

## Flying to the limit

The highlight of the Robinson Safety Course is the 90-minute flight with a factory test pilot, during which you get a chance to experience a lot of things that hopefully you'll never see in real life, and you're given the opportunity to test your reactions.

My pilot was Simon Jones, an Englishman from Salford who made no concessions at all to the fact that I'd just had lunch, and demonstrated manoeuvres that proved to me that under normal circumstances, I fly the R22 so far within its capabilities

that I've got massive safety margins. I was surprised when we got back that there wasn't a clove hitch in the tail boom, but it was far and away the most valuable hour and a half I've flown.

We did our manoeuvring amid a forest of cranes on Pier 400 at San Pedro Harbour, and throughout the sortie we were never above 1,500 feet. It was interesting to be going into autorotations and vortex ring at heights I'd normally be considering recovering from them, and even more so to be beetling along above build-up areas "not above 500 feet."

In the vortex ring demonstration Simon's patter concentrated

on keeping it straight and recognising the instant I had enough speed to recover. Then we did a plain vanilla autorotation followed by the range version and a couple of S-turns, with the emphasis on RRPM control. A zero-speed auto came next, largely to show that you've got no problem with low-G pushovers if you've got no torque on the main rotor. We dropped like a manhole cover before Simon stuffed the nose over to the vertical, then pulled maybe 2G on a recovery that had me wishing I'd passed on the pudding. I declined his invitation to repeat the dose, figuring that his demonstration had made the point adequately.

I asked Simon whether it was realistic to expect that in

the real world you'd genuinely have time to recognise and recover from an instantaneous engine failure. By way of reply he chopped the throttle, and I was gratified to find I caught it before the revs hit 90 percent. Okay, I was pretty keyed up – but then, you ought to be.

We flew to Long Beach airport for a couple of engine-offs from the hover and a simulated tail rotor failure, then flew back to Torrance at 500 feet for a "touchdown auto".

It's worth remembering that for an extra \$100 (£55) you can do the same in an R44.

