

Aaron Zeigler Q&A



For a long time, Aaron Zeigler, president of Zeigler Auto Group, spent most of his days on the road. As his business continued to grow, he decided how he managed his time needed to evolve. As a proud owner of a Bell 429, Zeigler says that his helicopter has not only changed the way he conducts business, but also gives him more time with his family.

Q: **What Prompted You to Start Thinking About Buying a Helicopter?**

We're an automobile retailer and have 35 car dealerships in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. As we've grown the company the last couple of years, I figured out that I wasn't getting to enough meetings that I should or getting out to the dealerships as much. I just didn't feel like as a team we were as effective as what we could be. I wanted to be out with our employees and wanted to be in certain meetings. But also, I've got a family and I would want to be back home with them.

Q: **Why Did You Decide on the Bell 429?**

The Bell 429 was the perfect size for we were looking for. I wanted something with two engines and something that had all the latest safety equipment on it, but also something that had a small down draft that I could land in some small spaces on my lots.

It's been fantastic because I land right at one of my locations. I go in, do a meeting, and then I don't have to worry about traffic. I don't have to worry about times of the day that I'm leaving and then I can fly to another location.

For example, last week I was in Schaumburg and then I had a meeting in Lincolnwood. Normally that would be an hour drive, and it was a four-minute helicopter flight. The other part of it is when I'm driving, I have to allow extra time in as I get stuck in traffic in between meetings.

Q: **How Has It Changed How You Conduct Business?**

I can hit eight or ten locations in one day and still be home for dinner back in Kalamazoo.

If I'm leaving for my house, it picks me up there, so I don't have to drive somewhere. The convenience and the time savings in the efficiencies has been amazing for not only me, but for some of our other top executives as well.

My CFO has full access as well and a lot of times if people know I'm going over to a certain dealership, they'll jump on with me. With the helicopter we can bring up to seven passengers. But we have the flexibility of being able to take in and out the seats.

Q: What's The Difference Between Flying Your Jet and the Bell 429?

The jet is great for long term, but it's not real efficient to do shorter trips.

I was flying the jet back and forth to Chicago, but when you land in Chicago, it seemed like there still is an hour drive with a bunch of traffic. It still took you forever to get anywhere. That's when we started looking at the helicopters.

The helicopter is usually faster than the jet. If I'm going to Indianapolis for the Michigan State game, there's a heliport right next to the stadium, which is awesome. We just walked across the street to the game, went to the game, and flew home after it.

Again, it saves the drive time back and forth to the airport. I live about 25 minutes from the Kalamazoo Airport where we fly out. Once I get there, it's about another 15 minutes usually until we're wheels off the ground. That's 40 minutes from the time I leave my house. With the helicopter, I can literally walk out outside. My pilot leaves it running, I jump in, and we're off the ground in seconds.

Q: What Does Your Flight Crew Look Like?

Chris flies the helicopter. Ben was able to hook me up with him. I asked Chris what he loved about Bell, and he said, "they always bring me home." We have a full-time maintenance guy too, so we do all our own in-house maintenance.

Q: What Else Do You Love About the 429?

I really like the versatility. If it's just me going, we'll take out all the other seats and you have more room than you could ever need. It's like five minutes to take the seats in and out. There's a tremendous amount of flexibility.

The downdraft is important too. When you're landing, it's coming down right underneath the helicopter. The other piece too is where my office is in Kalamazoo, we're landing in a really small area, and we need to go straight up because of the trees. The 429 has a power to go straight up. You don't have to get like a running start like you do some of the other ones out there.

This time of the year in Michigan, you get some iffy weather, and we tend to fly more IFR in the winter and it has all the latest safety features. We've even put floats because we fly over Lake Michigan a lot. In an emergency, the floats will deploy if you need to. It checked all those boxes for everything that we were looking for, plus it's pretty cool looking. I ended up going with all black and then just silver tail numbers on it. I really, really like the look of it.

It's also pretty quiet, too. You can use it without headsets. It doesn't cause this big, long disturbance when it picks me up from my house.

Q: How Has the 429 Changed the Work Life Balance For You?

I have four kids. I'll have breakfast with them, and then the kids will go to school. I'll go to Chicago for the day, or Wisconsin or Indiana, and do my work. And I'm back for dinner or I'm back for their sporting events.

Q: Does Your Family Fly With You?

They do. My son went down to the Michigan State basketball game with me on Monday night. One of my daughters races cars and she comes to the race track with me to race. My other daughter does gymnastics, and her meets are all over the Midwest, so we'll use it to go to her meets. But we will use it as a family for fun things

Q: You Said Safety Was Important to You When Deciding on a Helicopter? Why Were You Confident that the 429 Would "Bring You Home" like Your Pilot Said?

Every time a plane or helicopter crashes, it makes national news, right?

And the reality is, a helicopter is roughly 10 times safer than driving in a car. That's why I wanted an aircraft that had two engines and had all the latest safety features and technology.

And I just talked to a lot of people, and we felt comfortable with the safety record of Bell and the technology that that they had.

Q: What Was The Buying Process Like?

Ben brought a helicopter to my house, and we did a test drive. I said, "Hey, this is what I want." He showed me what it costs and ordering it was pretty simple. You wire money for a deposit, and I was able to pick out the colors. Most helicopters that you fly in, the interiors aren't really nice. With the Designer Series, it's really made for executive travel. Everything is leather wrapped on the inside. I was able to pick out the interior colors. We did a really cool flooring that looks like hardwood floors that's really easy to clean.

Q: Did You Take Advantage of the CAP Program?

Yes. It fixes your cost. We've had zero issues so far other than the 50-hour inspection.

Q: What Else Should People Know About the 429?

People think of it as a luxury, but I look at it as a competitive advantage from a business standpoint.

it will make us better as a business because like I said, we're multiplying ourselves. We're multiplying time and we're able to be in meetings that we wouldn't be otherwise. We're able to meet with employees that we otherwise wouldn't be able to do. It's a big competitive advantage for us to be able to have that. And obviously from a quality-of-life standpoint, it just makes life easier and better too on the family side of things.