EASYJET PILOTS ABORT LANDING ATTEMPT AFTER LOSING SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND FLYING OFF COURSE

News / Airlines

easyJet pilots "lost situational awareness" and flew off course over a ridgeline in Somerset earlier this year, forcing them to abort a landing attempt, it has been revealed.

A report into the incident found the Airbus A319 was forced into a go-around on approach to Bristol Airport and at one point was just 500 above ground level.

The pilots "became disorientated" and flew across the Dundry hills, south of Bristol, before realising they had lost "positional awareness" and aborted the landing attempt, according to a report filed with the Air Accidents Investigation Branch.

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Investigators said the flight left Glasgow on the night of May 13 and was approaching Bristol Airport in good weather conditions with 99 passengers and six crew on board.

The report said the flight crew -- on their fourth flight of the day and second into Bristol -- switched runways because the wind direction had changed and disconnected the autopilot, but did not approach on the required path.

There appeared to be a lack of communication in the cockpit, with the co-pilot unaware of how the captain intended to fly the approach due to a late change.

The co-pilot became concerned about the tracking of the flight path and soon realised they had turned too early, but believed the 56-year-old captain, who had 11,500 hours of flying experience, still had situational awareness.

The co-pilot then spotted communication masts next to the village of Dundry at the 1-2 o'clock position instead of the normal 3 o'clock position.

Although they were well clear of the masts, their position confirmed the aircraft was off course.

After stopping the descent and looking for outside reference points, the captain started to execute a go-around just north of Dundry as the co-pilot instructed him to perform the manoeuvre.

The report said: "Both crew members then lost situational awareness, but neither communicated this to the other until the co-pilot called for a go-around."

"The fact the go-around altitude was not set until the go-around had commenced indicates either the landing checklist had not been completed or that it had not been completed satisfactorily."

The plane landed safely on its second approach.

easyJet investigated and made three safety recommendations to its internal procedures.

The airline said in a statement: "The pilots on flight EZY408 performed a go-around after they realised they were off course. This action was a controlled response by the captain, in line with the airline's procedures, and the flight landed safely."

"The action was taken by the pilot before the aircraft's or ATC's automatic warning systems were activated thereby demonstrating his control of the situation."

"easyJet immediately launched a safety investigation to understand what happened and ensure that the airline could learn any lessons from the incident."

"easyJet's specialist team conducted a thorough safety investigation, in consultation with the AAIB, and as a result it made three recommendations to its internal procedures. The safety of its passengers and crew is always easyJet's highest priority."

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