



TO ATTEND THE UPCOMING 2011 SANTA FE CONCORSO, see the website (<http://santafecorcorso.com/>).

AVIATORS AND AUTOS

SANTA FE CONCORSO

"Another great reason to come to Santa Fe!" read Bruce Papier's email. "It promises to be almost as good as Pebble Beach or Hilton Head. If you're interested, I'll get tickets."

I'm accustomed to such cryptic communications from my old friend, who's always trying to lure Jean and me to visit him. Not that it takes much urging to draw us to the old Spanish territorial capital, with its rich blend of Spanish and Native American arts, cuisine, and adobe architecture. Then again, my record hasn't been exemplary lately. It's become a standing joke that I always seem to be overflying my buddy's home without landing there.

I clicked the embedded web link, and up popped a car show called the Santa Fe Concorso. Bruce and I share a love for interesting vehicles; our last such rendezvous was a British car-club show in Las Cruces. (See "Flying Carpet: Old Cars and Old Friends, February 2005 *Flight Training*.)

"Are you showing your MG at this 'Concorso'?" I asked.

"Oh no, for this show my car would hardly qualify for the parking lot," he said.

At first I hesitated. It's a long flight to Santa Fe, and other obligations would limit the trip to one day. But this was to be a bona fide *concours d'élégance*. Famed

racecar driver and automotive journalist Denise McCluggage was chairing the event. Among the judges, she'd enlisted racing legend Sir Stirling Moss; four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Al Unser; famed driver Phil Hill's widow, Alma; and *Road & Track* columnist Peter Egan. As for the automobiles, only teaser photos appeared on the site—but clearly they'd be special given such luminaries.

"You bet I'll come!" I replied. Jean, however, was less enthusiastic.

"That's like a five-hour round trip, right? If we could stay longer, or see something other than cars, I'd be more interested. Besides, I need to study for my Master Gardener class." But as the day approached, I'd found no one to join me. Then Bruce called, eager to introduce a new friend. "Liz isn't big on cars," he explained, "but when I told her Jean might come, she consented to join us." With that, Jean relented, packing her study materials to review on the flight.

Flagstaff to Santa Fe is an enchanted route anytime, but traversing it at sunrise when great shadows delineate the terrain and florescent dawn tints the world

peach—well, that's paradise. Dazzled by the early-morning glow, Jean and I traced Interstate 40 eastward from ponderosa pine forest over Meteor Crater and the Painted Desert. Next came the swirling red rock ridges cradling Gallup, followed by stately Mount Taylor, sacred to many Native Americans. Nearing Albuquerque, we marveled that in two and a half hours we'd almost fully crossed the Rocky Mountains. Twenty minutes farther, and we would have burst from between powerful peaks into the vast skies of the Great Plains.

But that was for another day. Upon crossing the northern reaches of the Rio Grande, far upstream from where it defines the Mexican border, we descended toward Santa Fe. Bruce and Liz waited when we taxied in.

"You two must be hungry," said Bruce, helping tie down the airplane. "And I know just the place for breakfast!" Bruce always eyes the *Flying Carpet* longingly when we meet. Although certificated in airplanes and balloons, he rarely flies anymore. But that doesn't diminish his love for aviation. Over *huevos rancheros* and green chile omelets he brandished his new iPad.

"You need one of these, Greg," he said. "Check out the electronic charts and flight planning apps! And these photos from my Fouga Magister flight last year!"

"This sure beats hauling a plane-load of charts," said Jean, examining the device. (A week later she authorized me to buy one.) Following breakfast we drove 30 minutes north and boarded a bus to the elegant La Mesita Equestrian Ranch. Within steps of the entrance was a stellar Bentley roadster. Clearly, this was no



PLUS View a slide show of the flight and some of the cars at the Santa Fe Concorso.

amateur gathering. “And we’ve not yet reached the formal show!” Bruce said.

In the coming hours we ogled futuristic concept cars; classic Bugattis, Ferraris, and Jaguars; and their exotic modern descendents. In the courtyard, Stirling Moss signed autographs next to the OSCA racecar in which he won Sebring in 1954.

“Here’s my next car!” raved Jean over a curvaceous best-of-show 1955 Jaguar XKD racer owned by Ralph Lauren. Liz fed her own passion petting show horses in La Mesita’s luxurious stables.

“Greg! Jean!” What a surprise, running into fellow pilot and auto enthusiast Jon Van Arsdel. I’d first met Jon back in 1988, when he worked as a specialist in the run-down trailer that housed the Las Vegas, New Mexico, Flight Service Station.

“Remember, Jon? The weather turned sour along our route to Phoenix, a rare enough occurrence that I wasn’t carrying instrument charts.”

“Sure do, Greg. I photocopied approach plates so you and your family could get home.” For years afterward I radioed Jon “hello” when overflying the area.

“Can you stay for dinner?” offered Bruce as we drove back to Santa Fe. “I know just the place...” But Jean had early morning obligations the next day, and I wanted to be well toward home before darkness fell. While the route is relatively flat with airports and I-40 offering comfort along the way, there’d be no moon tonight. After takeoff I waggled our wings to Bruce and Liz, who waved back from outside the terminal.

“What a great day!” said Jean, clutching my hand.

“We must visit Bruce more often,” I replied, squeezing back. Adjusting our seats for comfort and our visors against the setting sun, we settled in to savor the dusk-charmed landscape lining our long journey home. 🍷

Visit **Greg Brown’s** website (www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com).

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