



Mixing up the mixture

*Not familiar on type?
Read this cautionary tale
from William Fairney*



Landing short with engine trouble is not only the province of BA 777s as Bill Fairney (top) discovered in the Pink Panther (above)

Seeing the Near Miss incident in the letters page of the February 2008 issue of General Aviation, and with the recent British Airways 'heavy landing' at Heathrow in mind, I recalled a similar near miss I experienced at Kemble a few years ago.

Having trained at Staverton on PA28s, and with over 100 hours on C150/152s, I had bought myself a Socata Rallye 100 on which I proceeded to build over 300 hours. I put the Rallye into the hands of an engineer at Kemble one winter for its Annual, confident that it would be back in my hands in good time well before the PFA rally at Cranfield, which I attended regularly.

I had not counted on the combination of circumstances which arose from Socata's very poor spares delivery, and my engineer's habit of leaving minor checks until last. Having waited several weeks for spares for flap rails, my engineer announced that having fitted them, he had found that the brakes needed replacement parts. There was no chance of getting these in time for the rally.

At that time the engineer owned a Cessna 152 known universally as 'The Pink Panther', owing to its sickly colour scheme. He offered me the use of the aircraft to go to the rally. Not having flown a spamcan for some time I requested a flight on the day prior to the rally, to re-familiarise myself with the type. The engineer offered one of his technicians with a licence to accompany me as check pilot, as I hadn't flown for some weeks, but as he was the one actually working on my Rallye, I declined. First mistake!

I checked the pilots' notes and took off to do a bit of circuit practice and a short 'bimble around'. The wind was moderate and north-westerly and so I used runway 31 which was directly into wind. This runway has a displaced threshold because a main road runs close to the approach and there is a 15ft high wire fence.

On my first approach for a 'touch and go' I set the aircraft up with three stages of flap as is normal, called 'finals' and eased off the throttle to reduce speed to the threshold speed, about 58 mph. (BRJT is calibrated in imperial units). The engine seemed unresponsive, so I concentrated on the threshold and eased the throttle back further. There was still little response, then suddenly, at about 200 feet, all went quiet except for the windmilling of the propeller. I glanced at the throttle and saw that it was still half closed, and pushed it to the dashboard. There was no response and the nose of the aircraft dropped until I was heading straight for the road and the wire fence.

I took off one stage of flap to reduce drag. However, my Rallye has manual flaps so I can select the required position accurately, but I was very rusty on the C152's electric flaps and all the flap came off at once. The nose dropped further. Countering all natural instinct I held the nose down to increase speed to about 68 mph, the best glide speed. This happened very quickly, and then I had to ease back on the yoke to hold the speed from increasing further. To my relief, as the speed was held, the nose gradually rose until it was pointing over the boundary fence. In the next few seconds I switched off the magnetos and the fuel, unlatched the door and once over the fence, which I cleared by between five and ten feet, put on some flap. I was able to round out and floated a short distance owing to the higher than usual landing speed and little amount of flap, before coming to a standstill. It was strangely silent. All this had happened very quickly and I had no time to make a radio call.

The tower called to ask if all was OK as the controller had seen that I was stopped with a stationary propeller. I replied that my engine had stopped and that I would try a re-start. I commenced the re-start routine and saw to my

horror that the mixture knob was fully out. I had been easing out the mixture, thinking it was the throttle, until the engine stopped due to a lean cut. I was then able to re-start and continue with my exercise, and the next day I flew to and from the PFA rally without incident.

The incident was a timely reminder of the need to stay current on type, and to be proficient in emergency procedures. As well as firewalling the throttle, I should also have firewallled the mixture, checked that both mags were 'on', and that fuel was 'on'. I console myself by thinking that there was insufficient time to do all that, but had I been current it would have been automatic.

The recent incident with the BA 777 seems to have a number of parallels. One of the passengers in a newspaper interview stated that he saw the flaps retract, and then re-extend. I suspect, that when the accident report is published it will show that the handling pilot, Mr John Coward, acted in a similar way to myself, and attempted to extend the glide by retracting the flaps and increasing the speed to best glide speed. Unfortunately he seems to have been too far out to avoid landing in the undershoot, but nevertheless, it was a marvellous feat of airmanship. ■