



BOND HANDS OVER FIRST UPGRADED EC135 T2 TO UK NPAS

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Bond Air Services has handed over to the UK's National Police Air Service (NPAS) the first of an eventual seven upgraded Airbus Helicopters **EC135 T2+** rotorcraft.

Featuring a custom mission system including a L3 Wescam MX-10 electro-optical/infrared camera, upgraded communications suite, and new digital mapping featuring augmented reality, the modification work has been performed at Bond's Staverton facility in the west of the UK.

The initial example (G-POLB) which was handed over at the Helitech show today, is a former Surrey-based police helicopter which will now be operated from Boreham airfield in Essex.

Excess weight has also been stripped out of the airframe, which along with an engine software update, has enabled the addition of 145kg to the helicopter's useful load.

With three crew on board and a full fuel load, it now boasts endurance of over 2h, says David Crisall, senior pilot at Boreham.

NPAS will eventually operate a total of seven Turbomeca Arrius 2B2-powered T2+ EC135s, alongside eight Pratt & Whitney Canada PW206-engined P2+ examples, all with a common mission system.

There has been substantial criticism of NPAS since its creation as individual force areas lost dedicated helicopter coverage. That criticism has only intensified since an announcement in February this year that 10 more bases were to close over the next two financial years, reducing the total to 15 sites and cutting the rotary-wing fleet from 23 to 19 aircraft.

However, Crisall says without it the situation would have been even worse. “It is not all sweetness and light. We have five base closures at the moment and morale is down, no question about it.

“But the reality is without it there would be some [helicopters] left in the Met and some left in the larger forces, but the rest would be gone. NPAS is not perfect, but the reality it is the saviour of police aviation.”

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