

Saturday, July 25. 2009

The stormy landing approach in Hamburg last year.

Just heard on N24, that the Luftfahrtbundesamt found the reason for the go-around with touching the ground in the last year in Hamburg. The Spiegel (a german magazine) will report it: They call it a computer problem. Well ... i'm not so sure of that, and i'm sure that the Luftfahrtbundesamt said something different in their report. Why do i think different? Well ... i remember the last crash with fatalities of the Lufthansa on 14. September 1993 in Warsaw. At that time the Lufthansa Airbus A320 crashed into a small "hill" at the end of the run-way. The reason: The computer of the Airbus didn't think that the Airbus is on ground and thus it didn't brake.

At this time the computer programm for the brakes was modified and the activation of the brakes was coupled to an pressure of 2t instead of 12 tons on the landing gears and the airbrakes and the reverse thrust isn't coupled to the landing gears at all and i'm sure that many landing were more secure of this decision.

When i look at the video of this attempt to land it looks like that both gears touched the ground and thus the Airbus switched in the ground mode. Looks as "works as designed". That isn't a computer problem. This circumstances was just out of the specification. But as usual ... i'm waiting for the final report.

But i find something strange about this: When even a computer guy like me know about this situation, why does a pilot know about it, as the Hamburger Abendblatt reports it. Okay, i've read a lot about it to explain in meetings and seminars about the fact that the ability to specify requirements is finite. There will be always unspecified circumstances.

But well ... the Hamburger Abendblatt wrote, that the Spiegel will report about this. And the Spiegel is pretty well known for being overly negative in regard of Airbus. I remember they have declared the death of Airbus when Boeing announced the 787 They have even the old story about the Airbus being a computer controlled plane, but i assume you can't talk with a journalist about direct law, alternate law and normal law.

Posted by Joerg Moellenkamp in Aviation, English at 16:06

Ich hoffe, Du nimmst mir diese Kleinlichkeit nicht übel, aber das tut mir jedesmal weh: zum verneinten simple past gehört der Infinitiv: "The computer of the Airbus didn't think that the Airbus is on ground and thus didn't _brake_."
Anonymous on Jul 25 2009, 19:50

I think the fact that you cannot specify all conditions properly is a good argument about putting too much intelligence into a control system. (I am not actually sure what ground vs. flightmode does to the pilot in your scenario, but if it leads to a crash it is surely a restriction a pilot has not to suffer from).

Gruss
Bernd
Anonymous on Jul 25 2009, 20:08

Keineswegs ... ich weiss das mein Englisch lausig ist ...
Anonymous on Jul 25 2009, 21:24

On the ground you have to be cautious about the rudder thus the computer reduce the the sensitivity of the rudder and the maximum deflection to make it easier for the pilot to control the aircraft on the ground. At least it was explained this way on some locations.

And you have to take into consideration that the computer helps the pilot in many situations (all the protections in normal law, the support of pilots to keep them free for managing the flight and observing the surrounding airspace).

Technology is always a tradoff, it gives you advantages like a shorter way to break. The automatic braking system of an A380 is for example capable to warn the pilot if the computer calculates that the aircraft can't break on the remaining runway thus the pilot can go into TOGA early. And perhaps you may have recognized that an Airbus approach is much smoother than a Boeing approach, smoother isn't just more comfortable, it's more secure too.
Anonymous on Jul 25 2009, 21:45