



Falcon Hughes 300 with Agranautics spray kit. It rests on the Falcon nurse-rig.

## Falcon Helicopters Inc.

First Hughes Pilot Training Centre in Canada  
Services Eastern Ontario With First Class Training,  
As Well As Spraying and Charter

by Keith Randall.

The city of Kingston nestles on the shore of Lake Ontario about halfway between Montreal and Toronto. Once a hub of Upper Canada commerce, it seems resigned to small town-ness - summer tourists, Queen's University and a network of federal penitentiaries are the chief economic drivers. The near-terminal boredom of Highway 401 leads to Kingston by car; private pilots can find welcome and service at Norman Rogers's Airport, a 4800-foot runway, an ADF and an Aeradio station; Torontair serves Kingston a couple of times a day from Toronto, Montreal, Syracuse and Ottawa.

The Beech 99A bounces through the early morning cumulus, descending into gusting winds and thermals that promise a tough day's flying for the Torontair crew. Eyeing a downwind 150 doing circuits on a transverse runway, the young captain nails the 99A to the ground and taxis back to the company's neat little terminal. The half dozen passengers scatter to taxis, leaving one visitor looking around for Helmut Przontka. The husky blonde

fellow who introduces himself might have been a local farmer whiling away an hour watching the planes land or one of those cornfed American kids who populate CFL training camps across the land. He is president of Kingston's Falcon Helicopters Incorporated.

The president in blue jeans leads the way to his car for the 60-second ride to the end of the flight line - past the Kingston Flying Club, the Environment Canada Office, Kingston Tennis World and Racquet Club and a couple of other lonely hangars - to Falcon's home, a low brick building, like a suburban bungalow with attached hangar and landing pad. Informal, laidback, easy-going. Perfectly suited to a lazy summer day at Norman Rogers' Airport.

The atmosphere is deceptive, for Przontka and his little company are dedicated and determined. The world of business, he says, is new to him yet he has seized on a principal some never learn in a lifetime.

"I'm flying by the seat of my pants. I've had no business background. But I've got good people to help. I

work closely with my accountants who have helicopter experience and the staff is professional. It's the people who make the company - if you don't have good people, you might as well forget it."

Przontka, born in Germany, immigrated with his parents in 1952. After high school in Ottawa he wandered a bit before joining the U.S. Air Force - the Canadian military wouldn't guarantee him aviation training - and spent three and half years as a hydraulics specialist at Big Springs, Texas, maintaining Cessna T37's and Northrop T38's. Out of the service in 1971, he earned a mechanic's license at the Riverside School of Aeronautics in Utica, New York. During a visit to Ottawa, he landed a job with Personal Plane Services, which provided maintenance support for Kenting Earth Sciences and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

"When Universal Helicopters moved from Carp to Ottawa, I rolled my toolbox across the hangar and started working them. They moved to Montreal a little later and I found another job in Timmins in the middle of winter - didn't like that very much. Eventually I went to Montreal to work with Olympic Helicopters and was there for two years."

About that time, Bob Brough and Mike Bourassa started a flight-training operation in Kingston called Civet Helicopters, and Przontka signed on in 1977. By early 1979, he owned the operation.

Przontka had bought a three-ship operation - two Hughes 300's and a 500 - which lived on flight-instruction. He has added another 300 and expanded Civet's initial tentative foray into agricultural spraying. The staff is small - 3 pilots, 4 mechanics, 2 secretaries and the President/Chief Engineer.

"We had the first Hughes Pilot Training Centre in Canada. There are two others in Ontario now and one in Quebec. Students get better training on the audio-visual and books which are standardized to the 300. We have to adapt a lot of material to Canadian terminology and regulations, but it's pretty good stuff."

Falcon students have come from across Canada and - by some

*Continued on page 32*

## Falcon Helicopters

Continued from page 29

strange international word of mouth - from Holland, England and South Africa. Normally six students follow the three-month, 100-hour course, but summer enrollment has been reduced to three to give Falcon some leeway for its operations and other work. Przontka says about three-quarters of the students are initio, the balance converting from fixed-wing. Students can bunk, two to a room, in quarters adjoining the classrooms. It's not the Hilton but, Przontka laughs, it's better than the bush camps that future time-builders will learn to love.

"I won't take twenty students at a time," he says. "That's one reason I think we've got a good reputation because that gives each instructor just three students and it gives a much more personal course. Our two instructors - Nick Mukilow and Howard Hutchison - have 19,000 hours between them. Our third pilot Bob Wolseley, has converted to helicopters with 8,000 fixed-wing hours - he's out doing some spraying at the Petawawa military base today and he'll have his license by fall."

**"...insurance demands are really stringent for anybody under 1000 hours..."**

Anybody specializing in training helicopter pilots has to face the question of the limited job opportunities available to low-time pilots.

"That can be looked at in two ways. Training is our bread and butter and we've built up a darned good reputation. Whereas, when times get hard as they seem to be right now, everybody jumps onto the bandwagon and starts training. Last December Okanagan hired four new pilots in Newfoundland and three of them were ours. Midwest, I think, has picked up five and LaVerendrye has hired five or six and the rest of them have gone here and there. There's no two ways about it - some of them don't have jobs yet. It's un-

fortunate - I wish it was hundred percent fulfillment. These guys have to spend \$16,000 and then they still have to pay more dues to the industry before they get recognized. The insurance demands are really stringent for anybody with less than a thousand hours."

Would Przontka feel like giving a 100-hour pilot one of his machines?

"It depends on the type of work. I wouldn't expect him to sling at maximum in a 206, but some guys are very competent."

Howard Hutchison, Falcon's operations manager, and a former Canadian forces and Okanagan flight instructor, noted in conversation that, "Discrimination against low-time pilots is unfair in some cases. Often they're as qualified and safer than high-time pilots."



Falcon Helicopters' president, Helmut Przontka.

The competition is stiff in the flight-training business. In Ontario, tax-supported Cannadore College in North Bay offers a year-long course at minimal fees.

"They've got a great set-up," Hutchison says, "but obviously we're not in the same market. If they can make safer pilots, that's great."

The 100-hour course includes 10 hours on the Hughes 500.

"This is a good location for flight training," Hutchison explains. "We don't have any delays clearing ATC and our primary training area is only five miles away. We can use Lake Ontario for float instruction and, despite our location near the Lake, we lost only six days last year due to below-VFR conditions."

One of Hughes' major objectives in developing its Training Centres was to sell helicopters, echoing Cessna's success with a similar project on the fixed-wing side. It works, too, for Przontka has sold five or six machines to students who have been through the course and want to continue flying 300's for personal or business use. Another sale was to Jacques Cousteau's "Calypso" which visited Kingston last year on a film project.

"The 'Calypso's' pilot-engineer, Bob Braubeck came in for some maintenance on the vessel's 300 and we worked a deal to trade him up to a new helicopter. Considering the 'Calypso' spends so much time at sea, Braubeck's helicopter was in amazing shape - there was hardly a hint of corrosion. In fact, he took such good care of it the machine looked terrible, all covered in oil. It took us a long time to get the oil off so we could repaint it."

Przontka says his 300's each logged between 900 and 1100 hours last year with about 300 or 400 on the Hughes turbine, mostly for pilot endorsements.

"The 300's are the moneymakers right now, but I don't have that much invested in the turbine. It's a straight 500 with the old C-18 engine."

Falcon has recently added an unrestricted Class 4 license to its Class 7 and expects charter business to develop slowly and carefully.

"The Kingston market is difficult," Hutchison explains. "Okanagan, I think, has studied it a couple of times. We thought we might get some work from the penitentiaries, but the RCMP and the OPP have their own helicopters. The simple fact of the helicopter being here though is developing the market. We'll do about 400 hours this year apart from training and work. We do some photography and sightseeing and a little construction. The Ministry of Natural Resources does acid rain samples on lakes, we work

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for the Canadian Wildlife Service on bird migration studies. And for Natural Resources on deer population and hunting enforcement. It'll come slowly.”

The City of Kingston has not rushed to develop the aviation potential of a serviceable little airport in the community. MOT is studying an ILS installation for the field. But Przontka has not seen much enthusiasm for helicopters.

“The mayor of Watertown, New York, just across the border, has been over to see me. He was ready to help us locate a base over there, help with a heliport, ready to do anything to get helicopter service into his town. We decided against it for the time being, figuring it would spread us a little thin. We sure appreciated his attitude, though. Over here, all we ever hear are complaints from the Anti-Noise Committee.”

Przontka leads a tour of the hangar where mechanics are working on a pair of 500's. He has recently separated the maintenance shop from the flight operation, calling it Aviation Overload.

“We did that for, basically, insurance reasons. But it gives me a chance to develop that part of the business. While I don't want to go out in hot pursuit of maintenance business, we can do what the name suggests - handle the overflow from other operations.”

In the lush farming country around Kingston, Falcon's return to agricultural spraying has been welcomed by farmers. The average field runs from 25 to 100 acres - corn, zucchini, pumpkins, green peppers and other crops. There is a little local competition - the bulk of Ontario spraying is concentrated between Niagara and Windsor. Przontka says aerial application accounted for about a quarter of 1980's revenue hours.

“The farmers like it. It's more expensive than fixed-wing - about \$11 per acre versus around \$4 for fixed-wing. But the farmers can actually see the better job. We have a nurse

rig with a 1500-gallon water tank and 200-gallon mixing tank and the helicopter lands right on the truck. So you're there with the farmer and he can see what you're mixing. If you miss a spot, you're in communication with him and can go back and do it again. A fixed-wing fills up at the local airport, does his passes and is on to the next job. Fixed wing is better if you're doing 10,000 acres at a time, but we're talking here about precision application on small areas.

“One farmer near here has 200 acres of tomatoes and they require seven sprayings during the summer. The last application is Etherol, which ripens all the tomatoes at the same time. So you'll do ten acres at a time and the farmer can handle his picking much more efficiently.”

Falcon sprays for the Department of National Defence clearing weapons ranges. And for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources on a number of forestry projects which sound, almost, like science fiction.

“The Ministry plants millions of small pine trees, but the poplars and maples grow more quickly so participate in a program called conifer-releases that kills off the trees that have no value whatsoever and allows the pines a chance to grow.

“They have some experimental hybrids that are worth about \$5,000 each by the time they've reached the seed-producing stage because of all the research that's gone into them. There's a new poplar hybrid that they can harvest in five years. They can use it for cattle feed, firewood or pulp. And I understand it would be feasible to make wood alcohol out of it to use in Hydro plants.”

Przontka says he bid \$12.55 per acre last year - including travel, personnel, a 300 and the nurse rig - on a 8,000-acre New Brunswick spruce-budworm contact but was beaten by another operator who bid \$5.40 an acre. With a Bell 206B! He remembers Jason Pearce's story about hourly costs in the Spring issue of HELICOPTERS IN CANADA.

“No matter what, somebody's going to give it away. I think if I got to that position, I'd rather shrink the size of the operation - even go find a job myself in the bush - because it's just not worth it. Sure,

you might look good for a year, but all of a sudden it's going to catch up with you.”

1981, according to all the predictions, will not be one of the helicopter industry's great years. Most of the major operators will likely survive, even picking off a few stragglers. Falcon Helicopters appears to be firmly stabilized to ride out any storms.

“I don't think there'll be any great increases this year,” mused Helmut Przontka. “We'll be fairly stationary in terms of equipment. Long term, we'd look for a little growth on the turbine side.”

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The follow-the-leader expansion into bigger fleets and far-off bases is not for Falcon at the moment. Howard Hutchison sums it up.

“I worked for Okanagan and Universal for 12 as a pilot. There's nothing wrong with a big company, but my wife and I were anxious to get back to our home region and live a normal life. I was gone a lot - in one six-month period I remember I was home for 17 days. Why would I want to go back to the bush when I worked so hard to get out?

“And in today's economy, you don't want to be too aggressive.”

What drives a competent and experienced Aircraft Maintenance Engineer to be sitting at a desk worrying for somebody else?

“Well, the chance came along and I took it. Getting rich is not the ambition. To live well, perhaps, is. And to make sure my employees live well. To balance the long hours against the satisfaction of working on something that belongs to you.”

Kingston's summer afternoon has worn on. There's another 150 on circuits and a bright yellow Falcon 300 is buzzing in the airport infield, a student gingerly hovering above the high grass. The president in blue jeans is back in the hangar getting his hands dirty. Falcon Helicopters keeps on doing what small helicopter operations are supposed to do these days - working hard, growing carefully, flying safely.