

ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Lindstrand, LBL 90A hot air balloon, G-MUPP	
No & Type of Engines:	No engine	
Year of Manufacture:	2012 (Serial no: 1417)	
Date & Time (UTC):	25 July 2014 at 1940 hrs	
Location:	Silverstone Golf Club, Buckinghamshire	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - 2
Injuries:	Crew - 1 (Minor)	Passengers - 2 (Minor)
Nature of Damage:	Flying wires, scoop, lower nomex, top bar of basket and tank covers	
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	61	
Commander's Flying Experience:	428 hours (of which 400 were on type) Last 90 days - 13 hours Last 28 days - 3 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot	

Synopsis

Due to an increase in wind strength, above that forecast, the pilot decided to land the balloon in the first suitable field. The balloon touched down positively and then became airborne again and contacted an electricity power line transformer post and the associated power cables, before finally landing. The occupants received minor injuries. The balloon was damaged but there was no fire.

History of the flight

The balloon was being launched from Silverstone Circuit. The weather was good, with a forecast wind from 040° at 4-7 kt. A pyeball balloon was released, to check the wind strength and direction, and confirmed that it was as forecast. The balloon was then laid out and inflated normally, standing up in the calm conditions. The passengers had been briefed and boarded the balloon, in accordance with their instructions.

After takeoff, the balloon flew across the Circuit (which was closed) at a height of about 200 ft agl. It was reported that it quickly became apparent that the wind strength had increased to 14 kt, from 040°, so the pilot decided to land at the first field that offered a safe landing. After some 12-15 minutes, he saw a suitable field which was long, with no obstructions in the landing direction, but which had a set of power lines running down the left side, parallel to the landing direction.

The pilot descended the balloon behind trees to shelter the approach from the wind, as the groundspeed was in excess of 10 kt. Just before landing, the pilot pulled the rip out line, which opens a panel, to release the hot air from the balloon envelope. The balloon made a positive landing but then lifted off again and, in the gusty wind conditions, the pilot estimated the balloon changed direction by some 60° to the left. This resulted in the balloon tracking towards the set of electricity power lines. Having lost a lot of heat from the envelope the pilot did not think that they could clear the power lines, so he shut off the fuel and pilot lights and continued to pull on the rip line. The pilot briefed the passengers to be ready for a heavy landing and they adopted the landing position in the bottom of the basket whilst the pilot continued to try and land the balloon. The balloon struck an electricity transformer post, carrying power lines, with a heavy impact about 15 ft above the ground, and the metal flying wires contacted the power lines, which caused arcing. The pilot was briefly caught under the flying wires and he and the passengers received minor injuries from the electrical arcing. The balloon slowly rotated around its vertical axis and then touched down allowing those onboard to climb out of the basket.

The balloon suffered damage to 11 of the 24 flying wires, the scoop, lower Nomex and the basket top bar. There were also slight burns to clothing, a flight bag and propane gas tank covers.

Discussion

The pilot concluded that the accident had occurred due to a local increase in wind speed, above that forecast, and having to carry out a landing in the gusty conditions. Had the balloon remained on the ground after the first landing or not altered its ground track to the left, he estimated that it would not have contacted the power lines.