

Immerse yourself in the fascination of rotorcraft, history and future united under the roof of the Helicopter Museum.

14.10.2020 | Schaumburger Wochenblatt

An autumnal October day in Bückeburg: the rain-soaked pavement reflects the morning light at the corner of Sableplatz and Bahnhofstraße. The citizens hurry past me busily as I make my way to the helicopter museum. The glass extension is a striking landmark and visible from afar. Even from the outside, you can spot some of the good pieces in the glass aviary - at this point, I have no idea what impressive things await me inside. This is my first visit to the permanent exhibition, and so I enter the exciting world of rotorcraft with an open mind and curiosity. The museum, established on this site in 1971 by Werner Noltemeyer and originally founded in Achum in the early 1960s, is unique in this form in Europe and home to 50 helicopters and over 1000 models and components - some of them prototypes or machines with rarity value that are no longer produced today. At home in the museum Managing directors Kerstin and Dieter Bals, also museum directors, are already expecting me. With their help and expertise, today I will dive into the world of vertical flight. Of course, the corona check is obligatory: "The usual rules apply here - wear a mask, keep your distance and disinfect your hands at the entrance. In addition, there is a one-way rule, which 95 per cent of the visitors also abide by," informs Kerstin Bals. Currently, a maximum of 40 people are allowed into the museum at the same time, and visitors can keep their distance in the spacious exhibition area of almost 3,000 square metres. Nevertheless, the pandemic and the two-month closure have had an impact on visitor numbers. "We had around 5000 fewer visitors from March to August, this money is of course missing. We also had less income from renting out the event space, which added up to a considerable sum," Dieter Bals continues. Fortunately, this shortfall has been made up by the emergency aid requested from the federal government and generous donations from numerous members. Nevertheless, the situation remains tense: "The winter is generally worse. Tour groups are not coming at the moment and monthly we have about 1000 visitors less than usual. We have already reduced the number of hours of temporary help and taken over a lot of the work ourselves," explains Kerstin Bals. In general, the museum lives from the commitment of volunteers. Kerstin Bals and her husband also do a lot of voluntary work here out of passion: "We live the museum, it's practically our home. 3,000 square metres for vertical flight But all this does not dampen their motivation - Dieter Bals is already thinking about the latest coup he has cooked up together with model-making luminary Dieter Schlüter and General Wolski: the Mars helicopter "Ingenuity" is to be reproduced one-to-one by next year and, if everything works out, presented to the public at the International Helicopter Forum in July. There is already a place in the museum for the small, one-metre-high and 1.20-metre-wide Mars helicopter. The museum's eight thematic areas are divided between the "old" museum, the Burgmannsche Hof (first mentioned in documents in the 15th century), the exhibition hall and the new glass building and "aviary", which was inaugurated in 2011 to mark the museum's 40th anniversary. Our tour begins in the aviary, which is also Germany's largest model aircraft showcase. Here, a scale model of the "Cornu II" awaits us, the first helicopter with which a flight test was ever successfully carried out. Although it only lasted 20 seconds, it was revolutionary for 1907. This model was rebuilt by Dieter Bals and

Dieter Störig and unveiled in 2007 to mark the 100th anniversary of the first helicopter flight with a dramatic production complete with music and smoke machine. "It was a real goosebump moment back then," affirms Dieter Bals. The aviary also houses other helicopters that were important for the development of helicopters, such as the Focke-Wulf Fw61 or the Bo-105. A perfect starting point to learn about the entire history of helicopter aviation. The tour continues in the "Wunderkammer" (Chamber of Wonders), where visitors can vividly experience how mankind has been striving for the desire to fly for thousands of years. From Icarus in antiquity, Leonardo Da Vinci in the Renaissance and Thomas Edison in industrialisation - they were all fascinated by flying. A separate gallery is dedicated to these pioneers. photo:nh To be continued... Helicopters you can touch But the most amazing helicopter is nothing without its inner workings, its technology. In this themed area, visitors are not only allowed to learn valuable things, they are also invited to try them out, touch them and thus experience them with all their senses. A little boy runs excitedly with his mother through the exhibition hall, which is filled with large, impressive helicopters and many a small treasure. Wide-eyed, the boy is amazed when Dieter Bals asks him to climb into the "Alouette II". Suddenly, the helicopter in the Herresflieger room makes rotor noises, and the boy looks up, startled and excited at the same time. "We don't just have helicopters here to look at, but also to touch," Dieter Bals smiles. I also get to climb in briefly and marvel at the many buttons in the cockpit. Dieter Bals, meanwhile, amazes me with his enormous expertise in rotary-wing aircraft - no wonder, he himself flew a Sikorsky HC53 for over 25 years as a flight engineer. His absolute favourite helicopter, which as a medium-weight transport helicopter offers space for up to 40 soldiers. Since these machines are still in active service, they can hardly be found in museums so far. But one of them will soon find its way to Bückeburg. An almost 50-year-old machine has been promised to the museum and will soon be added to the exhibition - so far the good piece has only existed as a model in the large function room. In addition, the museum is to receive a Dauphin as a gift from "Heli-Flight" in the spring. Sponsors and funding are still being sought for the construction and the necessary steles. A reporter takes off The tour of the helicopter hangar takes us past many a rare treasure, all the way to Kerstin Bal's favourite, the Eurocopter EC-665 "Tiger". This impressive anti-tank helicopter, the very one on display in Bückeburg, was used in 1995 for the filming of the James Bond movie "Golden Eye". I am allowed to take a look inside the cockpit, but I have to prove my climbing skills. The technical equipment in the cockpit leaves me almost speechless - so many buttons, a science in itself. Our tour takes me further through the packed hall, where there is plenty to marvel at. In the garage, I learn more about the tinkerers and hobbyists and see some innovative models that unfortunately didn't make it into mass production. The themed areas take us on to the people behind the technology and on to the future of vertical ascension - but I don't want to give too much away at this point. What I can only recommend to everyone after my informative tour is that a guided tour makes a visit to the helicopter museum a well-rounded and extremely interesting experience where you can learn a lot. Finally, I am allowed to fly a round with the helicopter in the flight simulator - of course with the help of Dieter Bals, who makes sure that the helicopter and I don't crash-land over beautiful, albeit simulated, Bückeburg. We land safely in a field and I feel a bit like a real pilot. A great experience that I warmly recommend to any adventurous museum visitor. Photo:nh





