

BUSINESS JET TRAVELER

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**JOHN
TRAVOLTA**



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AND MORE...



The **BJT** Interview:

John Travolta

A superstar we can believe in.

By Jennifer English

In his 2023 commencement speech at Northwestern University, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker said, “The kindest person in the room is often the smartest.”

He might as well have been talking about John Travolta.

For five decades, the actor has sustained an almost impossibly successful and varied career in show business, turning out one charismatic performance after another—many marked by a depth of empathy and emotional intelligence that can take your breath away.

As it happens, Travolta is likely the most experienced pilot to rank among Hollywood’s top stars. In his downtime, he’s become highly accomplished in the cockpit, earning more than a dozen type ratings in aircraft ranging from the Dassault Falcon 900B to the iconic Lockheed Super Constellation (*see page 21*).

The level of intellect it takes to reach that kind of aviation expertise—and also convincingly play both Archangel Michael and Edna Turnblad—is clear. But we all know the cliché: never meet your heroes. More often than not, the disappointment comes down to one thing—they’re not nice. Travolta, as many have noted, is nice to everyone.

I recently had a chance to catch up with Travolta about the aircraft he’s currently flying, his thoughts on charter and supersonic travel, and how choosing a kind flight instructor can make all the difference. He was unfailingly considerate and humble—and as passionate an aviator as I’ve met.

After our interview—and at his suggestion—I sat down to read *Propeller One-Way Night Coach*, Travolta's novella about experiencing air travel for the first time, told through the eyes of a child. The young narrator is named Jeff, but in a parallel life his name might be John Travolta. From the moment the airplane takes off, his heart is utterly captivated. Early in the story, despite the broader complications in his life, the boy writes: "For some reason everything that happened thus far that night seemed perfect. For years after, no matter what negative experience I might have, from the time I would leave for the airport until the time I would arrive at my destination, life would seem safe and I would be happy."

Please catch us up on what you're currently flying.

A Dassault Falcon 900B. It's a very dependable, elegant, fast plane. It's one of the larger corporate jets I've ever owned, and out of all of them, I have appreciated this one the most, because it just seems like it never fails you. I have had maybe one canceled flight in five years—which is a remarkable thing. It's a beautifully designed plane. I think the modern design is why it's so efficient. Garrett engines are by nature efficient, but it all depends on how the body of a plane is built. How hard is the engine working to push something through the air? The Falcon has such a streamlined design—it allows these engines to perform at their best. And it's three engines versus two, which psychologically is always a nice thing. I do a lot of research before I buy a plane, and I noticed that all the top corporations in the world had this Falcon 900. Procter and Gamble had three of them. Elon Musk had one. Taylor Swift had two. Plus, about five other larger corporations—that could afford any plane—chose the 900.



I often hear feedback that Dassault Falcons are 'pilots' aircraft.'

It's definitely a pilot's airplane, because of how quick the design is to respond. Falcons are beautifully sensitive to your inputs. But it's also a passenger's plane. Don't underestimate how quiet all the Falcons are and how elegant they are inside as well. It's a pleasure to fly, but it's also a pleasure to be a passenger. [I used to fly] a Falcon 2000—also an excellent jet. The only reason I gave that up for the 900 was because it held 15 passengers versus 10, and it could go two hours further.

What other aircraft do you own?

A Boeing 737—300 series, which has the CFM engine. I guess you could call it a BBJ since it was an airliner modified into a corporate interior. It holds 29 seats, but since I run it under the rules of Part 91, I'm limited to 19 seats. It's very dependable, a good choice as far as parts are concerned, maintenance is easily and readily available everywhere in the world. Very dispatchable.

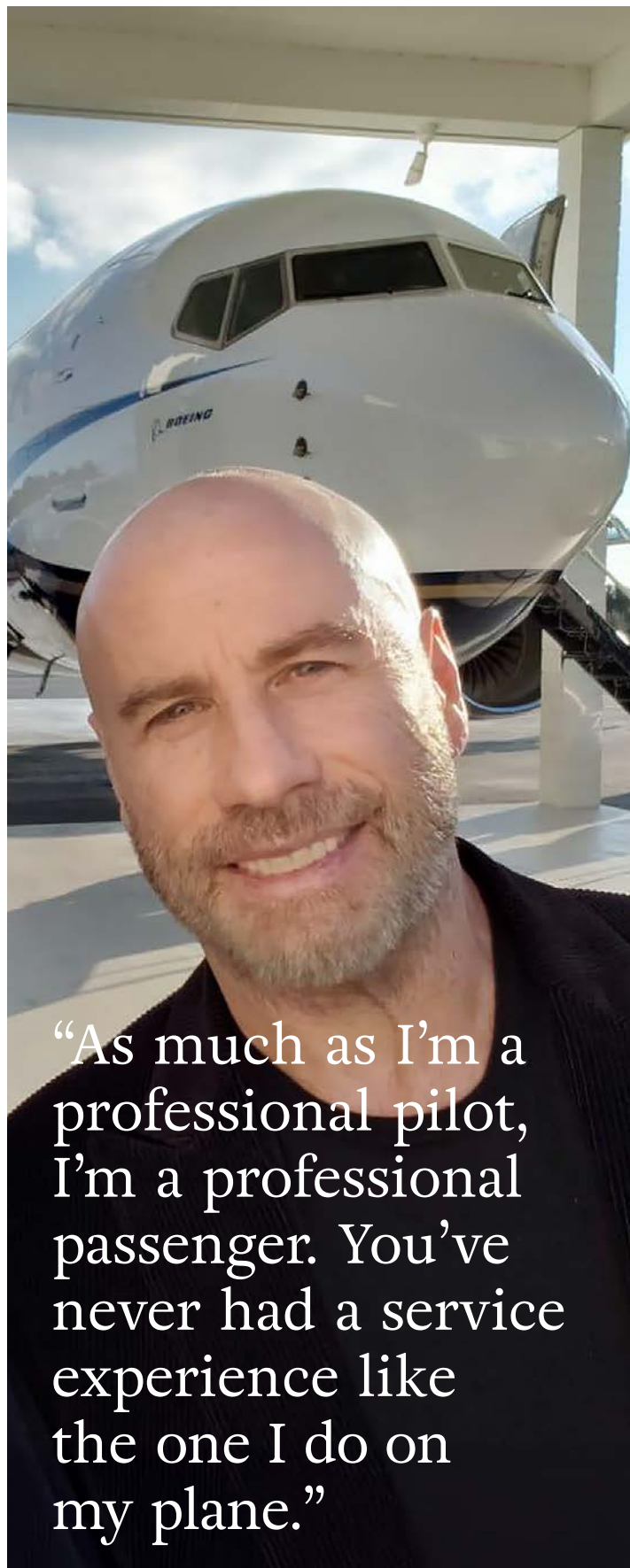
The other plane I own is a little Eclipse jet. I think it is an absolute miracle. A perfect safety record, just like the Falcon 900. And talk about efficiency! You can run it as inexpensively as an SUV car—that's how brilliant the design is. Vern Raburn designed the plane. A fantastic little jet. There's nothing out there that's quite as fast and efficient as that little Eclipse. Also, I just purchased a Lockheed Super Constellation.

You have an astonishing amount of type ratings. Where do you train?

I started training at American Airlines for the Citation and the Boeing 707, and then I went to CAE in Texas for continuation of the Citation, the Gulfstream GII, Bombardier



From Travolta's personal archive: Canadair CT-114 Tutor (left), which is used by the Royal Canadian Air Force Snowbird demonstration team, and Lear Jet 24B (right)



“As much as I’m a professional pilot, I’m a professional passenger. You’ve never had a service experience like the one I do on my plane.”

Challenger, Dassault Falcon 2000, and Falcon 900B, and I used private instructors for the Lear and my first Hawker. One of my most important licenses is the 747. I studied at Boeing and also at Qantas school for the 747. They wouldn’t let me be their ambassador flying around the world in my 707 to help promote the airline unless I was trained by the top instructors at Qantas. I studied for over a full month, every day, no days off, to get my license. And it proved that they were safe with me, because I flew all the Qantas executives around. I flew the chairman of the board, president, vice president, and other executives as well, plus their million-mile passengers, and their special VIP passengers. I flew them all over Australia.

Are you ever in the back of the plane?

Oh yes. As much as I’m a professional pilot, I’m a professional passenger. You’ve never had a service experience like the one I do on my plane. Soup to nuts. Meal service, sleeper service—I do it really well. All of my celebrity/artist friends know that I kind of pride myself when it comes to passenger service. I would be great at running an airline, except I’d probably go broke and need government support, because I believe so much in investing in luxury for the passenger.

What has your experience been with charter?

Sometimes, with charter, it almost feels like they’re doing you a favor, as opposed to remembering the massive amounts of money you’re spending on chartering their planes. It’s why I have my own planes, besides the fact that I can fly them. Nobody can give me the service I will do on my own aircraft. It’s a lost art, just not at the level it used to be. I’ve had to charter a few times because of my planes being in maintenance. I bring my own flight attendant so I don’t have to worry about service. You’re paying a premium, and you’re paying three times the amount of what it costs to actually operate the airplane. The service needs to be stepped up.

I heard you on a podcast telling someone that hiring the right crew and pilots should come before deciding on the actual plane. It’s a very interesting way of looking at the buying process.

You can have the finest airplane in the sky, but if you have a crew with a negative attitude, it affects that flight and the pleasure of flying. You could have a lesser plane and a better crew, and you’ll enjoy your flying more. Schools are fastidious about safety, and everyone is pretty well trained, but it doesn’t mean they’re going to meet your service expectations in their tone or in their behavior. If you have a pilot and crew that you love, you can train them for any new plane you buy.

How do you manage your aircraft?

I have three different planes, and they have three different types of pilots, three different types of maintenance facilities, and maintenance overseers. I have a group of flight personnel to cover three aircraft—actually four, if you include the Constellation, because that requires rarefied maintenance and pilots [who have expertise with vintage planes].

I like consistency, and I am proud of the way I like flights to be. I just did a little movie called “Propeller One-Way Night Coach” based on a novella I wrote 30 years ago. If you want to know who

I am, just listen to the audio or read the book. You’ll see why I’m who I am about flying, and it covers the heyday of luxury service in the sky—and how one should still have it, ideally.

Why do you think pilots are attracted to the profession?

I was always shocked when I would fly with pilots who only flew to make money and not for the joy of flying. I’ve run into several of those over the years. Those who do enjoy it all love it for different reasons, and I’ve noticed this is as different as when you ask an actor what their favorite movies are. What

John Travolta’s Type Ratings



1. Dassault Falcon 900 (Current)



2. Boeing BBJ 737-300 series (Current)



3. Eclipse 500 (Current)



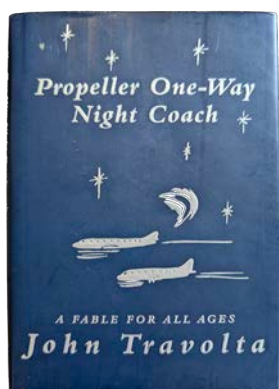
4. Dassault Falcon 2000

5. Lockheed Super Constellation (has flown and currently owns), 6. Cessna Citation I, 7. Cessna Citation, 8. Boeing 707, 9. Boeing 747 (second in command), 10. Lear 24, 11. Lear 36, 12. Hawker 125-1a, 13. Hawker 800, 14. Lockheed JetStar 731 (trained in), 15. Gulfstream II, 16. Bombardier Challenger 601, 17. Airbus 380 (ambassador pilot for Qantas Airlines; first non-test pilot to fly the aircraft).

excites pilots is so varied that I don't even know what the commonalities are, except that it makes them happy because they love the joy of flight. Some people love the challenge of calculations. Some like the sensation of flight. Some like the objectivity of seeing the world from a different perspective. It lifts their spirits.

What are your thoughts on the future of flight?

I love the idea of supersonic. The Concorde was fantastic. I flew on it many times. And we need that again. But I don't really care if it gets any faster, because then there's no fun to the journey. It's about as fast as you want to go; otherwise, it's more like time travel or "beam me up, Scotty." But two times the jet speed is very sexy to me. It's very cool.



What is your advice for others who want to learn how to fly?

An advisory to anybody learning how to fly: choose your instructor [wisely]. If the instructor is teaching you in a negative way, you're not going to absorb as much, and you're not going to be able to apply it as well. You have to get someone who really wants you to learn and wants you to have fun in your learning. If it's anything less than that, ask for someone different. I've never done well with the military style of being taught anything. I don't like negative instruction. It should be: support what you did right, and then teach you things that you're not quite as sharp on. It's simple.

I learned the hard way because my first two instructors were just awful to me, and I gave up flying twice, when I was 16 and 18, because the instructors were so rough. At 19, I found a furloughed United Airlines pilot who had the kindest heart. He gave me the best encouragement—just very caring about my learning. I first soloed when I was 19 because of him. I needed a person who had real patience and tolerance in their heart. When you have that, you can learn to the moon.

BJT

This interview has been edited and condensed.

Living Legends Leads to Lasting Friendship

By Jennifer English

For over twenty years, John Travolta has been closely involved with the annual Living Legends of Aviation event, missing only one ceremony.

In 2019, he presented the prestigious Lifetime Aviation Industry Award to Jean Rosanvallon, then president and CEO of Dassault Falcon Jet. The award honors leaders who have made remarkable contributions to aviation, including entrepreneurs, industry pioneers, record breakers, astronauts, pilot-celebrities, and celebrity-pilots.

"I first met Jean at Living Legends, but we bonded over our shared passion for Falcons," Travolta said. "We now speak four or five times a year—and he always shares updates and advice."

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John Travolta with Dassault Falcon's Jean Rosanvallon