



PLUS View a slideshow.

# ANY EXCUSE TO FLY

## NECKWEAR EXHIBIT GIVES HIM A PURPOSE

**W**hat's your zip code? And did you arrive by car, light rail, or bus?" the Heard Museum admission attendant asked. "None of those—I flew here by light airplane," I answered. "There's no check box for that," she replied, quizzically.

By now you know I'm a pilot who's hard-pressed to take wing without a purpose. Jean and I had just returned from a month overseas; before that I'd been overbooked with work, and afterwards grounded with a cold. Now all I could think about

list. Friends know I've long been enamored with *bola* ties; they're the only neckwear in my wardrobe. I'd vowed to tour the Heard Museum's nationally acclaimed exhibit when next in Phoenix on other business, but was it worth a special trip?

"You want to fly the airplane, right?" said Jean, exasperated. "You want to drive the airport car. And you want to see the *bola* tie exhibit, right? So fly the airplane to Scottsdale, drive the car to the museum, and see the exhibit!" Guilty pleasures had now been officially approved by direct order.

The mission seemed whimsical for inviting others. Besides, what if the airplane wouldn't start after sitting so long? How rusty might my piloting skills be? And what if our long-neglected airport car broke down? Best not to inconvenience anyone else.

The airplane's tires still bulged reassuringly full when I arrived at the

hangar. I checked the oil, polished the windshield, and climbed in. Two slow cranks, and then vroom—the warm rumble that stirs every pilot's heart. Thrills charged my soul as I roared heavenward from Flagstaff following an extra-thorough runup.

Oh, the joys of surfing blue sky, saluting mountains as equals, and like Dr. Seuss's Yertle the Turtle, becoming king of all



**THOMAS "TOMMY" SINGER (NAVAJO).**  
Silver and turquoise bolo tie, 2009.

you survey. How great to be back in the air! Then there was my long-anticipated destination. Along with being so rewarding in itself, piloting facilitates our other interests. I've never understood aviators who can't find places to fly.

Arriving at Scottsdale Airport, however, I found our old car's battery too drained to start the engine. If only I'd brought a companion; we could push-start it and pop the clutch! But I was alone and helpless until a friendly Bonanza pilot came to my rescue. Push-starting didn't work

after all, and neither of us had jumper cables. But he did offer a trickle charger; 45 minutes and one iced coffee later I steered happily for downtown Phoenix.

Entering through the Heard Museum's tree-shaded courtyard, I paid my fee and headed for the Native American Bolo Tie Exhibit. That title raises a question rarely debated in this magazine's pages: Are they "bola" ties? Or "bolo" ties? We locals usually call them bolas, while the exhibit's creator compellingly argued for bolos. As



was flying. But where? I did have some practical objectives. After languishing for five weeks the *Flying Carpet* might have bugs to iron out before launching on serious missions. Then there was our aging Scottsdale airport car, which hadn't been driven in months. Jean most often uses that car, and I didn't want her stranded on her next errand. But I had no pressing reason to fly to Scottsdale—or anywhere else.

"What about that *bola* tie show you've been wanting to see in Phoenix?" asked Jean.

"That's quite a journey for a 30-minute visit," I replied. Still, it was the only suitable day trip currently on my destination

TOP PHOTO: COURTESY THE HEARD MUSEUM, PHOENIX

with aviators arguing the merits of high wings versus low, the *bola* versus bolo controversy will not likely resolve soon.

The exhibit itself proved stunning. Along with traditional Native American and cowboy themes, the neckwear was artfully crafted into everything from twirling square dancers to a Dallas Cowboys football helmet. What in the recesses of my aviator's soul hooked me on these things, anyway?

Then, a clue. Beyond a photo of Roy Rogers, sporting a likeness of his horse *Trigger*, was one of late Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater wearing a massive silver-and-turquoise bolo. An enthusiastic pilot, Goldwater popularized both general aviation and Western neckwear during his 1964 presidential bid. Nearby political and advertising samples from the resulting 1960s bolo tie craze brought memories flooding back. *How could I have forgotten?* I wondered.

Now I couldn't wait to return home. Eagerly I drove back to Scottsdale Airport, walked two blocks to the airplane, and soared homeward. There Jean intercepted me emerging from the bedroom closet.

"Look!" I said, brandishing a dusty relic. It was a once-cherished plastic "I Fly a Beechcraft" bolo tie from my childhood—garnered at the Flying Physicians Association convention where my folks and I met then-presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. So what if I'd bounced the *Flying Carpet* three times landing back at Flagstaff. How rewarding today's return to flight had been! 🐉

---

**Greg Brown** is an aviation author, photographer, and former National Flight Instructor of the Year. Visit his website ([www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com](http://www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com)).

## **Bolo tie exhibit**

See the Native American Bolo Tie exhibit at the Heard Museum through November 4, 2012 ([www.heard.org](http://www.heard.org)), and then at the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport Terminal 4 Gallery from February through June 2013 ([www.skyharbor.com/museum](http://www.skyharbor.com/museum)).