In-service report: EC145

With eight EC145s on its roster, France's Gendarmerie will make a decision on possible further acquisitions this summer. "Tail rotor diameter
Weight empty
Main rotor diameter
Maximum take-off weight
Maximum usable fuel, standard
Powerplant

EC145 TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS
Length overall 13.03m
Main rotor diameter 11m
Tail rotor diameter 1.96m
Fuselage maximum width 1.84m
Height overall 3.96m
Weight empty 1,790kg
Maximum usable fuel, standard 18,000fth
Maximum usable fuel, optional 18,000fth
Maximum take-off weight 869kg
Maximum underslung load 694kg
Maximum cruising speed 1,500kg
Maximum cruise range 738shp Turbomeca Arriel IE2

North American orders
The first of five EC145s ordered by North American customers was delivered to Florida's Lee County emergency medical services in March, and went straight into service. The EC145 joined a BO105 that has been in operation with Lee County since 1990, and which will continue to serve as a back-up aircraft in its life support and search-and-rescue operations. "Our Bolkow [BO105] has met the county's needs for years," says Lee County chief pilot Rick O'Neal. "The EC145 offers us many operational advantages, including a larger cabin and the ability to accommodate additional equipment." Lee County emergency medical services supports a region of Florida where the population more than doubles during the winter, and which is bordered by 75 barrier islands in the Gulf of Mexico - a lot of them with no road access to the mainland. Aircraft completion was carried out by Metro Aviation at Shreveport, Louisiana.

Like its BO105 predecessor, the original BK117 continues to give good service. One aircraft, with over 10,000 airframe hours on the clock and recently refurbished by Texan completion centre Heli-Dyne, is thought to be the oldest surviving production model. The helicopter saw 20 years service with the Medstar air medical services (AMS) programme at Washington DC before being cycled into operator CJ Systems' back-up fleet.

Heli-Dyne then performed a complete interior refurbishment, avionics upgrade and paint job, the aircraft even receiving a new tail number. "When that BK117 left here, it was a piece of machinery that any AMS operator would love to have," says Heli-Dyne president David Horton. "It's every bit as good - if not better - than some of the newer aircraft that service the industry today." CJ Systems has since placed the aircraft back into full-time AMS service with Baptist LifeFlight in Mobile, Alabama.

UK police niche?
David Lewis, sales director for distributor McAlpine, believes the EC145 will find a niche within UK police aviation, but as much for its passenger capacity as its equipment payload. "The EC135 is ideal as a surveillance aircraft but, like the Gendarmerie, there is often a need for UK police forces to carry teams of various specialisations, and the two extra seats in the EC145 can be very useful. I see one type as complementing the other - with the larger one operated perhaps as a shared resource."

When the BK117 entered service, there was limited demand for the payload capability the helicopter offers. "Nowadays though, such is the amount of mission equipment that para-public helicopters want to carry that the type is coming back into fashion," says Kidd. "[The EC145] may stretch some budgets, but it can give you 1,300kg of payload coming out of a helipad, and that is attractive to any public service operator."