

Has your superyacht helicopter got you in a spin?

Serving as everything from a toy to a serious mode of transport for charter guests, a helicopter is high up on the wish-list for many yacht owners. But, playing host to the most complex of flying machines on board comes with more challenges than owners and captains might expect.



Space

This is a compromise that all but the largest vessels face when trying to accommodate a landing area and the deck space it inevitably eats into (there goes your tender spot). Small yachts with a helicopter squeezed onto the aft sun deck are unlikely to pass muster for commercial flight operations due to the lack of margin for pilot error which may leave them being of little use.

The rules have changed

Nigel Watson of [Luviair](#) explains that things are changing for owners who want to fly themselves on board.

Changes in legislation recently introduced should be considered by private owner pilots flying larger helicopters to ensure that the way they have flown in the past will remain appropriate under the new rules. The trend is towards rules and regulations that are more restrictive for the private pilot flying a complex helicopter. – Nigel Watson, Luvicair

Those vessels where a helicopter is integral to daily charter operations are increasingly built with a flag state approved landing area. The upshot is a significant increase in operational capability, due to landings and take-offs being much safer, whilst the downside is an almost certain impact on the yacht's aesthetic – it's hard to disguise a helipad!



A post shared by Dean Harrison Videography (@theyachtchef) on May 22, 2017 at 1:29am PDT

Crew are going to need specialist training (no sh*t)

When it comes to crew, any skipper worth his salt will employ a specialist helicopter consultancy to train and equip his team in safe helicopter operations. [The Squadron](#), founded by former US naval aviator Daniel Deutermann, provides this service as well as specialist flight training for pilots. Once trained, crew responsibility for deck operations will be with the yacht's designated Helicopter Landing Officer (HLO) whilst other crew members provide a firefighting detail and assistance to passengers- a serious training commitment for any yacht and one that must be kept current. In some cases, crew are also trained to refuel aircraft, greatly increasing the usability of the aircraft, but adding the safe bunkering of aviation fuel to the list of challenges faced on board.

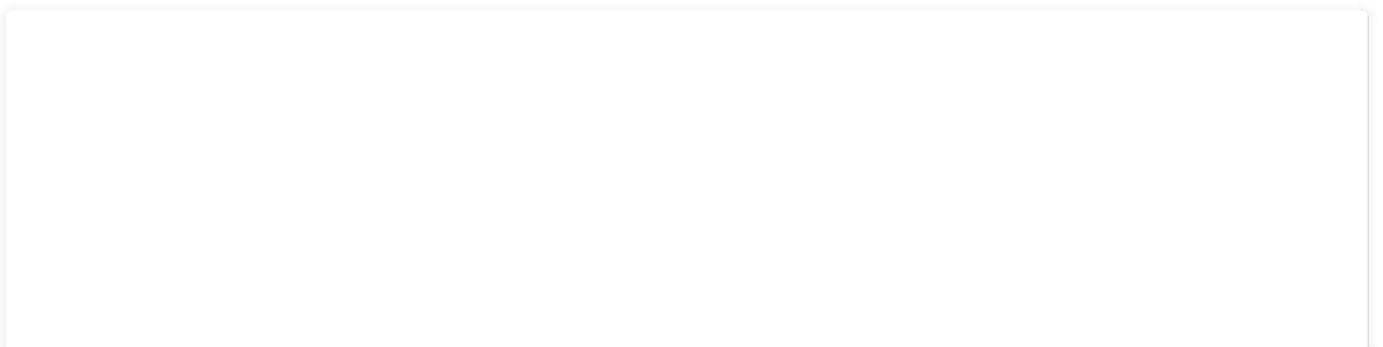
The owner may want to fly it

When trained pilot owners decide they want to fly helicopters onto their yacht, the boundaries are more ambiguous. There is no legal requirement for the pilot to hold the commercial helicopter licence professional pilots must have or the landing area to be certified; regardless, the crew should be prepared.

There are three main recommendations when it comes to helicopter operations on yachts, an operations manual that has been vetted for content and evaluated for use aboard that specific yacht, formal crew training, ideally with live-flying exercises involved, and a formal risk assessment undertaken by a specialist third party. – Dan Deutermann, The Squadron

Did we mention space (it's a big deal)?

When it comes to equipping a yacht with a helicopter and landing area, there are minimum standards to be considered too. “The deck should be of an appropriate size, free of obstacles, strong enough to take the dynamic loads of the helicopter under a heavy landing condition, and equipped for any incident that is likely to occur in the event of an accident,” explains Nigel Watson. “The helicopter should be fit for purpose, have ample power reserves, and be equipped for overwater operations.”





A post shared by @yachthelicopters on Jun 5, 2017 at 7:48am PDT

Let's be honest, they're handy to have

So, operational considerations tackled, helicopter purchased, landing area certified, crew trained and pilot employed; what's on offer to the owner and guests? Well, actually quite a lot. At the top end of the market, a twin-engine aircraft (single engine models can only fly in fine weather) will be capable of flying guests up to 600nm from the vessel, in poor visibility, during daylight hours. Transfers to and from land take minutes, whilst those mid-charter arrivals between ports are a logistical nightmare for the captain no longer.



A post shared by Henry Smith (@theyachtguymonaco) on Jan 28, 2015 at 5:42am PST

Inherently complex, but indispensable to owners and guests a well-run helicopter operation takes a yacht to the next level of operational capability.