

Career Pilot Jim Colburn Learns to Fly a Little Closer to the Ground at Hawley's Drag Racing School



Since he was a small boy playing with his favorite airplane toys, Jim Colburn knew his destined path was to be a pilot. Making his first solo in 1983 and then moving on the flying aerobatics for several years, Colburn worked his way through all of the different pilot ratings to eventually become a pilot for a major airline.

“When I was very young I didn’t think it was something you could learn. I just thought you either had it or you didn’t. Then as I got older I finally figured out, oh this is something you can go to school for,” Colburn jokingly admitted.

Currently the Director of Operations for Frontier Airlines, Colburn has an extremely busy schedule commuting back and forth between his offices in Denver, Colorado and Indianapolis, Indiana on a weekly basis. As a longtime fan of drag racing, it was this schedule that continued to throw a wrench in his hopes to attend a Super Class at Frank Hawley’s Drag School, something he had been trying to plan for the last several years.

The opportunity finally arose for Colburn to attend the Super Class earlier this year when Hawley’s school made its annual stop at Bandimere Speedway, just outside of Denver, Colorado.

Colburn had originally planned to drive both the school’s Super Comp Dragster and Super Gas Firebird during his time in the class, but later decided on just driving the dragster.

“The reason why I didn’t, and this may sound a little egotistical and I certainly don’t mean it that way,” confessed Colburn. “Just with my lack of knowledge, I thought I would be able to do both and transition very easily because of my history with airplanes.”

Once he made his first run in the school’s dragster, he was quite surprised.

“When you bring all the dynamics together, the things you need to be able to do naturally, the concentration it takes to do everything, I decided to just work on honing my skills on the dragster and expand on those later,” he said.

Flying all sorts of aircraft throughout his career, Colburn was quick to compare the acceleration and feeling of the school’s dragster to some of what he has flown.

“It’s a little more violent than what you would think it is and I’m not sure that is a good word,” he pointed out. “It really reminded me of a very high powered turboprop, when it’s nice and cold outside and you are very lightweight. You get a lot of torque and you get a lot of vibration with the props fighting the air. As far as the jets go, they are so smooth.”

“I think my best mile-per-hour was like 154 [in the dragster] and that’s kind of an average take off speed for us. But,” Colburn paused. “We are doing that, in three-quarters of a mile.”

In addition to all of his time in the air, Colburn is also what is referred to as a “Designated Examiner” and has been one for almost every airline he has worked for.

“What that means is for a guy to become a captain, you are the last person he has to get past before he can be upgraded,” explained Colburn.

Colburn hinted at what the various similarities might be with the sort of pilots he is familiar with and drag racing pilots. “I have probably examined thousands of pilots and there are some that have natural talent and some that don’t, no matter how much studying they do.”

As a part of Frank Hawley’s Drag Racing School’s Super Class curriculum, Colburn and his fellow classmates not only took part in the on track driver training, but also the Reaction Time Clinic, conducted by Two-Time NHRA Nitro Funny Car World Champion, Frank Hawley.

“The classroom session was much-much more than what I expected,” Colburn said. “As a matter of fact, I spoke to Frank about it a little after class. There are a lot of things that he says and his philosophies that I would like for him to talk to our check airman group about.”

“Perfect example is a take-off,” he said. “When you pull up to the line in a dragster, you have to clear your mind of everything. You need to only be thinking of the business at hand. Well, the captains go through a check every six months. One of the failures we put them through is called a V1 cut. The V stands for velocity and the 1 stands for precision take-off speed.”

“What we do is right when they lift the nose off the ground and the main wheels are still on the ground is to fail an engine on them,” he continued. “And there are memory things they have to do and it flies fine but there are things they have to do very naturally, because you don’t have time to think about it. So that’s why you train in it over and over again.”

“Frank’s approach to clearing one’s mind is something I would really like for these guys [pilots] to learn,” he added on his thoughts of the Reaction Time Clinic. “I have dealt with professionals and very focused individuals pretty much my whole career. Frank Hawley’s whole approach to things and what he does along with his philosophies are some of the best that I have ever heard.”

With well over 20,000 graduates from its various programs since 1985, Frank Hawley’s Drag Racing School’s most popular course, The Two Day Super Class, gives drivers the opportunity to obtain their competition license upon completion of the course and be certified to compete as quick as 7.50 seconds in a quarter mile. Classes are offered year-round at numerous facilities all across the county. Seats are limited in the school’s Dragster and Firebird as well as the openings for Classroom Only and Bring Your Own Car programs.

For more information on the Super Class and other available training programs offered at Frank Hawley’s Drag Racing School, please visit the school’s website www.frankhawley.com or call 866-480-7223.

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