

AIRPROX REPORT No 2010108

Date/Time: 18 Aug 2010 1324Z

Position: 5224N 00001E (5½nm NE of Wyton – elev 135ft)

Airspace: London FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Grob Tutor II Unk Microlight

Operator: HQ Air (Trg) NK

Alt/FL: 2000ft NK
RPS (1002mb)

Weather: VMC CLBC NK

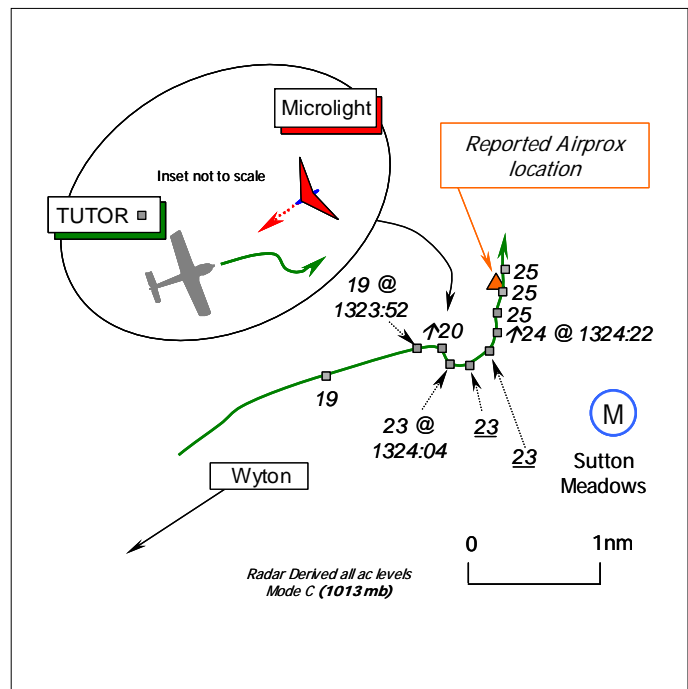
Visibility: >10km

Reported Separation:

50ft V/150m

Recorded Separation:

Not recorded



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE GROB TUTOR II PILOT reports he was conducting a local VFR instructional sortie from Wyton and was in receipt of a BS from Wyton APP on 134.05MHz. A squawk of A7000 was selected with Mode C on; elementary Mode S is fitted but the aeroplane is not equipped with TCAS.

Flying in a level cruise at 2000ft Chatham RPS (1002mb) [he reported 1500ft on the RT] some 4000ft clear below cloud, approaching a position about 6nm NE of Wyton heading 060° at 100kt, a red flex-wing microlight was spotted at 11 o'clock about 300m away some 50ft below his aeroplane. The microlight was virtually head-on with a 'low profile', appearing in his field of view from below the horizon. To avoid it he executed a 3½G break to the R. The microlight passed about 150m to port and 50ft below his aeroplane with a 'moderate' Risk of collision. After breaking R, he reversed his turn to re-establish visual contact but the microlight did not appear to manoeuvre at any point and its pilot may not have seen his aeroplane. He reported the Airprox to Wyton APP on RT, and followed this up with a telephone report after landing.

His aeroplane is coloured white and the HISL was on.

LATCC (Mil) RADAR ANALYSIS CELL (RAC) reports that the position of the Airprox was reported as 1¼nm NW of Sutton Meadows Microlight Site. Following several conversations with the CFI, and despite some conflicting advice, it was ascertained that none of the pilots airborne from Sutton Meadows saw a Grob Tutor at all during their flights. Therefore, the search area was expanded to include, amongst others: Alconbury, Chatteris, Deenethorpe, Boston, Halton, Hunsdon, Ridgewell, Brooklands, Peterborough/Conington, Wingland, Sandy and Northampton/Sywell. During the course of tracing action some 15 microlight sites in the area were contacted whilst attempting to identify the reported microlight pilot, but all proved fruitless. Consequently, the reported microlight pilot remains untraced.

THE WYTON APPROACH CONTROLLER (APP) confirmed that he was providing a BS to the Grob pilot. Furthermore, he provided the detail of the Airprox report transmitted to him on RT by the Grob Tutor pilot. As this detail is contained within the pilot's account, in the interests of brevity, it is not repeated here. The actual Wyton weather was reported to be: visibility of 30km with cloud, FEW at 3500ft.

ATSI had nothing further to add.

UKAB Note (1): This Airprox is not shown on LATCC (Mil) radar recordings as the reported microlight is not evident at all. Only the Grob Tutor is shown squawking A7000 on a broadly ENE'ly course indicating 1900ft Mode C (1013mb) - equating to about 1570ft Chatham RPS (1002mb) - as it approaches the reported Airprox location. The Airprox is presumed to have occurred just after 1323:52, when a tight R turn is evident as the Grob climbs through 2000ft Mode C, levelling initially at 2300ft (about 1970ft RPS) - in conformity with the reported avoiding action R break - before turning L onto a northerly track. A further climb is then evident to 2500ft Mode C.

HQ AIR (TRG) comments that this was an alarming incident for the Tutor pilot and was actioned and reported correctly. It serves as a reminder that despite every effort being taken to reduce collision risks through an appropriate ATS, threats will remain - particularly from small and hard to see ac. The importance of an effective lookout scan is paramount and should always be afforded an appropriate degree of effort and emphasis.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included a report from the Grob Tutor pilot, a transcript of the relevant RT frequency, radar video recordings, a report from the air traffic controller and comment from the appropriate operating authority.

It was evident to the Members that the RAC had expended considerable effort to identify the reported microlight, but all to no avail. Without the microlight pilot's report and in the absence of any radar data on the microlight, the Board could only assess this Airprox on the details contained in the Grob Tutor pilot's account, coupled with the radar plot available on his aeroplane. Therefore, it was most unfortunate that the reported pilot's viewpoint on this Airprox was not available to provide further insight into this close quarters encounter in Class G airspace.

The Board was well acquainted with the difficulties of sighting small ac such as the red flex-wing microlight reported here. The small frontal cross-sectional area, especially when viewed virtually head-on makes these ac very difficult to spot when they appear from below the horizon at a similar height. However, the Grob pilot had seen the flex-wing in his 11 o'clock at a range of about 300m, some 50ft below his aeroplane, and had taken robust avoiding action, which enabled him to maintain 150m separation from the flex-wing, and argued against a late sighting on his part. Although it seemed that none of those airborne from Sutton Meadows had been involved, a Member questioned whether the Grob pilot had flown too close to the Microlight Site that was about 1¼nm to the SE of the Airprox location. Pilot Members agreed it was only the Grob pilot's robust 3½G break to the R to avoid the microlight to port that had taken his aeroplane legitimately closer to Sutton Meadows than his original track, which in the Board's view was taking the Grob sufficiently clear to the NW. Moreover the Grob pilot had not loitered unnecessarily and had turned N without delay, whilst keeping careful watch on the microlight and climbing further above 2000ft RPS the radar recording revealed, thereby exiting the area expeditiously. With the limited information available, the Board could only conclude that this Airprox had been the result of a conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the Grob Tutor pilot.

Turning to the inherent Risk, some Members contended that with horizontal separation halved from the 300m at first sighting down to 150m, coupled with the Grob pilots robust 3½G break, safety had not been assured. However, other Members were of the view that whilst this might be less than ideal, the Grob pilot had seen the slower microlight in sufficient time to take appropriate action in his nimble aeroplane to remain as far away from it as he could. The Board seemed fairly evenly divided over this point and so the Chairman called for a vote. By a majority verdict, the Board concluded that there was no actual Risk of a collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the Grob Tutor pilot.

Degree of Risk: C.