

Name:	Sotirios Karvountzis
Location:	Shepton Mallet, Somerset
Occupation:	Dairy vet
Hobby:	Helicopter pilot

Sotirios Karvountzis: "It's very much an exercise in co-ordination"

Flying in the stars

text Rachael Porter

A 'pleasure' flight led Somerset-based dairy vet Sotirios Karvountzis to book a helicopter flying lesson. "And I was hooked and began to train to be a fully qualified helicopter pilot." He's been flying for 10 years and spends as much of his spare time as possible in the air.

"To keep costs down, I get my air time by piloting helicopters for a local firm that flies people to where ever they want to go," he explains.

"Owning a helicopter would be stressful – there's a lot of worry and responsibility that would come with it. And chartering a helicopter, just like any vehicle, can be expensive. So by working as a commercial pilot I get to do what I love, without the red tape."

Working with a charter firm as, essentially, an air-taxi pilot means that Sotirios has met a few famous faces during the past few years. He's flown rock stars into the Glastonbury Festival and also chauffeured bands, actors and comedians.

"Many of them are travelling 'incognito' and I'm often in the dark about who it is that I'm picking up. Sometimes I don't see them at all from where I am in the cock pit.

"Others I do see but, and I have to be honest, I don't always know who they are."

He does recall one ex boy band member and a lead singer who has recently divorced his Hollywood-actress wife – naming no names, of course.

Sotirios says that being a 'taxi driver in the air' is just a way to get some flying time – without the hefty price tag. "I usually fly every week during the summer and at least once a month during the winter."

One of his most memorable jobs to date was dropping some people off at a 'mock' village in Wales, which used to be used by the SAS for training exercises. "They were off for an 'extreme' team building exercise. It's in a remote place and I thought it was very exciting. It was like Vietnam without the shooting, or like being a MI5 spy."

It's certainly a varied hobby – no two flights are ever the same. And it's very demanding too. Sotirios likens flying a helicopter to patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time but at different speeds.

"The closest thing on the ground that I can compare it to is driving a digger. It's very much an exercise in co-ordination.

"If you like pushing yourself to the limit, it's definitely something that I'd recommend."

