



SAFETY

What can possibly go wrong?

Everything, if you accidentally fly into IMC. **Chloe Eriksen** with a salutary tale from a pilot who's glad to be alive



Pilots are cool, calm and collected – but not always when things start going horribly wrong

INADVERTENT flight into IMC has the potential to end in disaster, and this cautionary tale from one of our members has prompted me to explore this issue in more detail.

I intend to publish a more detailed article in the near future, but for now, please have a good read of this spine-tingling account of a microlight pilot's unplanned brush with the clouds.

It turned into one of those days – very quickly

Let me set the scene. I've been flying for 40 years. I started back in the 1980s on weightshift microlights.

After a while I went over to gliding, then came back to microlights, followed by GA in the shape of an Auster. I've 1000 hours logged, and now fly an Escapade.

On the day in question, vis was poor, but Humber-side was calling 10km and I could see the Lincolnshire Wolds around 10 miles away, so I decided to do a cautious flight.

After I bought the plane, I'd fitted a turn coordinator at the top of the panel, and replaced the existing VSI with a smaller one where the slip ball had previously been fitted. Fate hangs on slender threads.

On takeoff, all was normal, but as I got to 600ft or so, I decided conditions were too bad, and opted for a circuit to the left.

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Fate hangs on slender threads

A few moments after going into a climbing turn, I entered cloud that I hadn't spotted against the grey background. Now, I'm not qualified for instrument flying, and all I had was the limited panel I've outlined.

I'd been quite happy I could cope with this if I got caught out at height, having 100 hours on gliders, on which we were taught to fly on a limited panel in those days, so my plan based on that would have been to keep the wings level, close the throttle, keep the airspeed sensible and wait for the green stuff to reappear.

However, that went to hell in a handcart at this height. I knew the visibility to the north where the runway now lay was OK, so I broke right and closed the throttle.

My memories after that are a little disjointed. I remember the slip ball being over and 90kt showing on the ASI. The turn indicator was well over, but not on the end stop.

A few moments later, I spotted the ground and realised I was in a rather steep dive, hence the 90kt!

I sorted that out and set up for an approach in the opposite way I'd used to take off, since the wind was at 90°, so it wasn't downwind. I pulled on two stages of flap and sideslipped like mad, as I didn't want to have to go around. It wasn't the best landing, but I was alive and I could use the aircraft again.

I taxied back a wiser man, and over a cup of tea thought through my actions. Looking back, I'd level the wings, keep the power on (you can't crash into the sky) and turn until the compass said north, which would bring me back into the clear air.

I had SkyDemon active on my phone, so I could have used this for an ersatz instrument approach over the sea if vis was still bad.

The one thing I remember is how compressed time was. It all happened in seconds, but it felt like minutes if not hours.

Ho hum. If it can happen to me, it can happen to you. Fly safely out there.

Chloe's comment

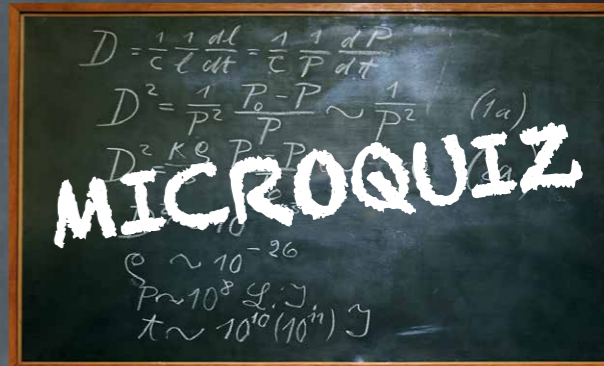
I was holding my breath reading this candid account from one of our members. I felt the relief as they described their safe return to solid ground. and I'm certain that the story may well be familiar to many of you.

Our contributor mentions his previous experience of limited panel flying, which undoubtedly played a part in his safe recovery, but it was perhaps his awareness of the surrounding conditions that prompted his actions.

As he says, given the situation again, he may well have acted differently, and we could all benefit from considering what action we would take given this scenario, in the safe comfort of the clubhouse.

Having a plan to cope with an emergency situation at each stage of flight, along with continual evaluation of your escape routes when in flight, could save your life.

Thank you to our contributor for an excellent flight safety lesson. □



- Lines connecting areas of equal pressure on a synoptic chart are called...
 - isogonals
 - cells
 - isobars
- In which direction do anabatic winds flow?
 - Up slopes
 - Down slopes
 - From the sea to the land
- What is the maximum total weight authorised for a two-seat microlight landplane equipped with an airframe-mounted total recovery parachute system?
 - 480kg
 - 600kg
 - 625kg
- When operating under a Special VFR clearance, the aircraft must operate below a speed of...
 - 250KIAS
 - 165KIAS
 - 140KIAS
- When flying over congested areas, an aircraft shall not fly lower than 1000ft above the highest object within:
 - 500m
 - 1000m
 - 600m

MF's quizmaster Lawrence Bell is the developer of QuizAero, the online groundschool for microlight student pilots, quizaero.co.uk.

Answers overleaf



GASCo

General Aviation Safety Council

GASCo, the General Aviation Safety Council, is a charity whose members are aviation organisations. Its aim is to make aviation safer through education. It presents the CAA safety evenings, runs seminars and provides safety information through its magazine and website, gasco.org.uk.

CHIRP

CHIRP, the Confidential Human Incident Reporting Programme, reviews and analyses reports from pilots, then publishes them so others can learn. Get the app at chirp.co.uk.

★ Trustpilot ★★★★★

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Flights of fancy

Straighten up and fly right: **Cath Spence** on how you can get involved in the BMAA Wings scheme

GREETINGS, all! Wing Tips is back, and over the next few issues of *MF*, I'll be answering the questions which you've asked, starting with: "What if I can't find anything I want to do locally?"

Well, this is one of the easiest ones to answer. There are four elements to the Wings awards:

- **Navigation:** a minimum distance flight with set criteria which you need to plan and then fly to, within an agreed tolerance on both fuel and time.
- **Safety:** usually a ground-based session such as GASCo safety evenings, taking only a couple of hours.
- **Education:** often ground-based, usually about half a day of learning about something relevant to flying.
- **Flight skills:** often half ground-based theory and a few hours flying. This could be with an instructor or with an experienced pilot to help you as you try out what you learned on the ground.

So what if you can't find something running near you?

Safety

For the Safety element, look at online sessions. Both GASCo and Astral Aviation Consulting offer great sessions which are completely online, so that you can join from the comfort of your favourite armchair.

But alternatively, you and a few other pilots could arrange something for yourselves. Here are some ideas.

A trip to a nearby airfield with a tower

Call them up and arrange a date to go and learn about what goes on behind the scenes. We went to Oxford and had a lovely couple of hours with the team there, getting the tour of all their facilities and learning about how they work with the traffic in their area of the sky.

Use a wet day to learn more about the inner working of your aircraft

We set up a session for a few pilots to

get a little more understanding of what happens under the cowling of the school C42. Would you recognise if something had come undone or a bit was broken? Making friends with your powerplant is a good way of ensuring you recognise what it's supposed to do, and knowing what you're looking at certainly aids confidence when doing the daily inspection.

Over to you

If there's something else you think would fit the bill, please get in touch. We're not prescriptive – just looking for something which will enhance your safety as a pilot. The expectation is that it will take a couple of hours, and someone can confirm that you completed it. If you have a good idea which is not on the list, please let us know – others might also enjoy trying it.

Education

For the Education element, there's some remote learning, which is excellent, as well as some "teach yourself" courses such as:

Become a Weather God

Things like Simon Keeling's Weather School, which is remote, or his Skew-Ts, which is "teach yourself". These both have the benefit of helping you predict weather windows to get a cheeky flight in when everyone else has given up.

Navigating with GPS

There's some great "teach yourself" material on using GPS for navigation. You could get together with some mates and do this one over a couple of evenings or on a wet Saturday afternoon. We've delivered it as a couple of online sessions in the past, and we'd happily do so again if you'd like us to. Just let me know at Wings@bmaa.org.

RT refresher

A fab one to gather together a group at your local airfield and upgrade your confidence on the radio.

Got your own suggestions?

Again, we'd love to hear them. The aim is to learn something more about flying which will help make you safer and should take about half a day.

Flight Skills

Flight Skills is the only element where you *may* need an instructor for some of it.

We have full diploma courses such as Strip Skills if you want to increase your confidence in landing at some of the more, er, interesting airfields. It's particularly useful if you've been familiar with larger ones with lovely clear approaches.

Similarly, if you have only done small airfields and want to go somewhere bigger, then try out Circuit Matters, which



Cath in the French mountains. High-Terrain Flying can be one of the Wings credits

guides you through the more rigorous requirements you may meet there. For example, flying into Cardiff in a microlight and waving to the pilots of the commercial jets as you taxi past is great fun.

There are, of course, the ones you'd expect, like High Terrain flying, Competition Flying (could you be the next Rob Grimwood?), Difference Training or extensions of licence to SSEA or instructor.

Got your own ideas?

Again, let us know. Hubby and I did a course on Terrain & Weather Awareness, which is a requirement for a PPL in New Zealand, while we were visiting family there. This allowed us to get signed off to fly on our own out there, which was an amazing experience, but it also gave us a better awareness of the effects of terrain

and weather, which are definitely skills I'd strongly recommend to all pilots.

The requirement for Wings is that the whole thing takes no less than a day of training, of which around half should be flying the aircraft.

To sum up...

There are loads of ways you can get the various skills in place for Wings.

Hubby and I completed our Diamond this summer, and it was a great sense of achievement to send off the paperwork and receive our awards (next day, of course, with Kelly Thacker's usual efficiency).

Diamond awards are still very rare, so come and get working on this. You can join a very exclusive club! □

MICROQUIZ answers

- 1c isobars
- 2a Up slopes
- 3b 600kg
- 4c 140KIAS
- 5c 600m



Cath on final for Mont-Dauphin – Saint-Crépin on a flight out of Gap-Tallard



I could be wrong, but I think there's a bit missing. Cath upgrading a 912 to 100hp (photo: Russell Ede)