

The Superyacht

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OWNER

GRANDE ORAZIO

Massimiliano Florio on taking *Grande Orazio* from Cape Town to the Med.

COMMERCIAL CUES

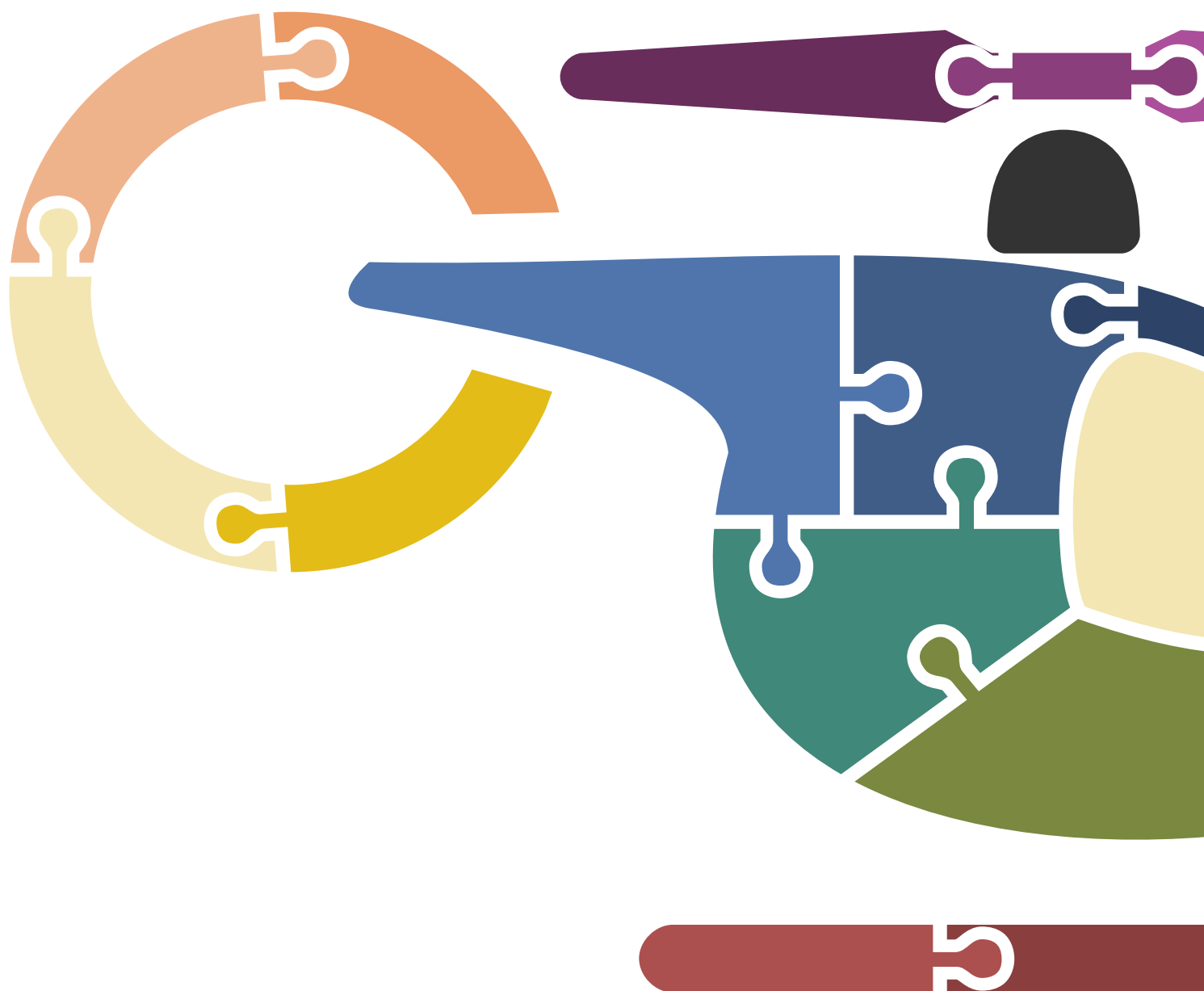
Southern Cross III's owner discusses commercial sensibility for yacht management.

NO REGRETS

Ex-owner Stanley Bey offers advice and words of caution on ownership.

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FIGHT OR FLIGHT

– WORDS BY LULU TRASK

Helicopters and helipads are becoming increasingly requested features on board superyachts but including heli-facilities is more complex than simply making sure there is space. Lulu Trask looks at what needs to be considered when making your yacht chopper ready.



While helidecks are an attractive feature for any owner, they are complex features that bring with them various challenges.

For owners who like the idea of making their toys visible to others and want their helicopter permanently on board their superyacht, a number of considerations arise. “Keeping a helicopter on board is a complicated affair,” explains Ken Burden, a sales broker at Fraser Yachts. “Helicopters are very sensitive to salt air – especially the rotors which are the most complicated and expensive element of a helicopter – and if they are kept aboard on a permanent basis, need to be kept in a pressurised hangar. These are not only complicated but also take up a lot of space.”

For this reason, many helideck requests in the brokerage arena surround touch-and-go systems. But regardless of whether an owner wants to utilise a helideck for a touch-and-go landing or a permanent helicopter storage facility, the certification of the helideck is a determining factor. A certified helideck is recognised worldwide and can accept any commercially chartered helicopter up to the helideck’s published maximum size and weight. A private helideck, often built solely to standards imposed by the class society, cannot accept a commercially chartered helicopter.

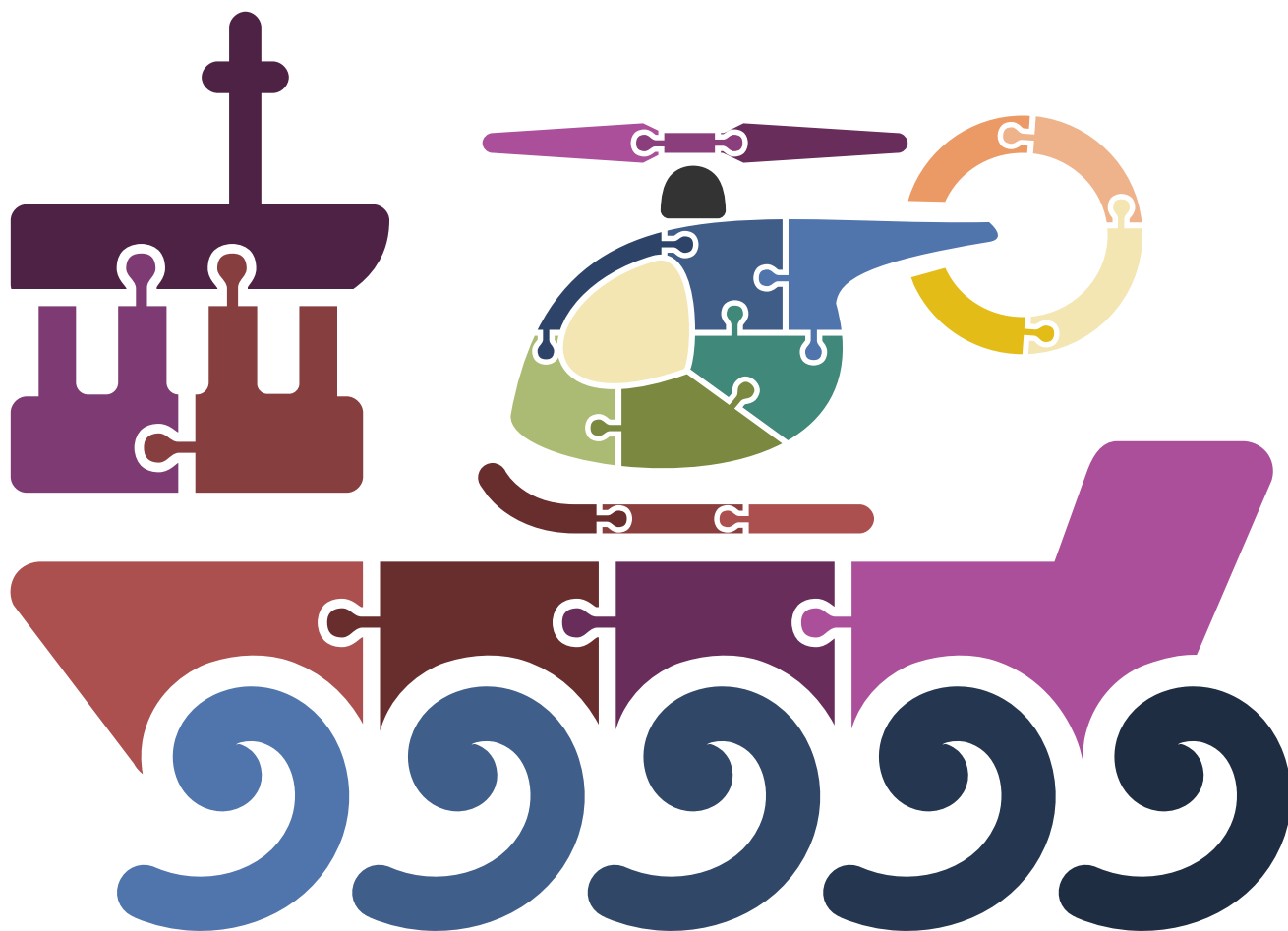
“When all the elements are taken into consideration, [private helidecks] are often less stringent,” explains David Nelson, safety manager at Helidecks Training Solutions. “Private helidecks almost always compromise on obstacle clearance in favour of the aesthetics.” Nelson stresses that this does not mean that private decks are necessarily less safe though. “An experienced pilot, well-trained team and good operating procedures will go a long way in mitigating most of the risk factors involved.”

THE ISSUES SURROUNDING HELIDECK CERTIFICATION OFTEN HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE BROKERAGE MARKET; CHARTER BOOKINGS CAN EVEN BE LOST AS A RESULT.

The issues surrounding helideck certification often have an effect on the brokerage market; charter bookings can even be lost as a result. “While the Fraser Yachts charter brokers have seen an increase in demand for helicopters from charter clients, they do say these requests are very complicated to deal with and difficult to fulfil,” explains Burden. “A charter broker in the Fort Lauderdale office recently lost a charter booking because the helipad on board the yacht was not commercially rated, so the client could not bring his own helicopter for the charter.” According to Burden, despite the fact that there is a growing number of helicopter-capable yachts, the majority of them do not offer commercial helipads and therefore cannot be used during a charter. “In short,” he says. “It’s very complicated.”

The ability of the crew to handle a landing is absolutely crucial to the safety of all those on board. Captain Malcolm Jacotine stepped on board M/Y *Global* part-way through 2014 and, in just three months, the crew had taken part in over 150 helicopter take-offs and landings. “Prior to the start of our helicopter operations, the crew received MCA-approved Helicopter Landing Officer [HLO] and Helideck Deck Assistant training which took place on *Global*,” explains Jacotine. “Conducting the training on board had a number of benefits: a good number of crew were trained without the disruption of manning; all the crew were exposed in one way or another to helicopter operations; and the training could be tailored to our set up and equipment.” Training is ongoing, however, and it is crucial that any training is undertaken in a variety of weather conditions which, Jacotine adds, is important for identifying the safe operating limits of that particular helicopter.

With so many helideck operations under his belt, I ask Jacotine if owners understand the implications of crew training when it comes to having a helideck on board. “This depends very much on how experienced an owner is with helicopter operations and who is advising him,” he says. “Training is only one of a number of other considerations, including choosing the right helicopter for the intended flight missions, wheels and skids, day and night operations, operational restrictions, helideck design, fueling, management and manning of the helicopter and so on.”



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NELSON, HELIDECKS
TRAINING SOLUTIONS**

Jacotine’s advice for owners contemplating a helicopter on board? Seek independent, professional advice from companies and crew who are experienced in helicopter operations aboard yachts and a full assessment of the yacht, crew, helideck, equipment and mission parameters should be undertaken to ensure safe operation.

Captain Gareth Sheppard of 42m M/Y *The Big Blue* has a somewhat different experience with on-board helideck operations. “In our case, the owner is the pilot, so [on board *The Big Blue*] was his first time landing on board a moving target,” he says. “We did a number of touch-and-gos with the owner and trainer in the helicopter and someone on board the boat helping direct. We have the captain in the bridge who is the main [communicator] with the HLO on the helideck, a fully dressed firefighter on the helideck and one crewmember in the tender trailing the port quarter for emergency ditching or crash pick-up.”

For Sheppard, safe helicopter operations come down to communication. “I would recommend good lines of communication – and more than one type – with the helicopter, and a way to track it,” he says. “We were well trained and have had no issues with helideck operations. The owner flies it as much as he can – and the crew are lucky and get taken for rides.”

Helicopters and helidecks can be a fun and useful addition to a yacht, but what owners need to remember is they come down to much more than just space and aesthetics; the appropriate certification, safety issues and crew training bring with them a wealth of additional necessary considerations.

Advice from professional, relevant parties should not be underestimated in order to avoid creating an area on your yacht that you are unable to use whenever you need it, or at all. 🚁



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CHART CHOPPERS

Qualified helicopter pilot Nigel Watson's 20-year career has spanned the Royal Navy, the Sultan of Oman's Navy and the superyacht industry. Now acting as a helicopter consultant and with his company Nigel Watson Ltd, he works with owners on the integration of helicopters with superyachts and private estates. He shares his top five helicopter models for superyachts with *The Superyacht Owner*. □



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