Civil Aviation Authority

Safety Notice

Number: SN–2026/005

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Version 2: This Safety Notice has been extended following stakeholder feedback to include guidance for organisations managing and/or maintaining General Aviation aircraft. It highlights specific review actions for owners, operators, and organisations overseeing aircraft fitted with autopilot or electric pitch trim systems. Minor amendments also clarify pre-flight checks and immediate actions in the event of trim runaway.

Autopilots and Trim Runaways in General Aviation Aircraft

This Safety Notice contains information that is for guidance and/or awareness.

Recipients are asked to ensure that this Information Notice is copied to all members of their staff who may have an interest in the information (including any 'in-house' or contracted maintenance organisations and relevant outside contractors).

Applicability:	
Aerodromes:	Not primarily affected
Air Traffic:	Not primarily affected
Airspace:	Not primarily affected
Airworthiness:	All organisations managing and/or maintaining General Aviation aircraft
Flight Operations:	All operators of General Aviation aircraft
Licensed/Unlicensed Personnel:	All General Aviation pilots

1 Introduction

1.1 This Safety Notice is relevant to General Aviation (GA) pilots who fly aircraft with autopilot and/or electric trim systems and organisations managing and/or maintaining GA aircraft fitted with such systems.

1.2 It is published to remind pilots of the importance of checking that the autopilot/electric trim is functioning correctly and the immediate actions to take in the event of a trim runaway event. It also reinforces operational best practice, highlights typical failure indications, and reminds operators of training and reporting requirements.

1.3 Additionally, specific review actions are highlighted for owners, operators, and organisations managing and/or maintaining GA aircraft fitted with autopilot or electric pitch trim systems.

1.4 Autopilots and electric pitch trim systems are integrated into the aircraft flight control system for control authority, flight instruments for attitude data, avionics systems for navigation data and the pitot-static system for altitude sensing and control. These are complex systems which require regular inspection and maintenance. There is a diverse range of GA aircraft with autopilots and/or electric trim systems. The technology used across the GA fleet varies considerably, and systems often have fewer layers of automation or protection than transport-category aircraft. Early detection and rapid pilot response are particularly important.

1.5 This Safety Notice is prompted by recent accident reports published by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch and Mandatory Occurrence Reports (MORs). These trim runaway events can involve significant pitch excursions and heavy control forces, potentially causing irrecoverable loss of control.

2 Action To Be Taken

2.1 Owners, operators and organisations managing GA aircraft with autopilot or electric pitch trim systems fitted should review their aircraft to ensure:

- The configuration of the system is in accordance with the manufacturer's data and the Aircraft Flight Manual (AFM)/Pilot Operating Handbook (POH).
- The Aircraft Maintenance Programme (AMP) includes the manufacturer's servicing tasks for the systems (including functional checks).[1]
- Any defects have been rectified or deferred in accordance with the relevant regulations (Part-ML, BCAR Section A).[2]
- If the system cannot be made serviceable it should be deactivated and/or removed in accordance with the manufacturer's data.

2.2 Pilots should ensure that they are familiar with the autopilot/electric trim systems used on their aircraft, conducting differences training/familiarisation training as necessary before use.

2.3 Differences training requires both theoretical knowledge instruction and training in an aircraft or appropriate training device. Familiarisation training requires the acquisition of additional knowledge relevant to the new type or variant. This may be achieved with the assistance of an instructor, another pilot experienced on type, or by self-study. Familiarisation training is only sufficient where differences training is not required. Reference should be made to **AMC1 FCL.725(a)**, **GM2 FCL.710** for further information.

2.4 To give the most effective mitigation against an autopilot issue/trim runaway event, pilots should consider the points below and plan their response.

Pre-flight Checks:

- Review AFM/POH for autopilot/electric trim limitations and emergency procedures. In some cases, there can be several ways to disengage the trim system. Vital actions

[1] An autopilot and electric pitch trim maintenance inspection needs to be performed in conjunction with an avionic inspection and a functional test of the pitot-static system. Due to the complex integration of the autopilot and avionic system, this should only be completed by a B2 Part-66 Engineer (or BCAR equivalent) with the required test equipment.

[2] It is likely that most defects affecting the serviceability of the autopilot and electric pitch trim should be categorised as an "aircraft defect that seriously endangers the flight safety" [Part-ML, ML.A.403 (a)] and should be rectified before further flight.

should be memorised for swift execution in an emergency. The location of any relevant circuit breaker(s) should be known and readily identifiable.

- As systems vary, you should ensure that you review any supplement(s) within the AFM/POH that contain information and procedures for the autopilot/trim system fitted to a particular aircraft.

- Confirm autopilot/trim disconnect and trim system serviceability and operation during pre-flight checks (on both control columns if fitted). This may also include any pitch trim warning light(s) and the servo override clutches.

- Check the deferred defects log. No autopilot or electric trim system should be utilised if there is any doubt of the equipment's serviceability.

- Prior to take-off, as well as checking the electric trim for full and free movement, check that the system operates in the correct sense.

Best practices whilst operating the aircraft:

- Maintain active monitoring when the autopilot is engaged, especially during climb/descent.

- Watch for indications of a malfunction such as unexpected pitch changes, heavy control forces, uncommanded trim motor activation or continuous trim wheel movement. If any of the above take place, consider the possibility of a trim runaway scenario.

- Be prepared for an uncommanded autopilot disconnect at any time (noting indications such as aural alerts, annunciators) and the need to manually fly the aircraft. Common reasons for sudden autopilot disconnect include turbulence, electrical issues or trim malfunctions.

- Autopilots often have multiple modes (e.g., heading, NAV, approach etc). Understanding which mode is critical to ensure there are no unexpected deviations from the intended flight profile.

Immediate actions in event of trim runaway:

- Disconnect autopilot/trim system immediately using control column switch or panel control to stop the unintended input.

- If the disconnect switch fails to cut the electrical power to autopilot/trim system, immediately follow the relevant trim emergency procedure detailed in the AFM/POH, which on some aircraft types may include pulling relevant circuit breaker(s).

- Manually retrim and stabilise the flightpath before troubleshooting, using any applicable checklist from the AFM/POH.

Training:

- Complete differences training/familiarisation training as applicable for aircraft equipped with an autopilot or electric trim system.

- Practice trim runaway drills during refresher flight training.

Reporting:

- Submit an MOR for any autopilot or trim malfunction.
- Report any defects to a maintenance organisation for further investigation.

3 Guidance Material

The following sources contain useful information which should be used in conjunction with this Safety Notice:

- **Trim runaways | UK Civil Aviation Authority**

4 Queries

4.1 Any queries or requests for further guidance as a result of this communication should be addressed to:

General Aviation Policy

Safety & Airspace Regulation Group

Civil Aviation Authority

Aviation House

Gatwick Airport South

West Sussex

RH6 0YR

Tel: 0330 1383495

E-mail: GA@caa.co.uk

5 Cancellation

5.1 This Safety Notice will remain in force until further notice.