CAPITAL AIR AMBULANCE PLOTS EUROPEAN EXPANSION

News / Business aviation

Capital Air Ambulance, the UK's largest fixed-wing medical evacuation company, is planning to grow its share of the European market by expanding its fleet and operational bases.

Exeter-headquartered Capital, which is a subsidiary of UK corporate services provider Rigby Group, took delivery in June of its first business jet. The Bombardier Learjet 45 has opened up the southern European and North African markets to the company for the first time, allowing Capital to compete more effectively with established medevac providers in mainland Europe.

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Paul Southall, managing director of Rigby's aviation division, which includes Capital, British International Helicopters, as well as Exeter, Norwich and Coventry airports, says: "The superlight twin's 2,000nm [3,170km] range allows us to reach destinations as far away as Egypt. We can now take on the big big boys, such as market leader FAI [rent-a-jet]."

Germany's FAI is the largest of around 10 air ambulance operators on the continent, with a fleet of 13 business jets including Learjet 35A/55/60s, Challenger 604s and Global Expresses.

"Capital also operates five Beechcraft King Air 200s which have all had the Blackhawk engine upgrade," says Southall. These twin-engined turboprops, which have had their original Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6A-41 powerplants replaced with the uprated -42 model, are deployed across western Europe.

Closer to home, Capital uses five Piper Chieftain piston-twins to repatriate patients from the Channel Islands and Isle of Man to the UK mainland.

"Our fleet expansion will focus on the Learjet 45," Southall says. "This aircraft is the sweet spot in our ambulance fleet."

To accommodate the growing demand, Capital has opened a second base at Coventry airport and says it may eventually establish a facility in mainland Europe.

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