

No: 10/83

Ref: EW/C824/01

Aircraft type and registration:	PA 28 Cherokee 140 (Light single engined fixed wing aircraft). G-ATJD	
Year of manufacture:	1965	
Date and time (GMT):	16 April 1983 at 0757 hrs	
Location:	Private airstrip near Markyate, Herts	
Type of flight:	Private	
Persons on board:	Crew — 1	Passengers — 1
Injuries:	Crew — 1 (killed)	Passengers — 1 (killed)
Nature of damage:	Aircraft destroyed Minor damage to Water Board installations	
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	50	
Commander's total flying experience:	574 hours, with considerable experience on PA 28 aircraft.	

The purpose of the flight was to collect a newly-purchased PA 28 Cherokee from a private airstrip 3 nautical miles south-west of Luton Airport. The pilot had already visited the strip by road, and had examined it from the ground; the passenger was another pilot, and it was intended that the two aircraft should fly out together. The strip was a field of short grass, with no windsock; the most topographically favourable direction of landing was towards the north, which gave an uphill gradient, although this made it difficult to touch down just inside the hedge. In this direction there was also a marked slope down from right to left across the strip, whose maximum dimension, was approximately 1170 feet. Some 170 feet beyond the boundary were trees with an estimated height of 30 feet above the ground at that point.

G-ATJD left Stapleford Aerodrome at 0715 hrs, loaded to approximately maximum weight, its freight including 12 gallons of gasoline, oil and tools, all intended for work on the aircraft which was to be collected. After making contact with Luton Approach the aircraft descended towards the airstrip at 0750 hrs, where it was awaited by the owner, who was also the vendor of the aircraft which was to be collected; two other witnesses were also present. The weather was good, with a light wind from the south, and the surface of the field was damp from overnight dew. The aircraft flew low over the field from south to north, and then came round for another approach from the same direction. On this occasion it touched down, as later shown by ground marks, approximately 250 feet inside the southern boundary, at a point where the ground was still rising, but moving fairly fast and skipping across the surface. At a relatively late stage in the landing run witnesses heard power applied and saw the aircraft become airborne in a steep nose-high attitude; the ground marks indicated that there had been approximately 300 feet of continuous ground roll before the nose-wheel was raised, and that when the aircraft became airborne the trees referred to previously lay some 400 feet ahead. The aircraft was then seen to pass through the tops of the trees and to sink apparently in a stalled or semi-stalled condition, before striking some power lines and coming to rest badly damaged, inside a sewage works approximately 1000 feet beyond the northern boundary (see map at appendix). It immediately caught fire and both occupants were killed. No reason for the accident could be found in the subsequent technical examination of the wreckage, or in the medical evidence.

The accident is the most serious of several which have occurred this year, involving light aircraft on private airstrips. Valuable detailed advice on the take-off and landing performance of aircraft in these circumstances is contained in Aeronautical Information Circular No 73/1982, published by the Civil Aviation Authority.