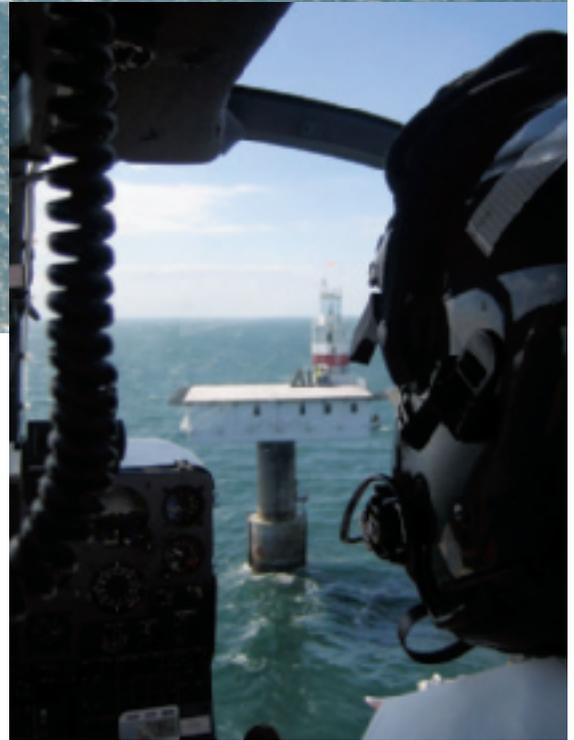


Because it was there



Unusual flying opportunities are rarely more challenging than this for the private pilot – a landing on a small offshore platform twelve miles out in the English Channel.

The Helicopter Club of Great Britain, an association of more than 500 private helicopter owners and pilots, runs a programme of interesting fly-in events for members throughout the year. The landing on the Royal Sovereign platform was the HCGB's annual 'tea on the lawn' event.

The platform is owned by HCGB member Ian Casselden, who lives near Eastbourne, runs an Alouette helicopter and had frequently flown over the Royal Sovereign on his way to and from Dieppe. He contacted Trinity House, who operate Britain's lighthouses, ships and platforms, to see whether he could rent the platform, which sits on a notorious shoal in the Channel, and discovered it was for sale. Asked why he wanted it, he says: "Because it was there." Ian plans one day to move his office there.

About a dozen helicopters flew out to the platform one at a time – it will only accommodate a single helicopter – and Ian ran shuttles out there in the Alouette for those who preferred to visit as passengers. The event had twice been postponed because of weather, but on this occasion the visibility was good, and



Main picture: the platform looks dauntingly small in a lot of sea.
Above left: Ian Casselden's Alouette 'shuttle'
Above: Gazelle lands on
Right: pilot's eye view on finals
Below right: the wind was strong enough to throw up some whitecaps
Bottom left: R44s went out with one seat empty to make sure power margins were more than adequate

there was a steady 15-knot wind across the platform which ensured an ample power margin for all. Some pilots made a direct approach, others chose to offset slightly to make a go-round easier, then slide sideways onto the platform.

The platform was inhabited by two lighthouse keepers until 1994, when it was automated. They spent a month at a time out there and were relieved by boat until Trinity House invested in a Bolkow helicopter. Ian Casselden is constrained to insure and maintain the platform and to paint it every five years, while Trinity House maintains the light.

The Helicopter Club of Great Britain runs the annual British Helicopter Championships and provides the British national team for the World Helicopter Championships, which will be held next year in Germany. As well as organising events for members, it lobbies for the interests of private pilots. The Helicopter Club is a corporate member of AOPA. If you're interested in knowing more about the HCGB, contact editor@rotortorque.com. ■

Pictures by Bob Kember, Clare Keyte and Roy Harford

