

Salty Sea Dog

Take Flight, Take Fright

Salty Sea Dog worries about safety on yachts that carry a budgie on the back

It never fails to amaze the Salty Sea Dog how little regard those in the superyacht industry seem to have for life when the use of the helicopter at sea is concerned. Oh true, they talk the talk and there are rules and regulations that state what is, and is not, acceptable but it all seems to go out of the window when the boss says "Get out to Sardinia, anchor in Calle di Volpe and I will join you by helicopter."

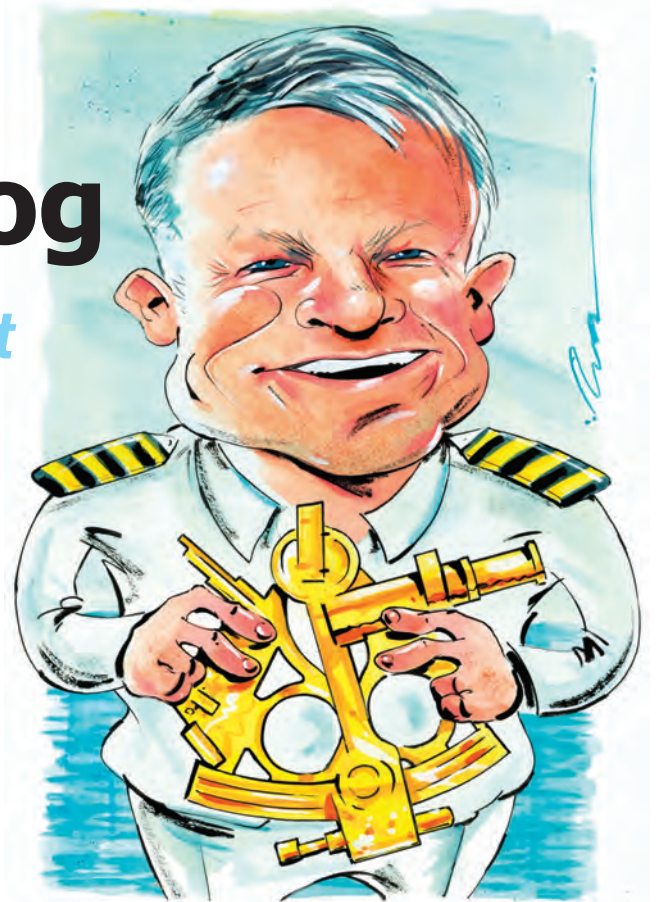
Every one involved in dealing with the budgie, then rushes around with renewed vigour because the boss is on his way. The Captain reminds everyone again, how imperative it is to keep the landing area surgically clean pointing out, once more, that Foreign Object Damage or FOD can easily wreck a helicopter's gas turbine engine if it so much as ingests a single base ball cap, magazine or cushion carelessly left out, to the point that crew fully understand that if it did, the budgie would immediately plummet to the deck with life threatening potential. Then someone mentions the boss has his latest girlfriend flying in and the stewardess, who remembers how much she likes pink flowers, rushes off to make an arrangement for the table she is preparing to set up on the sundeck!

I have even seen the mandatory fire fighting crew turn up dressed in just shorts and smart crew shirt with an extinguisher to hand. I have seen a crewmember lying on top of cushions to stop them blowing away rather than removing them clear of the area before the aircraft lands.

Training Standards

The law has changed in recent years and yachts that are operated commercially do now have to have been trained to a specified standard, which is, by the way, dependant upon where the vessel is registered. But what is wrong with these people who operate on private yachts and why is it that those individuals directly involved in the day-to-day operation of the infernal flying machine (Captain, Engineers, Helicopter Landing Officer, Fire Fighters) have not been forced to complete a specific training course ensuring they can correctly embark, test and supply aviation fuel and lubricants as well as safely launching and landing the bird.

It is so imperative that all personnel understand; that operating a helicopter effects everyone aboard, in particular the Captain who must truly understand his role and responsibilities, during



helicopter operations, including: aeronautical communications, meteorology, true and relative wind speed and direction, air flow, air temperature, barometric pressure, wave heights and frequency, visibility and cloud heights.

Why is this so important, because, for example the magnitude of the wind speeds over a ship's deck, coupled with the varying rotor speed during the engage and disengage parts of a sortie, expose the rotors to dangerous blade deflections that have in the past resulted in damage to the aircraft and even, fatalities. Therefore, an acute awareness of what is going on at the back end or on the bow landing pad aboard his yacht is required before the Captain alters course and or speed.

Rules and Regulations

There are rules and regulations laid down that govern the use of helicopters on commercially operated yachts and the MCA and the Helideck Certification Agency (HCA) have made sure that they are sensibly thought through to make matters safe on board superyachts. Yacht designers, now think about regulations when they draw conceptual yachts that feature helidecks, builders are creating yachts were helicopter decks are so much safer than there were ten years ago so why are crew not required to have done helicopter safety training?

Why is it that Captains of a privately operated yachts are being made to take courses on the use of ECDIS or Food Hygiene yet have to learn about helicopter safety from reading books or watching others.

There are now companies that offer such courses that are superyacht specific. Surely to goodness it makes sense that even if your yacht is not commercially operated the crews need to have been trained in helideck safety!

Lets hope they think about it and then instead of taking fright we can catch a flight.