

MAY 2022



STRIP FLYING



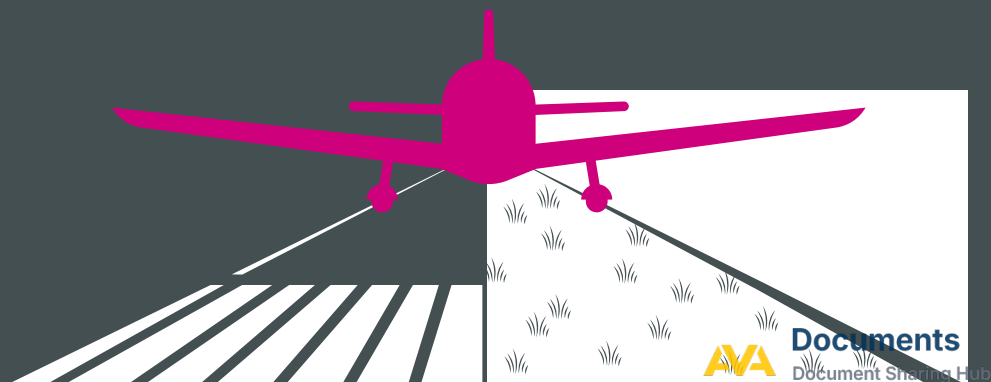
YOUR SAFETY SENSE LEAFLET FOR: **STRIP FLYING**

The use of airstrips can bring new destinations and challenges to your flying. Some may also offer a location to keep your aircraft. However, many require special planning and consideration for their use.

Most strips will not be licensed or certified to any standard and may have hazardous features such as power lines or slopes that you would not find at a normal aerodrome.

This leaflet is intended to help you think about safety when planning a flight to a strip for the first time and provide general operational guidance.

Flying into strips is an ideal scenario to practice threat and error management. Most strips will have 'threats' such as obstacles or poor surfaces and are less tolerant of 'errors' such as inaccurate flying speeds. Each one needs identifying, considering and mitigating as appropriate.



STRIP FLYING

Finding a suitable strip

You must make contact with the land owner or operator before visiting a strip - do not fly in unannounced. The details of some strips are available in commercial flight guides. Some are also marked on VFR charts, although this does not necessarily imply they are open to visitors. Many strips are found by word of mouth, so if you are interested in finding one in a particular area, ask around your local flying community. Some of the following issues to consider include:



Availability

When is the **strip available for use**? Are there any times when it is used for livestock grazing or sports activities?



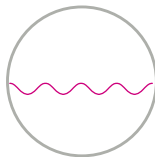
Useable length

The **useable surface length and distances for both takeoff and landing** must be established. Strips are usually less than 500m in length and a margin should be applied between the quoted Aeroplane Flight Manual (AFM) performance figures and what is safe in practice.



Obstacles

The **obstacle environment may require particular manoeuvring or techniques** to land in the available distance.



Surface condition

What is the surface condition, is it regularly inspected? Poor drainage during the winter can cause ruts and undulations to form, which then harden during the summer. Is the grass cut to an appropriate height?

Tell the operator of the strip what experience you have and what aeroplane you plan to use. They may be able to advise on past experience and any issues encountered. Be wary of anecdotal evidence that a particular aircraft is suitable for the strip – the exact model and pilot experience may not be known. Weather conditions, weight or any modifications will have a big influence on performance, so do your own assessment based on your aircraft and skill level.



Aircraft with tricycle landing gear tend to be vulnerable to 'digging in' on soft or rutted ground. In the right hands, 'taildraggers' tend to fair better, but directional control can be more challenging (particularly in cross winds) and the aircraft may 'ground loop' or 'nose over' if landing and/or braking technique are not correct.



Documents

Document Sharing Hub

STRIP FLYING

Assessing the site

Having established that the strip is available and potentially suitable, you should conduct a more detailed assessment. The aim is to identify all hazards and threats to operating there. The strip operator should be able to provide most of the information you need, but it is a good idea to verify yourself.

A good option is to fly there with a pilot who is already familiar with the strip. If doing so you must be clear about who is pilot in command and who will fly the approach and landing – it may be best to observe the first landing. An instructor familiar with the strip would be ideal.

Surrounding environment



A large-scale Ordnance Survey (OS) map and/or satellite imagery may be useful to establish the **elevation of the strip** (non-aeronautical maps will normally be in meters) and to assess the **surrounding terrain, obstacles and any buildings** that will be a factor.

As well as obstacles for takeoff and landing, you should look at the environment within several miles – for example if approaching in conditions of low cloud, are there any **hills or masts that might be threats?** Review the VFR chart for surrounding airspace structures and hazards.

Conditions on the ground



A ground visit is recommended. Where a visit is not practical, you should only fly to a strip when completely satisfied as to the suitability and condition and have all relevant information for operating there.



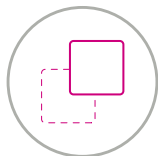
An OS map will give you an indication of length, but not the **exact usable length**. It may be possible to approximately measure the strip using online satellite pictures such as Google Earth. At a licensed aerodrome the runways and surrounding areas will have been surveyed to a high degree of accuracy – some strips may also have been surveyed, but it is not the norm.

The operator may have measured the strip using a surveyor's wheel or laser device. This should be reasonably accurate, however apply a conservative margin when considering real world aircraft performance. If in any doubt, verify the measurements using other means. If pacing a distance on foot, a typical human step is around 75 cm.

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Assessing the site

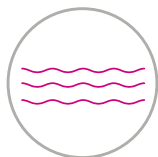
Conditions on the ground



The surface condition should be assessed, along with any areas you will need to taxi on. **Establish which areas are suitable for the movement of aircraft and any that need avoiding.** Avoid parking the aircraft on soft ground since it will sink after a while. Note any public rights of way that may cross the strip.



One way of assessing the **general condition of the surface** is to drive a car at approximately 30mph and note the ride quality, if it is reasonably smooth, it should be suitable. Grass height should be not more than 30% of the diameter of the aircraft's main wheels and ideally shorter.



Consider drainage issues – does the strip become waterlogged easily? Many strips become unusable in the winter due to water and mud. If your aircraft has wheel spats or fairings, consider removing these since they can trap mud and other debris from grass surfaces.



Propellor wash when manoeuvring or conducting power checks needs consideration – are there any buildings, other structures or animals that could be harmed? Areas with loose stones for example should be avoided, propwash will scatter them and may damage the propeller or anything else in the surrounding area. Always be aware of what is behind the aircraft when the engine is running.

Obstacles



Obstacles such as trees, hedges or power lines may be a factor – the strip may be a certain length, but if you cannot touch down at the start or clear the end on the takeoff, the usable distances are reduced.

The operator should know the approximate height of obstacles, but obviously trees and hedges can grow. If you are visiting on foot, a laser measuring device could be used to determine an approximate height.

The operator should be able to advise on the appropriate touchdown point and from this you should be able to determine the stopping distance required. For takeoff, you must determine the last point from which you can safely lift off and still clear any obstacles.