

**Clued<sup>up</sup>**

# GA Update

December 2020

# TOWBARS





# PAINT IT RED — OR YELLOW

Apologies to the Rolling Stones, but black doesn't really cut it when it comes to towbars

"I was looking out over the taxiway when I saw one of my aircraft heading out with its towbar still attached," the flying club owner said. "I went back in and phoned the tower to try stop it taking off but I was just too late." Fortunately, in this case the tower saw the towbar fall off on the runway so no real harm was done, though there was of course an interesting 'discussion' when the pilot eventually returned to the flying club.

But that's not always the case — take this incident at Southend Airport which you might recall was classed as 'serious' by the AAIB. On this occasion a Cessna 210 took off with its towbar still in place and, as with the flying club's event, the towbar fell off onto the runway and that's when problems started.

The towbar remained on the runway for some 30 minutes during which time

another aircraft landed, another took off and an ops vehicle completed a routine runway wildlife inspection before an Embraer 145 ran over the errant towbar during its landing roll.

The Embraer's commander spotted 'an object' some eight to ten metres ahead as he braked, so he applied slight left rudder and felt a light bump through the rudder pedals. Later checks fortunately showed no damage. He recalled that the object had been very difficult to see against the dark asphalt runway and he only spotted it because part of the dark-coloured towbar was lying across the white centreline markings.

While this was going on, the pilot of the Cessna was thinking back about a slight tendency he'd noticed for the aircraft to track to the left while taxiing out and it occurred to him that he couldn't positively

remember removing and stowing the towbar. He knew it wasn't still attached because the landing gear had retracted normally, so he called Farnborough Radar and asked for a message to be passed to Southend. He continued the flight, landing without incident, and a quick check of the nose wheel didn't reveal any damage.

If you're wondering how no-one noticed a towbar on a fairly busy airport's runway for half-an-hour, here's an extract from the AAIB report which sheds some light on why.

*'The towbar was not seen on the runway by two other aircraft that used the runway nor by a fire officer conducting an inspection. It is not known exactly which part of the runway the two aircraft used, so it is possible they did not pass the towbar. Alternatively, their attention may have been on flying their aircraft. The inspection was initially intended*