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Lawyer dad handled the investigation. His director son made the action film.

'American Made' shows Tom Cruise in his charming, cool-headed, high-speed element

"Is this legal?" Barry Seal (Tom Cruise) asks his CIA handler, Monty Schafer (Domhnall Gleeson), as Schafer hands him the keys to an airplane so sleek that even standing still it looks like it's going 300 miles per hour.

"All this is legal if you are doing it for the good guys," parries Schafer, failing to mention there will be no good guys to be found in "American Made," the heart-racing story of Seal's career as a CIA reconnaissance pilot, Medellin drug trafficker and Iran-contra arms runner.

In 1978, Barry was just a restless pilot of a TWA "bus," schlepping passengers on commercial flights to such nowhere destinations as Bakersfield, Calif.

Once the youngest pilot in TWA history, Barry is scaring up pocket change, and a little action, by smuggling Cuban cigars through Canadian routes and, on layover, surreptitiously selling this contraband in Holiday Inn lounges.

Turned on by the risk and seduced by the cloak and dagger

romance of the CIA, a giddy Barry doesn't hesitate when Schafer asks him to quit TWA and set up with a CIA front operation in order to take aerial reconnaissance photos of "enemies of democracy" — communist anti-government guerillas operating in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador fighting U.S.-backed regimes.

Barry's aviatric exceptionalism is established at the beginning of the film when he sends a passenger-filled plane into deep dive just for

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the fun of it; the close-range spy photos he delivers are fantastic.

"I didn't ask for mug shots," Schafer's CIA supervisor excitedly exclaims.

Barry is embraced (with golden



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handcuffs) by Latin American kingpins — Manuel Noriega, Pablo Escobar and Jorge Ochoa.

The Medellin cartel bosses point out to him there is plenty of room in his plane to transport drugs to the U.S. At \$2,000 per kilo, and with the "persuasiveness" of his new compadres, how can he say no?

Then Barry is given a promotion, if that's what you call it when Schafer gives him the choice of

the baby boy and, later, the brother-in-law who makes Roger Clinton look like Winston Churchill — are moved to Mena, Ark., the most dismal place on earth. But Barry gets busy, taking pictures, smuggling cocaine, delivering guns and expanding his fleet.

"I had my finger in every pie on the rack," boasts Barry, who is also the movie's narrator.

And the money flows in like a river.

Until it doesn't.

Tom Cruise is sensational as Barry Seal. Appearing in almost every scene, he is more than up to the job, even with a Louisiana accent. It's exactly the kind of role in which Cruise excels — a charming rogue, on the run, in physical peril, using his cool head and exceptional skill set to beat the clock.

Sarah Wright is just right as Barry's no-nonsense, ride-or-die wife. The perfect partner for Barry, she loves him but she doesn't harbor any illusions.

"Do you trust me?" he asks.

"Hell no."

We'd have to agree.

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Director Doug Liman never forgot. His father, the late Arthur L. Liman of Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison LLP, was counsel to the Senate Iran-Contra investigation. And this fast-paced solid entertainment is a love letter to his old man.