

Heliops

DELIVERING GLOBAL COVERAGE OF THE HELICOPTER INDUSTRY

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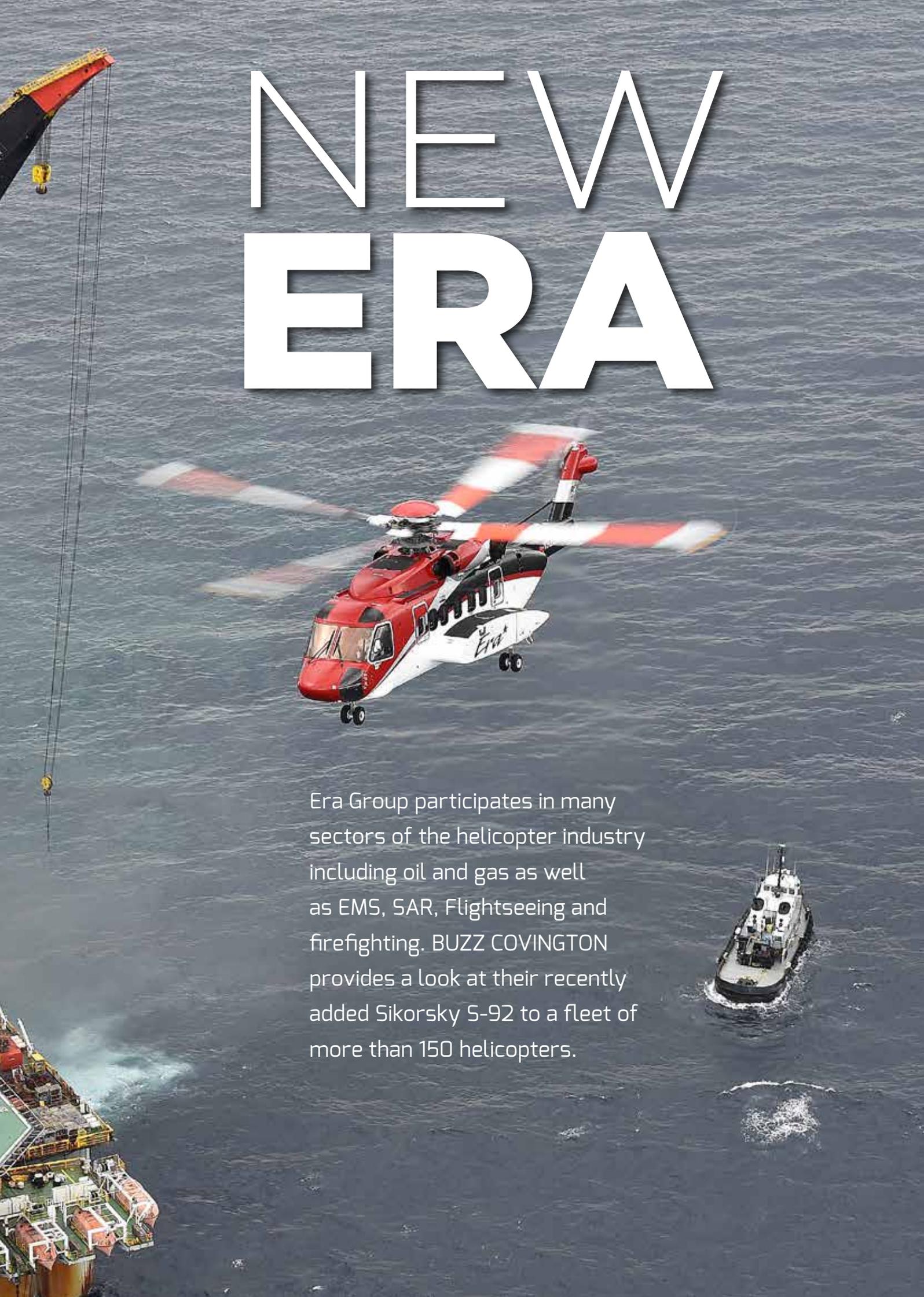


NEW
ERA

HELICOPTERS IN THE
DRAGON KINGDOM
Bhutan



NEW ERA



Era Group participates in many sectors of the helicopter industry including oil and gas as well as EMS, SAR, Flightseeing and firefighting. BUZZ COVINGTON provides a look at their recently added Sikorsky S-92 to a fleet of more than 150 helicopters.



THE NEW ADDITIONS



ong recognized as an industry leader in helicopter transport operations, Era Group recently added the Sikorsky S-92 to their fleet. Having taken delivery of their first S-92 in September 2015, the company began flight operations in October. Era expects an additional S-92 in December and has orders for another two.

In addition to rounding out their fleet of heavy-twin aircraft, Era's Senior Vice President - Commercial, Paul White, says that these S-92s are the first of the newly certified gross weight expansion (GWE) aircraft to roll off Sikorsky's production line. This modification adds structural reinforcements to the fuselage, and takes the helicopter from a previous max takeoff gross weight of 26,500 pounds to 27,700 pounds. "Having the extra payload available will help to better serve our current customers by offering greater flexibility and ability to suit their individual needs." He also says that though this modification is being offered as a retrofit kit to older S-92s, it made sense to wait for delivery of the first airframes that were produced with the GWE from the start. When asked about how the crews and maintainers are finding the S-92, he said "Great! The reliability has been superb, and our close relationship with Sikorsky ensures that we get support from their technical representatives if we need it." To further bolster

their working relationship with the manufacturer, Era maintenance personnel use a system that tracks all aircraft performance data and maintenance trends, which are then fed back to the OEM for continued improvement of material and maintenance performance.

When asked why Era chose this particular airframe to add to their stable, Paul advised that there were actually several factors, and they all relate to their company's motto, "Safety, Efficiency, Reliability". He said that Era is continually listening to feedback from both their operators and customers, allowing them to better serve their customers while increasing the overall safety of their operations. Factors included in the decision was the maintenance flexibility built into the systems, the inherent damage tolerant design, and the range and payload of the S-92, it made sense to add this aircraft to their inventory.

SAFETY IS THE PRIORITY

Era's helicopters in the Gulf of Mexico are primarily used to transport personnel to, from and between offshore oil and gas production platforms, drilling rigs and other installations. The S-92 is very adept at fulfilling the heavy crew-change role, and the passenger comfort options that Era specified provides the potential for passengers to feel like they are flying in first class. The current configuration allows for 19 passengers in the main cabin. The platforms that Era services are anywhere from about



100 miles, all the way out to 240 miles offshore. Cruising at 147 knots, that is a flying time of just over an hour and a half each way.

The S92 is the most advanced aircraft in Sikorsky's civil product line and incorporates an advanced health and usage monitoring system that sets a new level of reliability. This facet of the S-92 supports claims that the leadership at Era is known to say "Safer? Buy it!" The S-92 has several things going for it in the safety department, including

active vibration control, composite blades, high-visibility cockpit design, energy absorbing landing gear, and many other design features. The fully redundant systems for flight and engine controls, avionics, cockpit displays and electrical systems all contribute to an aircraft that was designed from the ground up with safety in mind. To further bolster the comfort of their customers, Era took the added step of doubling the number of standard active vibration controls from three to six. Additionally,





Era chose to expand the amount of situational awareness in the cockpit by opting for a fifth multi functional display (MFD). This fifth display can be tailored to show navigation data, weather radar, aircraft system monitoring, or whichever information the crew feels would be helpful to that particular phase of the flight. With the addition of technologies like TCAS-2 and the impressive Rig Approach System that has recently been certified for use by the FAA, the S-92 offers a

robust and well-balanced approach to safety in many different ways.

All of the added technology that is in the aircraft works in concert with infrastructure throughout the Gulf of Mexico to keep flight crews informed of air-traffic and rapidly changing weather conditions that are prevalent in the area. The summer months are especially known for producing

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thunderstorms that can pop up out of nowhere, and Era having weather radar installed on all of their helicopters ensures that the crews have the tools needed to simply circumnavigate the cells. The recently implemented Automatic Dependent Surveillance – Broadcast (ADS-B) network uses information from systems aboard the aircraft, ground stations, and ATC facilities to present a comprehensive picture to the flight crew as to where other aircraft are, as well as weather events. These features, plus the Automated Weather Observation Systems (AWOS) installed throughout the gulf, ensure that flight crews have plenty of choices, and are able to be more efficient in their decisions.

MANAGING RISK

Another important aspect of the decision to go with a new aircraft is fleet diversity. Although Era has been operating the EC225 since 2008, the Company felt it made sense to offer customers an alternative option. The 2012-2013 grounding of EC225s

(related to the main gearbox vertical shaft) adversely affected flight operations around the globe and although the problem was identified and corrected, there were several months when business that relied on this airframe were feeling the pinch. Era now having a heavy lift helicopter mix should help ensure that a similar situation will have much less of an impact on flight operations.

Now both types are sharing the workload. With one S-92 and four EC225s, the new S-92 is flying approximately 20% of the heavy lift flights, and that will be expected to go up to a 33% share after induction of the second Sikorsky airframe. By adding the additional type to their fleet, Era has become the only diversified heavy helicopter operator in the Gulf of Mexico.

Not all flights or customers require such a large helicopter to fulfill their needs so Era includes other helicopter types in the fleet to meet the needs of a variety of customers and their specific requirements. The fleet includes single engine, light



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twins, medium twins, and heavy twin helicopters. Additionally, by purchasing new airframes, Era further enhances its youngest large fleet in the world with a dollar-weighted average age of just 7.5 years.

SUPER BASE

Maintaining bases and facilities around the rim of the Gulf of Mexico, Era maintains a base in Houma, Louisiana. It was recently upgraded and expanded to become their 'Super Base'. Though this larger base may be just a bit further inland than some of

the other heliports like Fourchon, the extra distance acts as a natural buffer to some of the unpredictable weather that the Gulf of Mexico is famous for. The facilities that lie closer to the gulf face a greater chance of disruptions such as flooded roads following large weather events, so the extra few minutes of flight time incurred by being further inland makes sense over the long run to ensure as much as possible, an uninterrupted service. Additionally, Era chose a location with adjacent land that would be available for further expansion if needed.

Era currently flies about 15,000





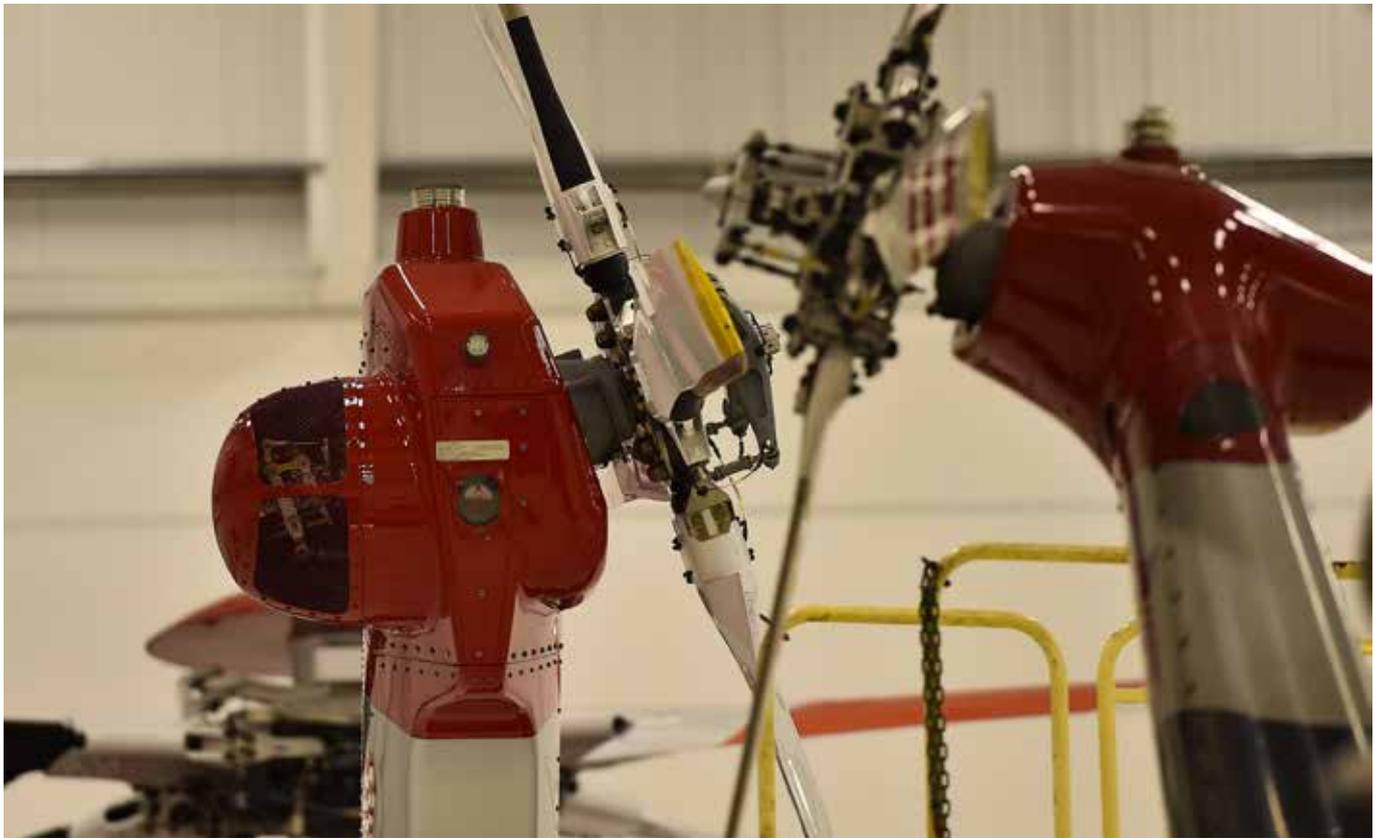


passengers every month to and from the oil platforms in the gulf. With approximately ten to twelve of the helicopters at Houma providing services to the deep water rig locations, there are anywhere from 20 to 50 flights a day. With so many people to take care of on a daily basis, the company invested in a world-class passenger facility. When a client shows up for their flight, they go through a process much like a traveler would see at any major airport in the world. A check-in kiosk is available to swipe in the passenger's identification, and they are then prompted to enter the company that they work for, destination, etc. After passing through a robust and efficient security screening for both passengers and their baggage, customers are invited to relax in a comfortable lounge/terminal. Couches, big screen televisions, food services, and flight information screens all create the feeling one would get in an executive flight terminal. When informed that their flight is ready, passengers attend a safety briefing

in a separate room, and are then led out to their aircraft for their flight. Fortunately, the water temperature in the Gulf of Mexico stays warm enough throughout the year that survival suits are not required for the passengers to wear.

DAILY RITUAL

A typical day for the crews operating out of Houma usually begins at 5am, and finds the pilots performing their preflight inspections, checking NOTAMS, and conducting performance planning based on weather, distance and expected load. This information is then shared with the scheduling managers to ensure that the appropriate number of passengers and equipment are programmed for the aircraft. For instance, on the longest route that Era operates, they may be able to take a full compliment of 19 passengers if the weather supports VFR for the entire day. If the weather is expected to be below VMC minimums, the amount of reserve fuel that they



are required to have on board may necessitate removing a passenger or two.

Interestingly, flight planning is driven by specific customer considerations requiring compliance with internal policies regarding the amount of reserve fuel that must be onboard as well as other technical requirements. The first takeoff is

usually at 6am, and most crews can expect to fly anywhere from one to three flights a day, depending on the flight durations and the day of the week. Wednesday is historically their busiest day of the week, as that is when the majority of the deep-water crew changes occur. All passenger operations operate during daylight hours, but their SAR helicopters



routinely operate at night. All of the medium-lift helicopters operated by Era are IFR capable, but only the S92 has the automatic rig approach system. Once the pilot enters the wind speed and direction (usually within the 50 miles of the approach), the autopilot will guide the aircraft right down to final approach, complete with decision height, missed approach information, and offsets to the left or right. With the rig in sight, the pilot can continue the mission on autopilot, or switch the system off and manually fly to the deck. Of course, the flight crew finds the reduced workload in the cockpit to be a big help!

There is no “typical” pilot at Era, and their backgrounds are as varied as the people who work there. Some have military backgrounds, some come from helicopter flight training programs, and a few were already commercial helicopter pilots working elsewhere before coming to Era. Usual experience minimums for the flight crews are somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 hours, and some of the customers that Era supports may have additional qualifying stipulations, such as a minimum of 1,000 hours of multi-engine time, or other unique

factors. Era encourages all of their flight crew to be ATP certified, and most pilots are rated on two aircraft for additional flexibility. Though they may be qualified on two different airframes, they are not allowed to fly different types of helicopters in the same day. Standard currency requirements are met in either aircraft or flight simulators, depending on availability and the types of emergency procedures and tasks that need to be completed.

GOM RESIDENT

Although Era’s helicopters operate all over the world (India, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom to name a few) their current plan is to keep the S-92s operating in the Gulf of Mexico for the time being. Era leadership sees the focus remaining on the Eastern and Central parts of the Gulf of Mexico in the near future, but with the number of bases they maintain around the rim of the gulf, they are able to flex their operations wherever needed to better support their customers. Paul White mentioned that future S-92 deliveries could very well be seen working in other locations around the world. HO



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