

Verne Thorarinson – Corporate Customer

Verne Thorarinson spent his entire career building roads and moving earth in southern Alberta until he decided to take to the sky in 2011 and become a helicopter pilot.

“I had never considered flying helicopters until I went for a demonstration flight. The ability to fly point-to-point is a definite attraction as well as, the pleasure that comes from flying a versatile and maneuverable machine,” said Thorarinson, age 66 from his ranch near Calgary, Alberta.

From coast-to-coast across Canada, there is a growing cadre of successful business people who have become passionate helicopter owners and pilots.

Thorarinson researched the market for a new helicopter he could fly for personal and business use, “My research kept leading me back to the Airbus Helicopters AStar family. I liked the helicopter’s large open cabin that was free of bulkheads, with excellent tail rotor authority and the enhanced safety offered by a dual hydraulic system and FADEC engine control. The AS350 B3e is a work horse.”

In early 2013, Thorarinson ordered an AS350 B3e and made arrangements to have it delivered in mid-summer so he would have a few months of good flying weather before the onset of winter.

“I travelled to the facility in Fort Erie, Ontario in July to receive AStar training prior to taking delivery of my helicopter.” Thorarinson departed Fort Erie on July 24th accompanied by Airbus pilot Richard LaJoie, who provided additional instruction on the 2,800 km (1,700 mile) flight home.

After flying over the prairie landscape of southern Alberta for a few weeks, Thorarinson was ready for another helicopter tour.

“I decided to invite a couple of my friends to join me on a trip to the Arctic Ocean and Alaska,” says Thorarinson. “I had never taken many vacations during the summer when I was building my business so this was definitely going to be different.”

It was a warm August day when Thorarinson lifted the AS350 B3e off the ground in Calgary, Alberta for a breathtaking flight west through the Rocky Mountains to Penticton in the scenic Okanagan Valley of B.C. to pick up the third member of his group.

The helicopter travelers stopped in Williams Lake, St. John and Fort Nelson while flying through the wilderness of northern B.C., proceeding north to visit Nahanni National Park in the Dehcho Region of the Northwest Territories.

“We then flew down the Mackenzie River making stops in Fort Simpson, Norman Wells and Inuvik. The next day we proceeded to Tuktoyaktuk on the shore of the Arctic Ocean.”

The next leg of the adventure took Thorarinson and his group south crossing the Arctic Circle to Eagle Plains with stops in the historic towns of Dawson City and Whitehorse on the Yukon River.

“We really enjoyed the Yukon where we were able to fly relatively low and enjoy the mountainous scenery. It was like being in a 360 degree IMAX movie but of course much better!”

From Whitehorse, Thorarinson and his companions flew on, touching down at Tok, Alaska and to Anchorage where they cleared customs.

The return flight was along the rugged and wild Pacific Coast to see Glacier Bay National Park with stops at Cordova, Yakutat, Juneau and Ketchikan, Alaska.

“The Alaskan Coast was spectacular but you have to be cautious because the weather can change rapidly.”

The flight proceeded through Prince Rupert, Terrace and Bella Coola, Kamloops and Penticton, B.C. before heading east over the Rocky Mountains back home to Calgary, Alberta.

“I thought we’d be camping so I loaded the helicopter with lots of gear but we ended up staying in hotels for most of the trip. It was a terrific and my only regret is that we didn’t take enough pictures of the scenery.”

Thorarinson was airborne again in late October for a helicopter tour of the western United States with stops near Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, Custer State Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, South Dakota, Aspen, Colorado and Moab, Utah as well as, the Grand Canyon and St. George where they stayed overnight.

“The performance of the helicopter was terrific and we had no trouble visiting Aspen Airport which is at 7,800 feet in the Colorado Mountains.”

Thorarinson keeps his AS350 B3e at his ranch and is now flying it regularly to check on construction projects and look at land for his property development business. Instead of driving 1000 kilometers to look a property in southern Saskatchewan, Alberta or B.C. he flies.

In 2013, the AS350 B3e also appeared in an episode of the CBC television series, “Heartland” that depicts modern ranch life in southern Alberta.

“Flying and owning a helicopter has been a lifestyle change for me,” says Thorarinson.