

Daily Journal From The Road

By: Dee Schaudek
Wonder Lake, Illinois

As we were cruising down Route 66, I was typing away in an effort to remember all that we were doing so that I could share it with all of you. I am no journalist, nor do I claim to be so it might not be perfect but I hope you will take away from this how much fun we had and how many more wonderful new friends each one of us 'cruising pioneers' we can now call our own.

Here I am sitting in our 1965 Grand Prix cruising at about 70mph down one of our countries most famous roads, Route 66. In front of me is a beautiful 1972 GP SSJ Hurst Edition owned by Ray Stoeck of Evans, Georgia. If I turn around and look behind us all I can see are more examples of Pontiac's greatest personal sport luxury



automobile. We are at 12 Grand Prix's in our caravan right now and are headed to pick up another dozen or so. As we head west the caravan promises to get longer and longer. The only thing better than seeing all these Grand Prix's out enjoying their freedom to cruise is seeing all the great friends who are riding along in these impressive cars. Sitting down for breakfast or lunch and having a chance to talk with these friends who live all over this great country and even Canada who took the time out of their busy lives to come join us in this Freedom Tour is awesome. Hearing about their cruising adventures and sharing stories of their lives and adventures is really what all this is about. We are out enjoying life and enjoying our friends and making many, many more new friends at the same time. Life doesn't get much better than that!



Jim and I have done our share of caravanning before but nothing like this. One great GP after another just cruising along with their happy owners

enjoying our freedom and enjoying our freedom to cruise. We have made our share of stops already to take in the history of this "Mother Road" and have run into so many welcoming people. It really doesn't matter where we stop; there are always many more interesting and friendly people to meet. One ironic thing about your reading this is that I am sitting here in a thirty-nine year old

Grand Prix with my laptop plugged into it. Thirty-nine years ago, I don't think that the engineers at Pontiac Motor Division had this in mind. But thanks to those guys who designed and built such a perfect cruising automobile. Even almost 40 years later, we are the second generation to be enjoying this GP. Cruising down



America's Highway, Route 66!

We couldn't have picked a better starting point than Pontiac, Illinois. The town of Pontiac has got to be where the

phrase "Hometown USA" came from. We were welcomed into this wonderful town by the town's tourism director Betty, her daughter, the Mayors wife Dee, and the Driscoll Pontiac Dealership. They had the red carpet out and a tasty selection of fine pastries from the local bakery. Driscoll Pontiac had a warm welcome on their sign out front that said "Welcome Grand Prix Drivers" and another sign saying "The Grand Prix Tour Starts Here". Even the "Jolly Trolley" was sitting at the dealership waiting to take us on a jolly tour of the town complete with stops at one of the three swinging bridges they have in Pontiac.



The trolley driver stopped to let us out to see one of the swinging bridges for ourselves and the group hurriedly ran to the bridge to try "swinging in Pontiac". We had a great time swinging and sent a few members running for stable ground when someone finally decided to read the sign above the bridge that stated "No Swinging". Jim quickly pointed out to the rest of the crowd "oh well, the GP Chapter doesn't ever go by the rules".



For breakfast we were welcomed to the Log Cabin Inn for some real hometown cooking. We were surprised to find out that The Freedom Tour was featured in the local paper too. Then the Police showed up to “escort us out of town”. It was so cool to cruise down the streets of Pontiac in this “Grand” Grand Prix Caravan with the Police Car with lights flashing and Don Vrabec’s Pace Car complete with strobe lights on leading the way! This day on the road was a chance to get the GP’s out on the open road and enjoy cruising. We had a lot of miles to cover that day and we enjoyed our day of cruising!



We were greeted warmly in Joplin, Missouri by the Ozark Chapter of POCI. They met us about 80 miles outside of town and we enjoyed cruising the old Route 66 with them. We made some stops including the Route 66 drive-in there in Joplin and then they took us to a local barbeque restaurant for a wonderful evening. Anyone planning on going to the POCI Convention this year in Joplin is in for a good time because the Ozark Chapter sure is a great group of people!



Here we are, the third day on the road and more than 1000 miles since we left Pontiac. We have picked up a few more Grand Prix’s along the way and are now a very impressive nineteen car

Grand Prix caravan. We have spent a good portion of the last two days driving the old Route 66 through the countryside of Kansas and Oklahoma. We have caused quite a stir along the way. These people are used to seeing their neighbors and an occasional classic car or two driving by, but can you imagine mowing your lawn and out of the corner of your eye you see nineteen gorgeous GP’s cruising down the road in what has to be one of the best looking caravans anyone could imagine. I think it’s almost as fun watching the look on the faces of the locals as we drive by with a friendly wave!



It’s almost as if we hand picked this Pontiac powered caravan. We have every year Grand Prix represented from 1962 up to 1972, a 1976, a 1992 GTP, a 1998 actual Las Vegas Speedway pace car, another 1998 pace car and also we have multiple ’62’s and ’64’s. We are headed west to pick up another seven or eight more before we head north to Vegas. The Las Vegas Strip will be shining like it hasn’t shined before. We can hardly wait!



We have members joining us from Canada, Florida, Tennessee, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, California and Missouri. We will be picking more members up from Arizona, Washington and Nevada. We can truly say this is a freedom tour. We have joined together from all over our country and Canada to Cruise Across America!



Yesterday, Thursday May 6th, Tim Dye took over as travel director for the next two days. We saw the world's largest totem pole at The Totem Pole Park, the infamous Blue Whale, The Coleman Theatre where we got a private tour, The Will Rogers Museum and numerous great little towns filled with memories of the past. When we drive by these places and cruise down these roads you can't help but think about all the people who traveled these roads before us. We rounded up an absolutely perfect day at Freddie's Steak House where some of the members of the Indian Nations Chapter came to welcome us. Thanks to The Ozark Chapter who met us in Joplin and to The Indian Nations Chapter and to all the members who have given us such a 'Grand' welcome. It has been a spectacular time cruising and sharing with you all!



Today, Friday May 7th, we have been lucky to have Tim and his wife Penny to lead the way down more of the old Route 66. We have visited with Jim Ross, a Route 66 author, in his home where he was kind enough to share some history of America's Highway with us. He actually lives on Route 66 and built his house to resemble an old Route 66 gas station. We visited the famous Round Barn and the really cool Route 66 Museum in Clinton, Oklahoma. Next is the Big Texan where I am sure someone will try to eat the 72 ounce steak that they offer free to anyone who can finish it.



On Saturday, May 8th, we headed west once again. Our first stop was at the famous Cadillac Ranch. It looked like the Grand Prix Ranch out front with our caravan of GP's lined up in front of the Cadillac's. What a great sight that was! It was another fun day of cruising and sightseeing and the guys were really enjoying their chance to open up those GP's with the higher speed-limits. Fast Fleury and others sure lived up to their nick-names today!



On Sunday we woke up early and were told by our tour director, Steve Fleury that our first stop was going to be in Holbrook, Arizona. He warned us that it is an hour earlier there and that we should "be quiet" when we show up at the Wigwam Hotel. "We wouldn't want to wake anyone up" he said.



The sound of 20 something Pontiac's pulling up was enough to wake anyone sleeping in those Wigwams. But then we noticed a famous GP sitting in front of one of the Wigwams. It was none

other than our own Topless Tom's 1967 GP resting quietly. So of course all thirty something of us had to run right over and surprise Tom and Nancy with a little good morning welcome. Tom was a little surprised to say the least to open up his wigwam's door and see all of us and our GP's standing on his doorstep. Of course, we just had to check it out so before he knew what happened we were playing a little "how many people can we fit in a wigwam" game. Let's just say...we made a little more noise than Steve had warned us not to. Pretty soon all the guests of the other Tee-Pee's were out looking around to see what happened and all thirty-something of us were piled into Tom and Nancy's Tee-Pee having a great time. We have the pictures to prove it!!! There was even still more room on top of the beds for more! If anyone asks you just how many Grand Prix Chapter members can fit in one Tee-Pee.....you now know the answer!



Not that much of anything could top that great morning off but our caravan continued west. We cruised by the Jackrabbit Trading Post and even "stood on the corner in Winslow, Arizona". Then it was off to Hackberry where we were welcomed into this warm town of awesome memorabilia and great people. Here we rested and shopped and got ready for our cruise across the desert on the old Route 66 into Kingman, Arizona.



On this stretch of the old Route 66, there is really not much besides dessert, dust devils and an endless stretch of open

road. Cruising in the luxury of our Grand Prix's made it a great time to open up our tri-powered Pontiac engines and listen to them roar. But when we think back to the travelers before us who were cruising this stretch of deserted road in the first automobiles, you can't help but think about all of the troubles they must have encountered.



Then we cruised into Kingman and were welcomed with open arms by our next tour director, Chuck Cochren and his wife Eva. We visited the Powerhouse Museum and ate at Mr. D's Diner. Chuck and Eva were completely prepared for us with the largest goodie bags anyone has probably ever seen. They had maps, directions and all sorts of great surprises ready for us to enjoy.



The next morning we had 28 Grand Prix's in the parking lot ready to cruise to our next destination. Our trunks were full of goodies and we were ready for another full day of fun. Chuck and Eva had warned us that this next journey on Route 66 was going to take us and our GP's on some "winding and steep roads". Well...let's just say that I doubt anyone could have possibly known just what we were in for next.



It was undoubtedly the most breathtaking experience of the entire trip. We were the only cars on the road and it sure was a good thing because I can't imagine where we would have gone with these wide-trackers if there was a car coming from the other direction.



This was a narrow, barely ever traveled, twisting and turning breath-taking stretch of Route 66 that was beyond words to describe. After we pulled into the town of Oatman and I hopped out of the car to take a breath, I first saw the huge (and I do mean HUGE) smiles on the faces of the guys. They had just had the most incredible experience with their GP's and they looked like they were on cloud 9. Then I looked at the ladies who were the shotgun riders for this stretch. They had a different look on their faces. Some STILL had their eyes closed. Some were speechless and some were just so happy to be standing on solid ground. Many husbands ended up with a sore arm from their wives gentle

reminders to slow down and move over a little.



Jim seemed to thoroughly enjoy his chance to "test that sway-bar" once again and if it weren't for the fact that I was so intent on getting this experience on film, I would have had my eyes shut too. When we had twisted and turned and climbed these intense roads that look like they were not made for such a wide car as ours and I looked back down the "hill" and saw the Pontiac caravan muscling up the hills behind us....I knew even though I was scared out of my mind....that cruising along this isolated stretch of Route 66 was what it was all about. It was an experience of a lifetime to see those GP's powering up the hills and I am proud to say we all made it safely and we even brought back the pictures to share with all of you!



Oatman was another absolutely fun town and we all enjoyed ourselves entirely. Then it was off again to the Riverside Hotel and Casino where we had a chance to warm up for Las Vegas. Then another cruise in the dessert and soon we were cruising down the Las Vegas Strip. Can you even believe we could have possibly done this much in less than one week!!!



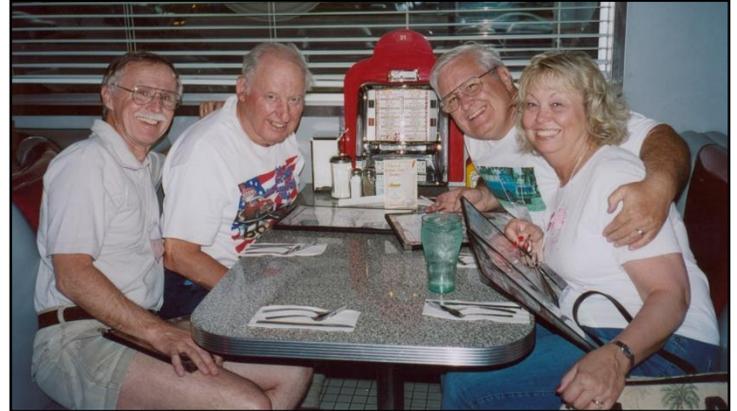
It was really hard to comprehend that we could have possibly accomplished this much in this short of time. And we made it... We did it!!!! WE CRUISED ACROSS AMERICA! Some said we were crazy and many were afraid to take it on. But this group of brave pioneers did it. It is the first time any POCI Chapter has ever accomplished anything of this magnitude before. We have many, many people to thank for making this crazy idea a reality. And an incredible adventure it has been so far.



Our impressive Grand Prix Caravan now consisted of twenty-nine Grand Prix's. We had 13 states and Canada represented in our caravan including, Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, Washington, Texas, California, Oklahoma, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Florida, Ohio, Tennessee, Iowa, and British Columbia, Canada. We had three 1962's, a 1963, two 1964's, four 1965's, two 1966's, four 1967's, one 1968, one 1969, one 1970, one 1971, three 1972's, a 1976, a 1977, a 1992, two 1998's and a 2002.



After a few hours of rest it was time to explore Vegas. We had another great dinner at The 5 and diner and spent the evening having even more fun.



On Tuesday we were ready for the fast lane. First we visited the Sun Belt Museum which was packed full of awesome cars. Then it was time to get back on the road and check out the Shelby Plant. We had a great private tour of the Ford Shelby Plant. They were kind enough to let us in the back where they were busy building the new Shelby's. Then they gave us some markers and allowed us to "leave our mark" on their walls. So of course we made sure that all visitors who come after us will see larger than life that the Pontiac Grand Prix's were there visiting their friends at The Shelby Museum. It was very kind of them to give us such a special tour!



After lunch it was time to visit The Las Vegas Speedway. Our Grand Prix Caravan cruised through the underground tunnel and right into the Pits for an incredible view of the Speedway. The GP's looked awesome lined up along the track and we immediately jumped out to view the NASCAR's speeding around the track. The Petty Experience had rented the track that day and they kindly offered us the chance to come visit with them. There were four brave members who decided to join in for a thrilling experience riding in the number eight car. We all watched in anxious anticipation as the brave four suited up for another once-in-a-lifetime experience. They put on their fire-proof suits and helmets and one at a time jumped into the racecar for a 160 mph adventure. Our racers were Don Kowbel, Tracy Everhart, Jim Schaudek and Don Vrabec. Jim explained later that the feeling was incredible as they hit the turns at full speed. All were on cloud-nine from their unbelievable experience.



That evening we had another fun evening with friends at The Imperial Palace Grand Salon. We had a private room inside their Automobile Museum and they even gave us a tour of their back room which isn't open to the public. Then we were treated to a great dinner and reception put on by Chuck and Eva. They had put together tables full of an astonishing amount of giveaways for us. We can't thank them enough for what they did for us and for the chapter. It really is incredible that two people could have possibly done all this for us and we are grateful to them for everything they did. We had such a fun time enjoying our friends and reminiscing about all of the fun we had so far. It was hard to believe that this was not the end but that we had many more adventures to go in Las Vegas.



Wednesday brought us another great day enjoying ourselves at The Grand Prix Museum. This is actually Chuck and Eva's house and they have done an unbelievable job at turning their home into a tribute to the Pontiac Grand Prix. Along with many other collectables we were treated to a viewing of a one-of-a-kind collection of everything you can possibly think of related to the Pontiac Grand Prix. They had a wonderful lunch for us and we had a great time visiting and viewing their collections.





That evening we jumped into our GP's once again and headed for a little cruise on the strip. The lineup of GP's enjoying their freedom to cruise along the famous Las Vegas Strip was enjoyed by all including many spectators. Cruising along the Vegas Strip in our GP's was another one of our favorite memories of the trip.



The NASCAR Cafe is located on The Las Vegas Strip in the Sahara Casino. They have the worlds largest Grand Prix, Carzilla, on display here and we were in amazement at this huge GP. They had saved us the best seats in the house and we enjoyed a great dinner right next to Carzilla.



On Thursday it was time to visit the Hoover Dam. First we stopped at The Hot Rod Grill for a wonderful breakfast. This diner was designed with many great automotive decorations. They were even kind enough to allow us to leave our mark by displaying our GP Chapter window cling on one of their display cases. We spent a little time at yet another automobile museum across the street and then it was off for the dam. We had a great time on their 'dam tour' and spent some time exploring this awesome wonder.

Then it was time to visit The Dream Machines Museum. We had a great lunch at their diner and then enjoyed even more cars. It was really unbelievable just how many great examples of American Muscle we could possibly view on one trip. We must have broken all sorts of records of viewing the most cars on one trip for sure! Chuck and Eva gave us a couple of hours to rest and catch up with our minds racing full of memories of all that we have experienced. Then it was time to head towards the NASCAR Cafe.





Now came one of the most exciting experiences of our time in Vegas. There were many great experiences but this was unbelievable! We got back in our GP's once again and headed for the Fremont Street Experience. Chuck had somehow convinced the local police department to meet us and allow us to bring our GP's right up and onto the sidewalk and become part of the festivities. Before we knew it, our GP's were parked right under

the Las Vegas Lights and all were enjoying our GP's. I doubt anyone could have possibly expected something like this. Having the treat of seeing our GP's shine under the lights and watching the light show on our hoods as they gleamed from sheer happiness was yet another highlight of our adventure. We enjoyed the band and the light show and our chance to shine. Thank you to Chuck and Eva for pulling off what has to be the most incredible experiences and we thoroughly enjoyed this unbelievable adventure!



Friday was our day to reflect on everything we had experienced. Most headed home to wherever home might lead them. Some went west to California. Some headed north towards Washington and Canada, some headed south towards Georgia and Florida and some headed back east along Route 66 for more adventures. All headed home with trunks full of mementoes, minds full of wonderful memories of great times and a brand new list of people they can now call their friends. I am happy to report that our cars ran well with only a few sight problems. We had a wonderful once-in-a-lifetime experience and are thankful to the many people that helped make this an enjoyable adventure for all!



