

Mystery of kerosene in petrol tank

CRASH PLANE FUEL PUZZLE

BY ALISON BYLES

THE WRONG fuel was pumped into the tanks of a light aircraft which crash-landed and caught fire among trees beside the M2 motorway at Chatham two weeks ago.

This has been revealed in a preliminary bulletin from the accidents investigation branch of the Department of Trade.

A spokesman for the department said yesterday: "Our inspectors have established that the plane, which was re-fuelled at Rochester airport, had a mixture of kerosene and petrol in its tanks.

"The mixture caused the port engine to fail. Kerosene is used in some jet aircraft and for heating and lighting.

"The crashed plane — a twin-engined Aero Commander belonging to Elliotts — needs a high-octane petrol. We assume the kerosene was put in the airport's petrol tank by mistake.



"Our inspectors are still investigating how and why it got there — along with all other details about the crash. We expect them to make their full report in the next couple of weeks."

A spokesman for Rochester airport said kerosene was normally not delivered there.

The plane crashed just after 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday 19 February. It had just taken off from Rochester airport to take three businessmen to Manchester for the Rochester firm Marconi-Elliott.

The aircraft started losing height soon after take-off when the port engine failed. It ran parallel with the motorway for a quarter-of-a-mile and it is believed the pilot tried to land on the motorway but traffic was too heavy.

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Instead, he belly-flopped on a tree-lined bank near the motorway's verge at Bridgewood and the plane ended up facing in the opposite direction.

Two passing motorists stopped and smashed open the cockpit to rescue the four men inside while another driver doused the flames with damp grass before firemen and police arrived.

The pilot, Mr. Eric Taylor of Highview Drive, Chatham, and his three passengers escaped serious injury. Mr. Taylor and two of his passengers — Mr. John Keeble of Fair Tree Grove, Bredhurst, and Mr. Kenneth Venison of Snodhurst Avenue, Chatham — were discharged after treatment at Medway Accident Centre.

Mr. Steven Duxbury of Greenway, Chatham, was admitted to the hospital with back injuries. A spokesman for the hospital said yesterday that Mr. Duxbury was making satisfactory progress.