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Microlight pilot walks away from crash-landing

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Christel Yardley

Gavin Brown, from Te Awamutu, was flying his microlight near the Matamata airstrip when the engine started cutting out.

A Waikato man has walked away uninjured after his solo-seater microlight crash landed in a paddock south of the Matamata airstrip.

Gavin Brown was flying his Sonerai 1 light aircraft from Te Awamutu back to Matamata when the aircraft started having trouble during a second attempt to land on Sunday.

"I came into land and didn't like the look of the landing, so I went to go round again and put the power on and the motor started to run roughly and finally stopped," said Brown.

With limited control the Te Awamutu pilot managed to get the plane into glide speed and find the nearest flat piece of paddock, about 600 metres from the Matamata Glider Airport.

"I was lucky there was so much flat land around, that's the very reason why I am flying out of here at the moment, there is a lot of flat ground in case something goes wrong."

Brown, who has been flying since 1996, estimates he had about 10-20 seconds to decide upon about the best course of action.

"You just do what you gotta do, you haven't got time to be scared."

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The microlight, imported from the United States, came down hard on landing into the Waharoa paddock, causing serious damage to the undercarriage and propeller.

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"This is the first time I have had damage like this to an aircraft, I have had other engine failures but never had any damage."

A police officer heading down a nearby road to inspect a fire burning in a paddock spotted the aircraft going down and raised the alarm, said Brown.

"She turned around and saw me in the paddock. I had just got out and was pretty oblivious to everyone else coming in behind me."

Emergency services arrived to the paddock off Wardville Rd within minutes of the crash, just before 2pm.

Northern Fire Communications shift manager Scott Osmond said the microlight had reportedly done a "belly landing", where the aircraft lands without its landing gear fully extended and uses its underside or "belly" to take the impact.

Brown said conditions had worsened during the flight with cloud and showers creeping in.

He had only purchased the homebuilt aircraft three months ago, which would now have to undergo major repairs.

"It's always a lucky escape when something goes wrong."

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