

## My EPST experience

I will always remember the day I received the phone call from GAPAN telling me they were going to award me one of their prestigious scholarships. I couldn't believe they had actually chosen me, to say I felt lucky would be an understatement. I set about preparing for my trip over to Holland where the course is run through EPST, European Pilot Selection & Training, a school with high standards and an excellent reputation.

The scholarship was in the form of an Airline Jet Foundation Course (AJFC) which took around 6 weeks to complete. The first 6 days consist of ground school where you learn a good base knowledge of what is required of you in the simulator and a chance to get to know your fellow students. After this you begin the really fun part, flying in the B737-800 simulator. There are sixteen sessions giving a total of 49 logged hours and check rides at session eight and sixteen to monitor your progress. The first few sessions you get are much needed general handling lessons. As you can imagine there is quite a difference in going from a light twin into a big jet. Never has setting attitudes and power settings been so important! You will then begin to be introduced into non-normal procedures, such as minor failures, engine failures/fires and so on. This all sounds quite daunting after only a handful of sessions but if you do your homework and follow standard operating procedures (SOP's) things should go rather well for you. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of knowing the SOP's, they are a pilots bread and butter. The biggest learning curve on this course is learning to work together in the cockpit. After more than a year of flying/thinking single pilot operations during flight school do not be surprised if working as a team does not come easily. Particularly when your flying partner's mother tongue is not English. I was paired with two Dutchmen throughout the course and initially the cultural differences were apparent what with my soft spoken, overly polite English manner and the very straight forward no-nonsense Dutch manner. However, that is the beauty and importance of having standard procedures, if you stick to them, together you can make it work and have an enjoyable flight. The instructors have a vast amount of experience many of them Captains still flying operationally. We

students often think of Instructors/Captains as flying gods, unapproachable and sometimes a little bit scary, not at EPST. The instructors are down to earth, genuinely nice guys who are there to help you as they know how it feels to be in our shoes. They make sure you are of a good standard to complete the check rides at session eight and sixteen. After the first check ride my partner was swapped. This is an excellent idea as it gets you accustomed to working with different people and puts the SOP knowledge to the test. By this time you begin to feel the multi crew co-operation part is really working and nothing puts this to the test like dealing with lots of emergency situations. Problem solving whilst travelling at 6 miles/minute can create quite a lot of excitement! While the warning bells are sounding and the lights are flashing you really do forget that you are in a simulator, it all seems so very real. Maybe because the simulator I was training in is an actual B737-800 cockpit. By the end of the sixteen sessions you will be astounded at how far you have come since your first session.

It still amazes me today to think I have flown the B737, all be it a simulator. I cannot thank GAPAN and EPST enough for giving me this opportunity. It has changed me as a person, I now feel I have the confidence to undergo a type rating successfully. This maybe because the AJFC is based upon an actual boeing type rating course. I am now more certain than ever that I can succeed in fulfilling my dream of flying commercially.