British Pilots set a Speed Record for Around the World Helicopter Flight

Two British pilots flying a 16-year-old Boeing MD 500D helicopter have set a speed record for flying around the world, knocking four days off the previous record.

The pair, Stephen Good and Michael Smith of HeliAir Helicopters, Wellsbourne, Warwick, England, used only 13 1/2 days and about 200 flight hours to complete their 20,000-mile trip. The journey began July 29 at Boeing Field in Seattle and concluded Aug. 11 at the same location.

The trip included flight segments of up to 730 miles over open ocean between Greenland and Labrador and a visit to the North Pole. The journey was virtually trouble-free, with only a partially blocked fuel filter that was corrected in flight, and head winds and heavy turbulence that buffeted the helicopter during most of the trip.

The MD 500D helicopter, which Good purchased in 1996, had previously accumulated about 3,000 flight hours in service with the Albuquerque, N.M., Police Department.

Good and Smith made their record-setting journey without financial sponsorship and with limited outside help. The pair did their own mechanical work and used existing facilities for fuel and maintenance. The helicopter required a mid-trip 100-hour inspection, which was performed overnight by March Helicopters in England.

Other record-setting trips have received assistance from manufacturers, often including an accompanying fixed-wing aircraft carrying spare parts and licensed mechanics.

"We couldn't have done this better in any other helicopter," Smith said. "All we had to do was put oil in it."

The pair were inspired to make their trip after meeting previous record holder Ron Bower. "After talking to him, we knew it was a challenge we had to take," Good said. "It was a good, fun thing to do."

The trip, which was flown mostly over the northern ice pack, including the North Pole, covered more than 19,800 miles, which is the required minimum to establish an around-the-world record. The miles flown were about the same as flown by Bower in his record-setting flight and covered all meridians.

The helicopter was equipped with a 100-gallon auxiliary fuel tank, a global positioning system for navigation and a satellite telephone for communicating.

The pair said the arctic terrain, over-ocean flying and heavy turbulence made the trip exceptionally difficult.

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