

Autoland Runway Excursion Blamed On Pilots

RUSS NILES



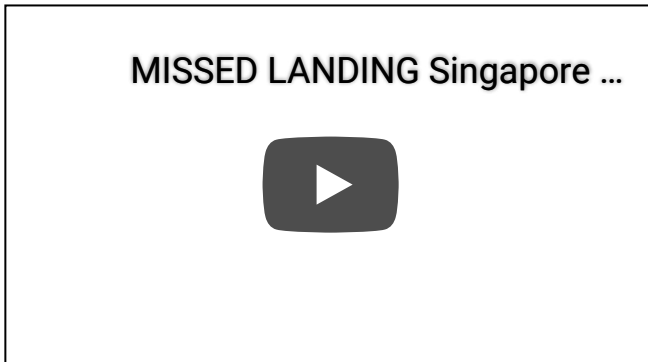
German investigators say a runway excursion by Boeing 777 that was on autoland was the fault of the pilots. The unusual incident happened in November of 2011 at Munich Airport but the report from the German BRU was just released this week. The BRU found the Singapore Airlines crew initiated the chain of events that led to the autopilot putting the aircraft on the grass. It was [reported by Aerossurance](#) on Monday. The flight was arriving from Manchester in the U.K. and was just about to touch down when an RJ85 taking off farther down the runway momentarily blocked the signal from the localizer at the opposite end. For a few seconds, nothing and no one was in control of the aircraft, which was less than 50 feet above the runway.

The widebody banked left before landing on the left main gear and veering left off the runway, even though the captain hit the go-around button on the throttle lever. The pilots were only able to gain manual control when they kicked right rudder, sending the big jet back across the runway where it finally stopped in the grass on the right side. There were no injuries and the plane wasn't damaged. The investigation concluded the aircraft performed as designed and blamed the pilots.

The crew's mistake occurred when they got their final weather report for the destination airport. As per their company's procedures, the captain took over from the first officer as pilot flying because of the low visibility (1.25 NM) and ceiling (300 feet). Even though the conditions didn't require it (they were CAT I), the captain decided to let the plane autoland but he didn't tell controllers. The controllers were operating under CAT I procedures, which allowed them to clear the regional for takeoff ahead of the approaching 777. Had the controllers known the 777 was autoland, the investigators said the controllers would have held the RJ85.

The timing of the events proved critical to the eventual outcome. The localizer signal was interrupted just as the 777 was about to touch down. When it banked left, the captain hit the automatic go around but not before the gear touched and caused the aircraft to reject that command. It instead went into the roll-out mode. The pilots were, however, able to manually retract the spoilers in anticipation of the go around and that likely contributed to their wild ride on the ground.

The BRU recommended that flight crews be brushed up on the regs and do more sim training for localizer deviations. The mishap was caught on video.



[view on YouTube](#)

Kitty Hawk: Spanning Time And Distance

PAUL BERTORELLI

When, in 1927, it was decided to erect a monument to commemorate the first controlled powered flight of an airplane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the place was considered so remote that Congress figured no one would ever deliberately visit such a fly- and mosquito-infested sand spit. So isolated was Kitty Hawk, that the planners assigned to the memorial task required a five-day round trip from Washington just to survey the site.

Clearly, there was to be no aeronautical Lincoln Memorial in such a wasteland and Congress instead settled on what's there now: a simple, albeit impressive, stone monument rendered in the Art Deco style that reads as fresh to the eye now as it did when it was dedicated in 1932, attended by Orville Wright, who was then 61. (Wilbur Wright died of typhoid fever in 1912.) To justify the project, Congress ordered a light placed atop the monument and anointed it as a Coast Guard coastal navigation aid.

The monument now commands the center of the Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kitty Hawk and it alone is worth both the visit and the semi-arduous trek to the top of Kill Devil Hill. The Wrights did that climb many hundreds of times, dragging gliders upslope, teaching themselves the rudiments of aeronautics a handful of seconds at a time, between crashes, skids through the sand and uncommanded turns they called "well digging."

The monument was restored in 2008 and recently, in time for this year's First Flight Day on Dec. 17, the museum/visitor center got a facelift, too, as I reported in [this video](#). Some 88 years after the fact, the park service seems to have similarly assumed that Kitty Hawk is still too far off the main bus line to warrant a more ambitious facility than the one originally erected there in 1960.

That's perhaps one reason to explain declaring the original building architecturally important enough to preserve and restore. It was built under a program called Mission 66, in which the Park Service planned to—and did—dramatically expand facilities by 1966. As such, the design is efficient and spare—in other words, cheap. It was the first structure of its kind on a national park, so that's another reason the Park Service restored it, I suppose. It's basically slab-sided concrete reminiscent of a 1960s elementary school with a splash of Eero Saarinen. There's room on the site for a larger museum and that may yet happen. But not this time.

It's a minor complaint, because the exhibit designers did a terrific job of reworking the interior with new displays that tell the Wrights' story in satisfyingly rich detail. The museum's main arena, called the Flight Room, has a replica 1903 Flyer and one wall dedicated to an all-encompassing technical evolution of the Wrights' journey from kites to controlled powered flight. Give it 10 minutes and you'll have a grasp of the Wright genius. One intent is to ignite youthful interest in STEM pursuits and that it ought to do.