



**Civil Aviation Authority**  
**Safety Notice**  
**Number: SN-2026/005**



**Issued: 24 April 2026**

## **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).

<b>Applicability:</b>	
<b>Aerodromes:</b>	Not Primarily Affected
<b>Air Traffic:</b>	Not Primarily Affected
<b>Airspace:</b>	Not Primarily Affected
<b>Airworthiness:</b>	Not Primarily Affected
<b>Flight Operations:</b>	All Operators of General Aviation Aircraft
<b>Licensed/Unlicensed Personnel:</b>	All General Aviation Pilots

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This Safety Notice is relevant to general aviation pilots who fly aircraft with autopilot and/or electric trim systems. 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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 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.

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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 Aircraft Flight Manual (AFM)/Pilot Operating Handbook (POH) for autopilot/electric trim limitations and emergency procedures. In some cases, there can be several ways to disengage the trim system. Vital actions 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.
- 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, pull the 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.

## 4 Guidance Material

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

- [Trim runaways | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)

## 5 Queries

- 5.1 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](mailto:GA@caa.co.uk)

## 4 Cancellation

- 4.1 This Safety Notice will remain in force until 30 April 2027.