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Sep/Oct 2022



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**THE EAGLES OF
CHAMONIX HELICOPTERS**

MEET A ROTOR PRO

MATT JOHNSON



RPMN: What is your current position?

I am a single-pilot IFR HAA line pilot, Part 135 check airman, instructor, and FOQA gatekeeper for Metro Aviation, Inc. I'm also a designated pilot examiner for the FAA and remain active as a sworn law enforcement (LE) officer flying on a part-time basis for a sheriff's office.

RPMN: Tell me about your first experience with helicopters.

Like many, I became fascinated with helicopters at a young age after a short tour on a family vacation. It was undoubtedly one of those "I've got to do this someday" moments.

RPMN: How did you get your start in helicopters?

I started flight training in airplanes, but I don't like to admit it (I'm joking.) I earned my Private ASEL. Although I haven't flown an airplane in many years, I am glad that I started with this path; it allowed me to gain a lot of initial aeronautical experience. So, when I began in helicopters, I was able to focus primarily on helicopter flying fundamentals and build that skill set. Then, I went on to do all my certificates and ratings from Private through ATP, CFI, and CFI-I over three to four years.



RPMN: When and how did you choose to fly or work on helicopters? Or did they choose you?

It was all my choice for sure. I had a long successful law enforcement career and began flying a little more than halfway through that career with the mindset of a second career in aviation after retiring from public service, but I got impatient. I had the aviation bug and started flying more and getting more ratings, and then got an opportunity to begin flying part-time for a local sheriff's office. I built a lot of experience and decided to retire from LE early and began flying full-time. I flew law enforcement, news, instructing, and agricultural. I've been flying HAA for the past 12 years and I've been a DPE for the past 10 years.

RPMN: What do you see yourself doing if you weren't in the helicopter industry?

I still think I would be in some aspect of the aviation realm if I were not actively flying. I have a strong passion for education and would likely be in an academic role at the college level. I also have a strong passion for weather and would find a way to include that in my career.

RPMN: What do you enjoy on your days off?

Well, they say don't take your work home, but aviation is more of a passion for me and not just a career and it surely isn't just a "job." I spend a lot of my time studying my trade, and I read a lot and include my family in many aviation-related activities. I have a young daughter that is the absolute apple of my eye. But, hey! Who else has a 4-year-old that knows the three stages of a thunderstorm?

RPMN: What is your greatest career accomplishment to date?

That is a tough one for me to answer. I have been fortunate and blessed to be involved in developing and implementing several projects that have ended up benefiting hundreds of pilots, which is very fulfilling. I think if I had to pick one thing, it would be my DPE designation. Although it certainly can be a difficult position

at times, it is gratifying to meet career-focused pilots who put everything into it. I have issued private-pilot certificates to those who go on to obtain all of their certificates and ratings and then become a colleague; that is really cool and makes me feel old at the same time!

RPMN: Have you ever had an “Oh, crap” moment in a helicopter? Can you summarize what happened?

I’ve had a few things over the years: an inadvertent encounter with freezing rain and an engine failure at low altitude. Both ended with successful outcomes with no one hurt and no bent metal, so I call that a win.

RPMN: If you could give only one piece of advice to a new helicopter pilot or mechanic, what would it be?

Be a professional on Day One! I habitually ask pilots of various experience levels, “What makes you a professional pilot?” I hear lots of responses, some of which are mind-numbing. Being a professional pilot doesn’t happen with the stroke of a pen on a newly issued commercial pilot certificate,

or when you reach a magic number of flight hours. From my perspective, I identify the consummate professional pilots as those with undeniable characteristics. They are those that strive for excellence, never stop learning, strive for competence, are mentors — and have mentors — and they are humble and prepared. I work hard to be a professional pilot and to practice what I preach. I am nearly 25 years into this, and I am thirsty for knowledge now more than ever! I owe it to those I mentor and, more importantly, to my family and to the families of the flight crew members I transport, to be the best I can be.

RPMN: In your view, what is the greatest challenge for the helicopter industry now?

The biggest challenge I see is the ability to fill open positions with qualified personnel. A lot of long-time talent has retired or left the industry; it’s a challenge to find experienced replacements. Due to the high cost of training pilots and mechanics, and with competition from more lucrative aviation jobs, it seems to be difficult to attract those that would be the best investment for the future.



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