wing tip	
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	53 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	304 hours (of which 8 were on type)	
	Last 90 days - 8 hours	
	Last 28 days - 8 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and further enquiries by the AAIB	

The pilot had recently completed a conversion on to the Europa monowheel aircraft type, of which G-LABS is an example. He had planned a cross country flight from Hinton-in-the-Hedges, Northamptonshire, to Old Sarum, Wiltshire, and return. He chose Old Sarum as his destination because he had been advised that, with limited experience on the type, he should restrict himself to operating from grass runways without crosswinds, until he was more experienced and had received more training. The outbound flight to Old Sarum was uneventful.

After start up for the return sector, the Global Positioning System (GPS) failed to initialise. The pilot elected to continue the flight using his map for navigation. Shortly after takeoff, the remote reading compass failed, so the pilot reverted to use of a hand held compass. At that time the aircraft was over Thruxton Aerodrome and the pilot set course towards Didcot Power Station, on an estimated track of 050°M. The actual course from Thruxton to Didcot is 025°M. After 30 minutes of flight time, the pilot realised that he was lost and contacted RAF Brize Norton Radar for assistance. Brize Radar allocated a transponder code but were unable at first to identify G-LABS, which was reported as being at 1,500 feet amsl.

At 1610 hrs, the London Heathrow Special VFR Controller telephoned Fairoaks ATC to ask if they had any information about an aircraft in the Ascot area. Fairoaks advised that they had no traffic at all. At 1615 hrs Heathrow advised Fairoaks that the aircraft was now one mile north of the airfield and was using a Brize transponder code. The Fairoaks controller telephoned Brize to discover that the aircraft was G-LABS, which was reported as being lost in the Oxford area.

Europa, G-LABS

Meanwhile the pilot saw an airfield below him and decided to make a precautionary landing. He contacted Brize once again who were now able to advise him that the airfield was Fair Oaks and transferred him to the correct frequency. The pilot made contact with Fair Oaks Tower and was given clearance to land on Runway 06. The surface wind conditions were light from the north-east.

The pilot described the touchdown as normal but during the landing roll a swing to the left developed, which he attempted to correct with right rudder. The aircraft swung hard to the right, ground looped and pitched forward onto its nose before dropping back to the ground. It came to rest by the side of the runway where both occupants, who were wearing four point harnesses, were able to vacate normally.

The weather over the route flown was generally fine with good visibility. The 1450 hrs Heathrow METAR indicated that the surface wind was from 060° at 12 kt, visibility greater than 10 km, with overcast cloud at 1,900 feet. The temperature was +5°C, dew point 0°C and the QNH was 1035 mb.

The direct track from overhead Thruxton to the observed position over Ascot would have been 070°M.