



Commentary

Flying Carpet

Festival Flying

Tales of the emerald Chevy

"Hey, Dan, check out that '39 Chevy. It's just like the one I owned in high school — even the same color!" Dan drives a tricked-out Camaro, so I doubt he appreciated the old car's beauty as I did.

Then again, my view was burnished by memories. As we crossed the road to see it, I remembered my dad encouraging me to buy the low-mileage antique he'd spotted on a street corner. Among life's rich lessons was when girls at the Dog 'n Suds drive-in bypassed the muscle cars to ride in my emerald Chevy. It only did 55 mph, but like puppies and babies it exuded character so the girls loved it. Best of all, the narrow front seat ensured that such passengers rode deliciously nearby. After graduation I rebuilt the engine and journeyed in the old auto from Chicago through Canada to Maine and back.

As Dan and I approached the car, however, something didn't seem right. In hazy memories my old Chevy loomed much larger. Certainly I didn't recall bending down to look inside, as we did with this one. Yet surely this was the real thing, with its curvaceous proportions, detailed grill, and sparkling chrome. "What the heck?" I said, figuring my mind was playing tricks. Lacking '39 Chevy expertise, Dan just shrugged. We were soon enticed down the street by a burnt-orange pickup sporting yellow flames and a matching 1950s travel trailer.

Among my favorite flying destinations have always been the nation's wacky and wonderful small-town festivals. This time I'd invited my pilot buddy Dan to check out the Route 66 Fun Run, a good-time weekend auto tour that follows the historic highway across northern Arizona. "I have no idea what to expect," I'd cautioned Dan when making the offer.

"Count me in," Dan replied. "Flying anywhere will be more fun than trimming trees, which is what I'd planned for the day." We decided to intercept the tour Saturday morning at Seligman, Arizona, rather than join the bigger party when the cars reached Kingman that afternoon. Flying weather would be better in the morning, and we could walk into Seligman from the airport. Kingman would require a taxi.

Saturday morning dawned cool and clear. Escaping the Phoenix air traffic hornet's nest via the Bradshaw Mountains, Prescott, and the Chino Valley, we skimmed over Arizona's higher, cooler northern plateau. Hues of hand-rubbed lacquer sparkled from below as we entered the traffic pattern over tiny Seligman. Unlike my previous visits to often-empty Seligman Airport, this time airplanes occupied every tidied and interstitial space. Fortunately a departing Cessna Skywagon opened a gap between taxiway lights where we nestled the *Flying Carpet*.

Guided by a pedestrian map posted at the airport, Dan and I walked downtown to old Route 66. There, quadruple rows of collectable cars clogged the historic thoroughfare for the length of town. This is no *concours d'elegance*, but an open-entry event where owners flaunt their treasures regardless of how exotic or mundane they might appear to others. Alongside lovingly restored Corvettes, Mustangs, and fire-breathing pickup trucks was a rainbow of chopped and channeled '49 Mercury sedans — I've never seen so many in one place. Other gems included an all-original '26 Ford, a 1930s cab-over-engine truck hauling an eight-wheel Jeep, and a VW Beetle surgically slimmed to the width of its driver. Such magical backyard creatures you'd never encounter at any white-glove auto exhibit.

As the cars accelerated slowly along Old 66 toward Kingman, Dan and I thrilled to the bright colors, broad smiles, and revving engines associated with each passing vehicle. We'd just reversed course toward Lilo's Cafe for lunch when I again spotted the '39 Chevy. This time, however, the car appeared in context with other vehicles around it. What's more, a very tall man rested his foot on the running board and his elbow on the roof. Now it was conclusive — the old Chevy was most certainly not the right size.

"This yours?" I asked the man.

"Yes," he said, extending his hand. "I'm Ernie Adams, 'Mr. Dwarf Car.' My friend Daren and I built it from scratch. You should see our dwarf '42 Ford convertible...." He retrieved photos but was soon motioned into the procession. To everyone's amusement, the big man compressed impossibly into the tiny car and buzzed away in a cloud of oily smoke.

Flying home that afternoon, Dan and I chuckled at the dwarf Chevy and its well-deserved place in the homespun heritage of small-town celebrations. I described the lavender municipal vehicles where I grew up in Lombard, Illinois, so painted in homage to the local Lilac Parade. "Picture a purple Plymouth Valiant police car with diagonal tailfins. Even the garbage trucks were lavender!"



Every community must have its festival, no matter how far-fetched the justification. I remember driving my college pal Fred home through the little Wisconsin town of Abbotsford. "Wisconsin's First City," boasted the welcoming banner. "Strange, that the state's first city should be founded in so remote a place," I observed to Fred at the time. "That's not what they're celebrating," he replied with a chuckle. "You see, there's this alphabetical *Directory of Wisconsin Cities and Towns*...."

Near Prescott our attention shifted from cars and festivals to a striking cloud formation layered like a Dagwood sandwich. Dan and I thought we were experiencing atmospheric history, but meteorologist friends later identified it as a variant of the common altocumulus lenticular cloud so familiar to mountain pilots. How embarrassing. Then again, I thought I knew a '39 Chevy when I saw one, too.

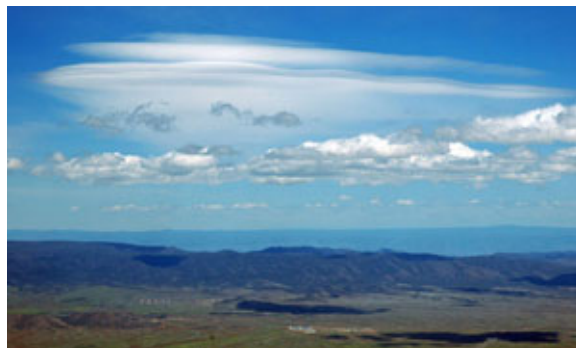
Greg Brown was the 2000 National Flight Instructor of the Year. His books include *Flying Carpet*, *The Savvy Flight Instructor*, *The Turbine Pilot's Flight Manual*, *Job Hunting for Pilots*, and *You Can Fly!* Visit his [Web site](http://www.GregBrownFlyingCarpet.com), www.GregBrownFlyingCarpet.com.

By Greg Brown

Story and photographs ©2005 Gregory N. Brown, first appeared in "AOPA Flight Training"



"A very tall man rested his foot on the running board and his elbow on the roof." Ernie Adams and his '39 Chevy.



"Near Prescott our attention shifted to a striking cloud formation layered like a Dagwood sandwich."