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Office of Aviation Safety, Eastern Region

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Subject: NTSB# ERA24FA136

Contact: Rolando Merchan Rodriguez (PIC/ SIC at SkyJet Elite)

The individual noted above provided the following information via telephone conversation. The below contents are a summary of what was reported:

Mr. Merchan was a line pilot at SkyJet Elite on the Astra jet. He flew multiple flights with Mr. Colmenares (PIC) in February 2024 in the Astra, Part 91 and Part 135.

Mr. Merchan started working for SkyJet in August 2022. In December 2022 he was sent to Flight Safety for type rating training on the Astra and in February 2023 he started flying the line.

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Colmenares recently started flying the Astra (February 2024). Some of Mr. Colmenares first flights in the Astra were flown with him.

Mr. Merchan explained that when Mr. Colmenares joined the line in February, Mr. Merchan needed 25 hours of Supervised Operating Experience (SOE)¹ with a Captain/ PIC. This was needed in part due to the Astra being his first type rating. He explained that Mr. Colmenares served as the supervising pilot in the SIC for some of their flights, so that he could build time towards the 25 hour SOE requirements.

Mr. Merchan reported that during their multiple flights in February 2024, Mr. Merchan was primarily responsible for ensuring Mr. Colmenares understood how to interact with passengers and what needs to be done at FBO's.

¹ Supervised operating experience (SOE), FAR § 61.64

Mr. Merchan explained that in their first flights together, he noticed Mr. Colmenares was still getting used to the cockpit.

Mr. Merchan reported that in his flight experience with Mr. Colmenares, he did not notice anything unusual about his flight performance as it relates to his aircraft control, regulations, or decision making. He stated, "Everything was to standards."

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Colmenares would occasionally miss some commands from air traffic control when they spoke very quickly. Mr. Merchan in hindsight believed this was in part due to a language barrier and that he was still getting used to the speed of the jet and how fast things happen. Mr. Merchan explained that they both were Spanish speakers and Mr. Colmenares was a native Spanish speaker.

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Colmenares was the Chief Pilot at SkyJet. He reported that he was not around the operation a lot and was not around to supervise the operation. Mr. Merchan explained that he observed that Mr. Colmenares was primarily working towards getting the PA31 airplane's ready for operations, until sometime in the fall of 2023, Mr. Colmenares was assigned to Flight Safety training to fly the Astra.

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Diez (CEO of SkyJet Elite) made the decision to send Mr. Colmenares to Flight Safety PIC training for the Astra, sometime in the fall of 2023 and after the PA31 flying never materialized at SkyJet.

Mr. Merchan did not have any discussions with Mr. Colmenares on his work experience at REVA, another Part 135 operators. He was aware that Mr. Colmenares flew at another charter, Aztec Airways.

Mr. Merchan reported that the accident flight was Mr. Colmenares second flight flying the CEO of SkyJet. He reported that he and Mr. Colmenares flew the CEO and his family to Key West, Florida, in February 2024.

Mr. Merchan reported that it was just like any other flight with a passenger onboard. Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Diez (CEO) was an experienced pilot and would have understood risks for why a particular flight could not be completed. He was aware of another instance in which a flight for Mr. Diez was cancelled due to a concern. Mr. Merchan had no direct or specific knowledge of the accident flight, only other than it was a normally scheduled SkyJet flight in their system.

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Gagan Reddy (SIC) had never expressed any specific concern to him about flying with Mr. Colmenares. Mr. Merchan and Mr. Reddy did not

fly together in the Astra at SkyJet, but they had flown together at the flight school (also owned by the CEO) on training airplanes.

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Reddy would occasionally mention "verbal safety reports" to him in discussion. He specifically described that Mr. Reddy was looking for ways to improve his Crew Resource Management (CRM) skills and he was concerned about a SkyJet Captain that he felt was rushing preflight activities and checklists in order to get the flight into the air quickly. Mr. Merchan reported that the captain was not Mr. Colmenares and he believed at that time, Mr. Reddy and Mr. Colmenares may not have even flown together yet.

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Reddy was asking questions like, how can I talk to the captain and slow things down without being disrespectful. They had many discussions on best approaches to CRM in a crew/ jet environment.

Mr. Merchan reported that Mr. Reddy and Mr. Colmenares had flown together on the PA31 for training flights and that "they knew each other." Mr. Merchan believed that the original plan was for them both to fly the PA31's for SkyJet, but that plan did not materialize.

Mr. Merchan reported that "Mark" the FAA POI does all of SkyJet's Part 135 - 293 and 299 line checks. He explained that SkyJet does not have a line check airman, so the FAA has to do all of the line checks and he sees the POI every year. It was his understanding that the Director of Operations (DO) and the FAA POI are in constant contact.

Mr. Merchan reported that in the fall of 2023, the DO (Buehner) at SkyJet left the company and a new DO took over (Mr. Sharpe). Mr. Merchan explained that the former DO was very involved in the operation and was running everything, so the new DO had a lot to take over. He explained that there was a transition period where Mr. Sharpe was very focused on paperwork and General Operations Manual (GOM) changes.

Mr. Merchan reported that there were no big changes he was aware of, when it came to pilot 'green on green' trip pairings, when the new DO took over, as compared to the past DO practices.

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