

# Power to the People

*Agusta's military helicopter can also accommodate the executive flier's missions.*

FOR A STRETCH OF TIME in the mid-1990s, the U.S. Coast Guard was confronted with a dilemma that the Italian-made Agusta A109 Power helicopter eventually helped solve. Caribbean smugglers were using high-powered speedboats to transport as much as two tons of drugs per shipment. Traveling at speeds of 50 mph or faster, they regularly outran the authorities' larger vessels. Indeed, the Coast Guard estimates that it formerly was able to intercept only one of

capability, and instrument-flying proficiency as reasons for acquiring the twin-engine helicopter and incorporating the aircraft into its Airborne Use of Force program.

"It's a stable platform for instrument operations," explains Neil Parkinson, who has been flying an Agusta A109 Power for the past year in his role as chief pilot for the Warwickshire & Northamptonshire National Air Ambulance, a British charity organization that operates the helicopter for

emergency medical situations. "It's more like airline flying than helicopter flying. In the air ambulance role, we have to land in tight spaces. When I used to do this in older helicopters, I'd think, 'If an engine failed now, it's going to bloody hurt.' In the A109, you know that if an engine fails, it's going to keep climbing on the other one."

Such attributes make the helicopter ideal for civilian use as well. Fisher Scientific, a New Hampshire-based provider of research equip-

ment and supplies, purchased an A109 Power Elite for its corporate flight department. The 42-foot A109 Power Elite is the \$4 million VIP version of the Power. It can be fitted with either Pratt & Whitney or Turbomeca engines, and features a five-passenger air-conditioned cabin with leather seats and a 34-cubic-foot compartment that can store baggage and golf bags for a weekend getaway.

Art Godjikian, a Fisher pilot, finds the helicopter more passenger-friendly than other models. "It's noticeably quieter," he says. "People can talk and work without headsets." Godjikian praises the machine's power and ability to fly in bad weather, while his passengers enjoy details, such as a retractable step, that make the workhorse a pleasant helicopter in which to travel. "It's very difficult to be lady-like getting in and out of a helicopter," says Godjikian. "The step is a small cosmetic thing, but it makes getting in and out a lot more elegant." —MATTHEW STIBBE

*Agusta, 215.281.1400, [www.agusta.com](http://www.agusta.com)*



every 10 drug-smuggling runs. In 2001, the Coast Guard took corrective action by leasing eight Agusta A109s (branded MH-68A Stingray under military designations) and assigning them to its Airborne Use of Force program.

Recently, a Stingray, operating from the cutter *Diligence*, came upon a 40-foot speedboat in the Pacific near the coasts of Costa Rica and Panama. When the vessel failed to heed orders to stop, the Stingray fired warning shots across its bow. When that measure did not deter the speedboat's progress, the Stingray fired 19 rounds into its engines. A *Diligence* crew boarded the boat, seized 4,200 pounds of pure cocaine, and arrested the crew. "For all practical purposes, we have a 100 percent stop rate now," says Commander Edward Cubanski, the squadron's operations officer. "It's an excellent aircraft for the mission."

Remove the Stingray's infrared optical system, head-up display, and M240G machine gun, and you are left with the Agusta A109 Power. The Coast Guard cites the A109 Power's 177 mph top speed, power reserve, stability, load-carrying

*The Agusta A109 Power Elite, the executive version of the helicopter, can fly as fast as 177 mph.*