

AASF Safety Spot, November 2021

Rocky Capozzi, here. You've probably wondered what's happened with AASF. In a word – COVID. We haven't gone away and we plan to resume in-person safety seminars when it's safe and we can secure an appropriate venue. In the interim, we will put out a monthly letter covering accidents, incidents, and safety topics of general interest with the goal of keeping our collective heads thinking about aviation safety.

**Autopilot Woes:** On June 16, 2021 on a clear VFR day at 1345 local, a LANCAIR Evolution, N704AK crashed near Arapahoe Airport, CO. The husband-and-wife fatalities were both pilots. The following is extracted from the NTSB preliminary report accident number CEN21FA272: <https://data.nts.gov/carol-reggen/api/Aviation/ReportMain/GenerateNewestReport/103276/pdf>

“Air Traffic Control information showed the pilot was established on the RNAV (GPS) runway 35R approach to Centennial Airport (APA), Centennial, Colorado, when he contacted the air traffic control tower about 7 miles south of the airport. The tower controller issued the wind conditions to the pilot and cleared the airplane to land on runway 35R. **The airplane was about 2.6-miles from the end of the runway when the controller queried the pilot if he was executing a 360° turn, to which the pilot advised that the airplane had lost its autopilot capabilities.** A nearby airplane reported to the controller that it had the airplane in sight, and then saw it impact powerlines, and subsequently the terrain. A postimpact fire ensued that consumed most of the composite airplane.”

We may never know the complete story of this accident, but we all know there's been more than a few accidents attributed to the use or misuse of an autopilot. I think we can all agree that we shouldn't be fussing with an autopilot 2.6 miles on final. I'd wager that anyone who has flown with an autopilot for any length of time, has been startled at least once or twice when “it” screws up. “It” equals the pilot more often than not. Even if “it” really is the autopilot and not one of us, the answer is the same. TURN IT OFF immediately!

Although I can't prove it, my theory is the number of possible pilot errors associated with autopilot usage roughly equals the square of the number of autopilot modes available. Rhymin' Paul Simon sang about the 50 ways to leave your lover. I can't sing or rhyme, but I can think of at least 4 ways to turn off an autopilot. I bet you can, too. Don't try to figure out why “it” didn't work until you're in a safe place – maybe even on the ground.

**Plan Continuation Bias:** The PenAir 3296 report is available at this link: [Runway Overrun During Landing, Peninsula Aviation Services Inc., d.b.a. PenAir flight 3296, Saab 2000, N686PA \(nts.gov\)](#) It's worth the read. The NTSB found a lot that needs fixing. You probably already knew that the crew went around on their first landing attempt and put it down on the second attempt with tailwinds out of limits. You may not know that the NTSB found the anti-skid system was wired incorrectly which ultimately resulted in loss of braking capability in 3 out of the 4 wheels. Were it not for the cascading antiskid failure, the plane should have been able to stop on the remaining runway. According to the NTSB the crew succumbed to “plan continuation bias.” That's a fancy way of saying they stuck to their original plan to land on RWY 31 even though the winds clearly favored landing in the opposite direction.

It's a cautionary tale for all of us. No matter how experienced we are, when mother nature suggests a change in plan, we should take her suggestion.

**Traffic Pattern Stalls:** One of my favorite aviation writers and commentators is Paul Bertorelli. He recently posted a video titled [How I Stalled on The Base Turn \(And Got Away With It\) - YouTube](#) His message is entertaining and relevant. As usual, Paul's language is colorful and a bit sarcastic as he explains how he nearly succumbed to distraction in the traffic pattern. Enjoy the video.

Until next month. Keep focused and fly the plane!

Rocky