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Sikorsky offers added comfort and luxury to GB clients

GB Helicopters of Cheshire in the UK has taken delivery of a Sikorsky S-76C++. Primarily based in Manchester, the aircraft seats up to six passengers and is expected to be popular with dignitaries and royalty. Operations manager Andy Cunningham believes it is a great prospect for the charter market. "Only two C++ models are available to charter in the UK at the moment," he says. See page 9 for more.

Carolina releases book to document time in the air

CRM instructor and former Piaggio pilot Carolina Dellonte has published a book discussing her executive aviation career. 'My Heart at Zero Gravity: A Girl, A Plane and Their Story' is available now in e-book format and looks back over Dellonte's career flying the Piaggio Avanti for a small Italian operator between 1998 and 2010.

"I started to work for an operator at Bologna airport by chance, because at the time I was a ramp agent for another airline," she tells *EBAN*. "A vacancy came up, and I didn't know that the Piaggio was the aircraft in question. It was my desire to work more deeply in the executive aviation business. So I met the Piaggio by chance, and I loved it right away. At the time, that particular aircraft was not very well-known – the company I worked for was the only one in Italy flying the type. It only had one, but over the course of five or six years the business grew quickly, and we ended up having six Piaggios."

"In the beginning it was very exciting because the aircraft was not known, and all of the new passengers and clients loved it very much, because it was different. It was more comfortable and cheaper than similar aircraft and it had great performance too, so we were able to land and take off at short field airports."

She says that there was a great atmosphere around the aircraft and that she felt like part of a family with Piaggio. "I think that was the best part of the job. I had a very good experience as a pilot, because the aircraft is really nice to fly. It

is easy yet honest; you can fly it by relying on technology but you can still feel the aircraft, which is not so common anymore. My colleagues reported the same: they really enjoyed flying it, and we all had the feeling of having a connection with the machine."

Dellonte stopped flying because changes occurred both in the company and in the wider industry. The company was sold so the management changed, as did her colleagues. This led her to move to France.



Carolina Dellonte says that the Piaggio Avanti is a joy to fly.

"The main reason I stopped flying was that I was quite tired, and I didn't want to be away from my family so much," she explains. "Executive flying is very demanding because you don't have scheduled flights, so your phone is on all the time as you wait for the call, meaning you are unable to relax. You might have a programme for one week and then during that week things change. Perhaps you might have had plans with your family or something like that and you then have to rearrange."

"It is a very nice job but it does have some downsides compared with commercial airlines where you have a better idea of your schedule and you have definite 'off' days that are

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Air Serv continues Ebola fightback in perilous DRC

Air Serv has arranged two more relief flights from Entebbe, Uganda, to Bunia in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in response to the Ebola outbreak in the region. Bunia is located northeast of Madinga, the initial site of the outbreak. The operator dispatched two Cessna Caravans from Uganda last month carrying two tonnes of medical supplies and cargo, which were offloaded by crew before the aircraft returned to Entebbe.

The most recent outbreak of Ebola

in eastern DRC is attributed to the high fatality rate 'Zaire' strain of the virus, and the death toll has risen to 49. Health officials have disclosed that the outbreak has now spread from the province of North Kivu to neighbouring Ituri and 90 cases have been reported, 10 of which are healthcare providers.

Field teams working to contain the outbreak have also identified more than 2,000 potentially exposed contacts, and incubation can last up to 21 days. Added to this, the extreme

insecurity of the region caused by clashes between government officials and rebels forces have made it difficult to trace the path of the virus. According to Tarik Jasarevic of the World Health Organisation in Geneva: "We are at a critical moment where we are not yet sure we have all the chains of transmission identified." He warns that the corners of the province that contact tracers cannot reach could allow the virus to continue spreading.

"It's a very, very complex operation,"

adds World Health Organisation deputy director general for emergency preparedness and response Peter Salama. "In terms of difficulty, trying to extinguish a deadly outbreak pathogen in a war zone is at the top of the scale."

Air Serv is expected to continue performing response flights, transporting medicine, protective gear and personnel. An outbreak in the west of the country that claimed 33 lives – for which Air Serv loaned a Cessna Caravan – was contained in July.

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GB Helicopters adds Sikorsky to amplify comfort and luxury

Cheshire, UK-based GB Helicopters has added a Sikorsky S-76C++ to its fleet. The company has also recently opened a satellite base at London Elstree aerodrome in response to demand from clients in London. Operations manager Andy Cunningham says: "Our core business model is focused on providing luxury travel solutions to our distinguished clientele. However, we are also heavily involved with the aerial filming and utility sectors. Five of our nine-strong fleet are based at private addresses near to our Ashley headquarters."

"Although the operation is quite sizeable, the staffing infrastructure is relatively small and comprises two operations staff, five full time flight crew and a generous pool of freelance crew. The Sikorsky S76C++ is a firm favourite among VVIPs, dignitaries and royalty. Only two C++ models are available for charter in the UK, so we expect the aircraft to be in high demand."

The Sikorsky seats up to six passengers and has two rear-facing 'captain's chairs' plus a forward-facing bench configuration with armrests. The helicopter will primarily be based in Manchester but is expected to visit London and other parts of Europe too. "The S-76 amplifies the comfort and level of luxury that we can offer," continues Cunningham. "Other types we have under management include the AS355N/NP, AW109SP and B429."

GB Helicopters has been heavily involved with the aerial filming sector in recent years. In 2014 it invested in a GSS C516 gyro stabilised platform equipped with a RED Epic Dragon

sensor, enabling the team to capture footage up to 6K resolution. Three project examples that have required this specialist activity included the movies Dunkirk, Transformers and Spitfire. In 2018, it purchased a Shotover K1 gyro stabilised platform with sensors that can capture up to 8K.

The company is also one of the only civilian operators in the UK approved by the CAA to perform helicopter abseiling tasks along with low level disembarkation into bodies of water. "This type of tasking is primarily requested by production companies for projects such as the Bear Grylls television series and Harry Styles' Sign of the Times music video," Cunningham explains. "In addition, with our multi-role AS355N/NP aircraft we regularly perform cargo flights around the UK and Europe. Common cargo items include car and aircraft parts. Due to our close proximity to Manchester airport, we are favoured by the based maintenance organisations to transport urgent parts to commercial aircraft with technical faults."

"We can also perform underslung load lifting missions for larger items, and have worked alongside environmental organisations to transport heather brash in the Peak District for development and rejuvenation projects. We have also recently operated on behalf of a large water treatment company to replace a broken pump weighing 0.6 tonnes."

Power distributor contracts are another source of revenue for GB, and its AS355 fleet with aerial cameras is well-suited to these missions.



Writing about her experiences as a pilot and changes in the industry was 'like therapy' for Carolina Dellonte.

Carolina releases book to document time in the air

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decided one month in advance. The executive aviation environment changes all the time as well. I started to feel a little homesick, and then the economic crisis happened.

"Eventually I received an offer from a commercial airline, but it was based in the Middle East, so that didn't work for me either. The financial crisis was very severe in Europe, so there were very few jobs available; I decided to go back home."

Following completion of a university degree, Dellonte became a flying school instructor and then headed to Manchester for a crew resource management instructor course. "I now give classes to pilots from many different backgrounds and who fly different types. I work with a network of flying schools in northern Italy and give classes

on aspects of the ATPL."

The book developed from some articles she was writing for an American women pilot's magazine. The readers enjoyed the articles about her life on the Piaggio, so the editors suggested she write a book about it. "This idea stayed in my mind for a couple of years and eventually I started to write. It was a process that I had to go through to help me accept the changes in my life. At first, it wasn't easy to change my life completely, and it was difficult to feel comfortable with writing about it. But as I started to write, the uncomfortable feeling became less and less intense. It was like a kind of therapy. I felt the need to share my experiences as a woman pilot."

"At the beginning of the book I write about who I am and where I'm from, why I decided to be a pilot, how I became a Piaggio pilot, and

then I talk about adventures and misadventures during my ten years of flying, both in the air and on the ground. The book ends with the reasons why I decided to stop flying."

"I wanted to share these experiences because in-between several things happened that changed me as a person. They never changed my love for flying though, which is still very strong. I thought it would be nice and also useful to share my experiences."

"Becoming a pilot was not easy and once I made my dream a reality, it was also often difficult to maintain it and defend it. I hope that sharing my experience will, above all, help younger generations to pursue their own desires and to never give up. Women should not be influenced by the preconceptions of family or society. Fight for what you believe in and be yourself."

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