

Airprox report number 2023039

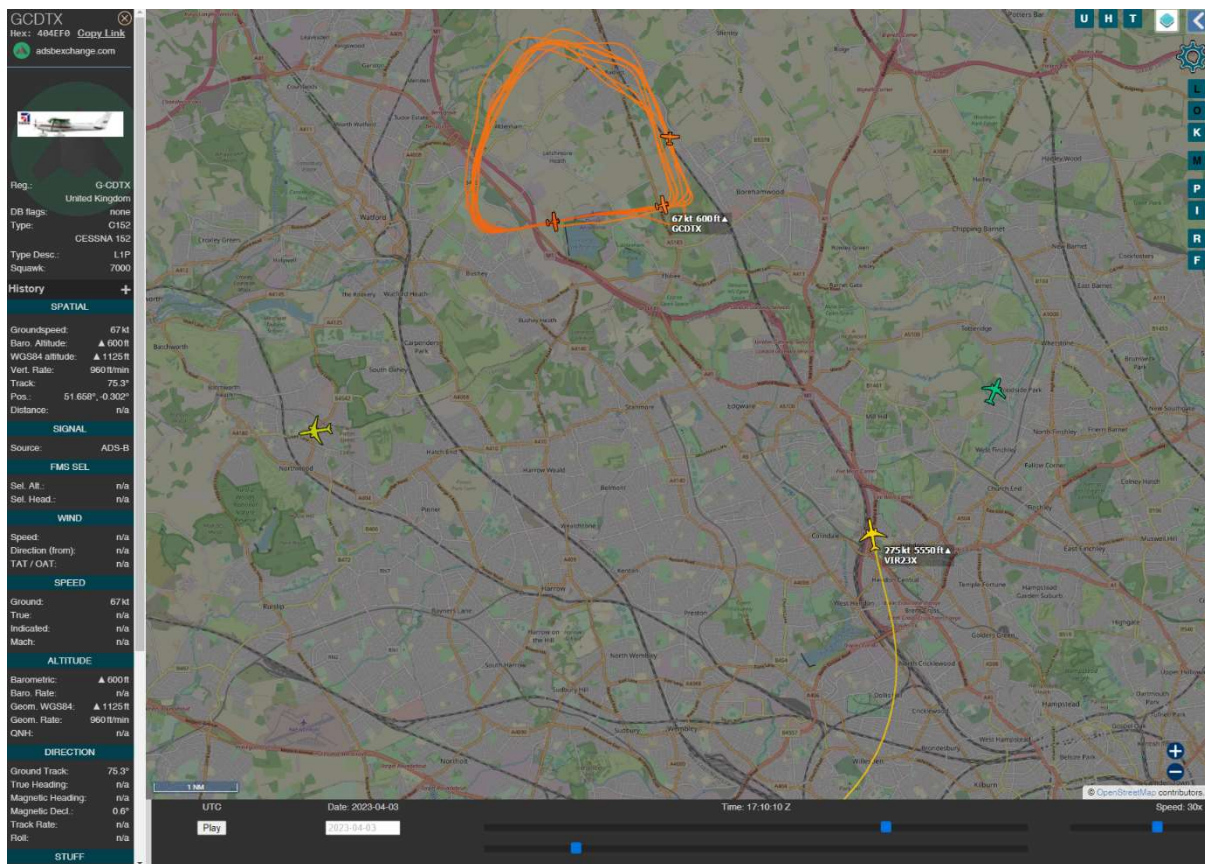
A350 pilot reports Cessna 152 as a drone

The UKAB have published airprox report 2023039 detailing an event at 17:10hrs on 3rd April 2023. The pilot of an A350 reported that whilst on departure routing from Heathrow, flying straight and level at 6000ft on 335⁰ 1.5NM North East of Brent Reservoir, an object passed below the left side of the aircraft. The object, which was only in view for a few seconds, was described as silver and X shaped, and at the time was estimated to have passed 200ft below. (This distance was later changed to 100ft.) UKAB have classified this as *'a situation where safety had been much reduced below the norm to the extent that safety had not been assured.'*

Analysis by Airprox Reality Check of ADS-B data reveals that at the time and location reported, the reporting aircraft A350 G-VPRD was following a departure route from Heathrow which took them North across London, passing East of Elstree aerodrome. At the stated time and position, G-CDTX Cessna 152 (effectively a silvery white when viewed from above), climbing out after a touch and go on Elstree's 08 runway, was turning NNW onto the crosswind leg at 725 feet. (5,275 feet below) and three or four miles in front of the reporting a/c. It would only have been visible from the left-hand seat – which is borne out by the UKAB report. From the angle viewed, the Cessna would have appeared to be effectively X shaped - as reported. At that distance the C152 would appear about the size of a drone. The A350 was flying at 275knots (316mph) so the C152 would have been lost from view in seconds. The turning C152, viewed from above and to one side from a rapidly moving cockpit would have presented an unusual aspect, making identification difficult.

Interestingly, the reporting A350 pilot commented *'it was difficult to estimate the size of object and distance from aircraft but due to relative speed it is assumed to have been fairly close.'*





It is an indisputable fact that the C152 turned to the lower front left of the reporting aircraft at the time and place of the report. There is no evidence to support the claim that any drone was present. If the pilot's report had stated 'between us and the C152' or 'just after the C152 turned in front' or something similar then it would be possible to imagine that two 'objects' (a drone and a C152) were to the lower front left of the reporting A350 within seconds of each other. But this is not the case. The reasonable conclusion is that the distant C152 was misidentified as being a nearby drone, and that there was never any risk of a collision.

Airprox Reality Check believe that the majority of drone airproxes published by UKAB are wrong, and are in fact cases of distant full-sized aircraft being misidentified as nearby drones in fleeting encounters by startled pilots. Psychologists specialising in human visual perception have explained that in the sky, humans have none of the cues they use on the ground to judge size and distance, making such errors commonplace.