



May 2008

## Commentary

### Flying Carpet

#### Passion for flight

##### New Year's treat

What a way to celebrate the New Year! I scan 100 miles in every direction while tracing the boundary between Arizona's wooded "Rim Country" and the high desert to its north. Snow frosts forests along the Mogollon Rim to my right, while to my left multihued rock barrens stretch out of sight across the Painted Desert. Beneath the wings captivating textures and details reveal themselves one after another on the ground. What created these herringbone rock patterns? Who lives in those remote dwellings? And what might their lives be like?

Memories soon tint the mind-bending vistas on this little-traveled route between Flagstaff and Show Low. Earlier this week my son Hannis journeyed with his buddies Conor and Phil in another friend's car to the tiny hamlet of Concho. There they celebrated New Year's Eve with other members of their on-again, off-again jazz hip-hop band. Today their driver heads elsewhere, so eagerly I soar over this breathtaking land to retrieve my son and his friends. As far back as Phil and Conor go with Hannis, I treasure their company almost as much as he does. Seeing them will be even better than these amazing views.



Crosswinds howl as the *Flying Carpet* touches down at Show Low Regional Airport. It's my first visit here in years, but the little Arizona mountain town has always intrigued me with its idyllic setting and unusual moniker. Legend says the town was named during an 1880's mayoral election when a tie vote was settled in favor of the candidate who drew the lowest poker hand.

As I secure the airplane, Hannis yells from the fence. Three scruffy young men bearing backpacks hug me at the pedestrian gate. Conor in particular beams with anticipation; the fire in his eyes reminds me of his passion for flight. "Any concerns about weight?" he asks, aware of the airport's 6,400-foot elevation above sea level.

"Not in these winter temperatures," I reply. "Plus I planned ahead so we're light on fuel. But that's a good question. In summertime the four of us would weigh too much to take off from here at this time of day." Apparently seating negotiations have already occurred — without further discussion Conor bounds into the co-pilot seat.

I lift off on one wheel and pivot 20 degrees into the wind. "Good thing you warned us in advance about the crosswind takeoff," observes Conor gleefully while the others squirm uncomfortably in the back seat.

Nine years have passed since Conor and I first shared a cockpit. Back then he was a University of Arizona student, and I retrieved him from Tucson for a weekend visit with his folks in Phoenix. That flight was memorable not only for Conor's flying enthusiasm, but because he was the first nonfamily passenger to grace our *Flying Carpet* after we bought it.

Not long afterward Conor and I flew again. He was weathering a confidence crisis about his studies and career, so we piled into the airplane and motored up to Payson for soul-searching and homemade pie at the airport restaurant. Many years have passed since then, and every time I've seen Conor he's asked, "When are we flying again, Greg?" Today we are finally doing it.

Phil too has a connection to the *Flying Carpet*. He reminds me of the time I piloted him with another young man to Southern California to pick up the \$1,500 Greyhound bus optimistically purchased by the band members for touring. They made it home to Flagstaff in the derelict old bus, but never any farther than that. "Flying with you to California was by far the best part of the whole bus experience," chuckles Phil at the memory. (See "Flying Carpet: Vulture's Prey," March 2005 *AOPA Flight Training*.)

We level in cruise, and beyond our propeller, snow-covered Humphreys Peak beckons from 110 miles away at Flagstaff. "You know where to aim," I say to Conor, turning over the controls. Instantly he pilots like an old pro who last flew just yesterday. Then, to my astonishment, he proceeds to identify all the various instrument panel updates I've made since we last flew together umpteen years ago. Clearly, it's only a matter of time until this guy fulfills his latent dream of becoming a licensed pilot.

A tailwind speeds our progress, but this seems too special a day to hurry home. "Have you seen Meteor Crater from the air?" I ask my passengers. No one has, so I mark its location on the map and Conor detours us west of Winslow to circle the amazing landmark.

Conor and Hannis went to high school together — and from the beginning Conor has been one of the funniest guys I know. After resetting course for Humphreys Peak and home, the subject somehow arises of how after moving to Flagstaff the young man "got into reading" while working part-time in college as a strip club deejay. "You 'got into reading' at a strip club?" I echo, disbelieving.

"You bet!" replies Conor. "We only employed like five strippers in the small city of Flagstaff, so once each of them had removed her clothes a few times the job got mighty boring. Fortunately Hannis started loaning me books." Our cabin reverberates with laughter as Conor mimics stripper introductions and then lists Charles Dickens classics he claims to have read while the music played.

By now the Painted Desert glows ruby-red behind us. Snowy meadows and icy mountain lakes silver beneath our wings, while ahead the setting sun glints golden from behind Humphreys Peak's fluffy cloud cap.

"It's pretty obvious you'll be flying me around one of these days, instead of the other way around," I tell Conor as we hangar the airplane.

"That's for sure," he replies. "But in the meantime you've gotta call me when you go flying again, and I mean sooner this time!"

*Greg Brown was the 2000 National Flight Instructor of the Year. His books include Flying Carpet, The Savvy Flight Instructor, The Turbine Pilot's Flight Manual, Job Hunting for Pilots, and You Can Fly! Visit his Web site, [www.paperjet.net](http://www.paperjet.net).*

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Meteor Crater, near Winslow, Arizona (Photo by Dan Sobczak)