

CANADA'S NATIONAL ROTARY-WING RESOURCE CENTRE
HELICOPTERS

The Mirabel Gamble: Montreal's Hélibellule FBO is Paying Off

Written by James Careless



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Mirabel International Airport is a daunting place to launch a new FBO (fixed based operation) helicopter service. The reason: Since November 1, 2004, all passenger flights in and out of Montreal have been routed through the city's Trudeau (Dorval) airport. Mirabel remains in operation, but only for freight service.

Despite this fact, a new helicopter FBO called Hélibellule opened in Mirabel in May 2007. Owned and operated by helicopter pilots/spouses Valérie Delorme and Sylvain Robitaille, Hélibellule is aimed at the city's

business clientele; many of whom need access to fast, efficient helicopter transport. Hélibellule also serves charter companies and private aircraft owners. In addition, Hélibellule's services and facilities are used by Mirabel's Foxair Flying School (Helicopro), and the Quebec non-profit air ambulance service AirMédic.

So why did Delorme and Robitaille decide to take a gamble on opening an FBO inside Mirabel, an airport legendary as a white elephant that was supposed to replace Trudeau/Dorval, but never did? "I would say the idea of opening an FBO all started when we took our trip to Mexico City to retrieve our Bell 222 that we had just purchased," comments Delorme. "On our way back, we visited many FBOs, and it was there and then that we saw the need for an FBO of executive caliber here in Quebec."

One smart move: Hélibellule doesn't require clients to come to Mirabel airport for departure. Instead, they can be picked up at a helicopter landing site of their choosing, as long as it is within the fleet's operational flying range. This option effectively neutralizes the problems that made Mirabel into a white elephant, notably its distance from downtown Montreal and a lack of fast/affordable transportation to the site.

Hélibellule's Fleet



Owned and operated by helicopter pilots/spouses Valérie Delorme and Sylvain Robitaille, Hélibellule FBO opened in Mirabel in May 2007.

Although in business less than a year, Hélibellule has three helicopters in its fleet. These are a Robinson R22, a Bell 222, and a Eurocopter SA/341 Gazelle. All but the R22 have been painted in Hélibellule's elegant dark blue livery. Meanwhile, "the interiors of the Bell 222 and the Gazelle have been reupholstered in leather and redesigned to offer enhanced comfort and luxury," Delorme says.

Of the three helicopters, the Bell 222 offers the most carrying capacity. It can lift two pilots and five passengers, and provides an inflight bar service and high-quality sound system. This Bell 222 is IFR-equipped, allowing it to provide night flights.

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Hélibellule's Facilities

What makes an executive FBO stand out is the range of business-oriented services it offers compared to a conventional airport, and Hélibellule is no exception. Consider its passenger lounge at Mirabel: Facing the runway, the lounge features floor-to-ceiling windows, luxurious furniture, a television, and even a fireplace. The company also has a conference room onsite, "fully equipped and decorated under the theme of aviation," Delorme says. Food service is available through the onsite restaurant Café L'Envolée, and catering can also be arranged. For unique events, Hélibellule's hangar can be rented and decorated for large gatherings!



Service is aimed at business clientele who need fast, efficient helicopter transport.

Hélibellule provides its clients with access to customs clearance, interior and exterior aircraft parking with 24-hour video surveillance and security guards, limousine and taxi services, and helps to arrange hotel and restaurant reservations. Crew members have access to a flight planning room with their own private lounge, a bedroom, and washroom with shower. Aircraft refueling services (Jet A and 100 LL) are provided, the hangar is fully heated, and the base even has de-icing provided by a qualified ground crew.

The Mirabel Gamble

Not surprisingly, Hélibellule experienced a relatively slow startup attributed to its Mirabel location and newness to the charter/private helicopter market. However, "our business is now increasing rapidly," Delorme says. "For instance, beyond our regular corporate traffic, AirMédic and Helicopro require our services and facilities daily." But "since Mirabel has been dedicated to freight transportation only, our biggest

challenge remains making people aware of our services," she adds.



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Are Delorme and Robitaille nervous about the gamble they've taken on Mirabel? Yes, but such is their success to date that they are already looking toward future expansion. Their plans include "the acquisition of a Bell 407 in spring 2008," Delorme says. "We are also planning to expand our facilities. In fact, our plans have already been submitted to Nav Canada and ADM (Montreal's airport authority) for their approval."

How big can Hélibellule grow? Well, with Quebec's biggest city experiencing an economic revival, helicopters continuing

to gain popularity as fast, convenient modes of transport, and Hélibellule offering non-Mirabel departures for clients wanting to avoid a long drive, one would have to say 'the sky's the limit'! But however big Hélibellule may become, its mission will never change, Delorme says. "Our goal is to provide exceptional services and reliability to our clients."

Hélibellule can be found on the Web at <http://www.helibellule.ca/> .