

Luciana Stein reports  
from São Paulo on how  
the uber-wealthy are  
avoiding the traffic by  
taking to the skies

# HIGH



# FLYERS



Top businessmen in São Paulo wake up early and you can hear them. Exquisitely attired in Ermenegildo Zegna suits, their rush hour involves crossing the sky over the city's Avenida Faria Lima in highly manoeuvrable helicopters, costing around \$14 million each.

At eight o'clock in the morning São Paulo's 20 million people and six million cars hit the streets, so it's no wonder that the city's super-rich are foregoing their limousines and taking to the skies to get to work. Not only faster, it is safer in a city notorious for robberies and

bought an Agusta AW-139 at the end of April. In Klein's case the sleek, Italian-designed 15-seater complete with leather upholstery, was a necessity. Last December, he opened seven shops at Espirito Santo in northern São Paulo State, on the same day.

More helicopter sales also mean the need for new places to land them. Helimarte Air Taxi began operations in 1999 with just two helicopters. Today its nine aircraft are constantly booked and fly from Campo de Marte or Congonhas Airport to the city's top hotels, or to one of São Paulo's 200 other helipads (New

'SÃO PAULO HAS 200 HELIPADS, NEW YORK HAS JUST 60.'

carjackings. It was only two years ago that gangs run from São Paulo's prisons brought the city to a standstill with a violent offensive that cost over 100 lives.

'If helicopters were first seen as an extravagance, now they are a business tool,' says Almir Gramani Junior, owner of Camkar, a luxury vehicle operator in São Paulo. He regularly hires helicopters from Helimarte Air Taxi to transport clients from São Paulo-Guarulhos International Airport to the city centre. Frustrating journeys of up to one and half hours by car are reduced to ten minutes by helicopter.

The demand for luxury transport reflects Brazil's economic growth and emergence as a world player. To do big business you need the latest jets, helicopters and limousines. Sales of luxury cars alone are up 37% compared to last year, while 25 more helicopters will be zipping above the city skyscrapers by the end of 2008.

To meet demand, helicopters are becoming larger and more luxurious. Michel Klein, owner of the national retail chain Casas Bahia,

York has just 60). All of São Paulo's banks and most of its skyscrapers have their own helipads.

It's no coincidence that when Brazil's most exclusive shopping mall, Daslu's megemporium Vila Olimpia, opened last year, a helicopter was displayed inside. Vila Olimpia has its own helipad and offers the services of Helisolutions, Brazil's only helicopter fractional ownership company, with 12 aircraft and 200 users. José Carlos Smenzato, owner of Microlins, a chain of computers school throughout Brazil, uses a five-seater Eurocopter EC 120 Colibri for five hours a month and is well placed to sing the praises of 'heli-commuting'.

'Last week, I landed at the Guarulhos from Mexico and took the Colibri to go to Campinas for a two hour meeting,' says Smenzato. 'Then I went back to São Paulo where I had dinner with an investor and went home to São José do Rio Preto. All this costs money but it's my way to do business and still have some quality of life left over.' ■