

MARAUDING ACROSS THE USA- 1964 Mercury Parklane Marauder

Written by Double Dragon

Wednesday, 08 July 2015 16:03 - Last Updated Monday, 05 February 2018 22:16

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DAY ONE- Vancouver, Surrey, BC/ Blaine, Bellingham, Burlington, Tacoma, Ridgefield, WA/
Portland, OR

Serenity washed over me while driving a 1964 Carousel Red Mercury Parklane Marauder south through 1:45 PM Vancouver, BC gridlocked traffic. A tsunami of blaring horns and serial lane changing lurching panic braking tailgating red light running psychosis flooded my view from every direction.

Despite the serious menace that pure unadulterated stupidity on a mass scale entails I cruised along in a Zen state of mind.

How can this be?

The insulating effect of the mighty Mercury Marauder kept me detached from the mayhem maze. The Marauder is huge and brightly colored repelling the immediate choke hold of grinding traffic crush.

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Modern vehicles build their size upwards. The Marauder spreads its volume much wider and longer than the biggest monster pickup or SUV. Oceans of steel kept the crazies out of my immediate personal space. The Marauder is equal in weight to a minivan or a small SUV balancing the physics in the event of a nut hitting you; although obviously the Marauder lacks modern crush zones and air bags.

The Mercury Parklane Marauder constantly reinforces the driver's awareness that this is a highway car. The God of travel and speed Mercury stares back at you from the center of the steering wheel and his silver bust adorns the dashboard among all the chrome.

As implied by the name Parklane the car is spacious and sumptuously comfortable. The crossed checkered flag emblems on the front fenders, fast back rear window and the thrum of dual exhaust are a reminder that the Marauders won races back in the day.

SUVs are identified by a meaningless jumble of numbers and letters. What does it mean?

Nothing.

SUVs look like gigantic bicycle helmets or industrial garbage bins. Ponderous, dangerously powerful, heavy, ugly, square 'status symbol' motion boxes.

Once in awhile there was an innocuous car among the warring refrigerators on wheels but these were just as depressing in different ways. Jelly bean shaped things... drab and invisible.

The red Marauder stands out among a vast vapid landscape of white, grey and black vehicles. People actually see the car- well, the few drivers who are not texting can see it.

The fool ahead of me was texting. 'Dropped head syndrome' is your only sign that some dangerous idiot might suddenly run into the back of another car at full speed without even touching the brakes.

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I blasted a monster truck with the tug-boat deep Marauder horn. He only momentarily adjusted his track before re-entering the oblivion of head-down texting drifting back into my lane.

Stuck amidst a free-for-all endless stream of 6,000 pound trucks and SUVs sloppily driven by ignorant rude incompetent savage uncomprehending beasts will cause the rare remaining rational human to recoil in horror

The
city

exacerbates the effect of bad drivers and red light runners by offering almost no advance left turn signals. Major Vancouver intersections are perpetually littered with fragments of broken glass, pieces of plastic bumpers and turn light signal lenses left over from collisions.

Yet I regarded it all with ice cold detachment.

My sense of remove was total. I am the outsider looking at the ants crawling in pointless panic. My invulnerability and detachment radiated from the safe haven inside the big red Marauder and also from the excitement of anticipation.

The freedom of the open road was soon to be mine. This nightmare daily reality of these people droning along texting was a temporary nuisance for me. I wasn't fighting the other cars just to get somewhere to slave for The Man or to plod through a mall mindlessly shopping.

I was heading on an adventure. Vast vacant desert landscapes beckoned. Freedom and space. I was driving a MARAUDER. Hell, I was a marauder.

A freebooter. Marauders roam the world looking for plunder. A marauder doesn't slurp coffee from Starbucks and play video game apps in traffic. A Marauder drives his car and he LIVES his life.

The snarl of Vancouver traffic dropped away momentarily on highway 99 heading south. The horns and screaming threats, omnipresent gadgets and near misses resumed at the border lineup in Surrey, BC.

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Just to emphasize that I'm not interpreting this avalanche of imbeciles through a misanthropic haze ; the first words out of the mouth of the border guard from Blaine, Washington were complaints about a terrible driver.

See? It's not just me!

The guard vented,

"We shut down cell phones for the last few feet before the crossing. But he was trying to reboot his phone while driving. His texting is more important than someone else's life. Then he holds up the line searching for his driver's licence after all that."

The guard was infuriated by the ridiculous buffoon ahead of me who drove his mini van over an orange warning cone meant to guide drivers away from the entrance to the border booth. After squashing the cone the side panel of the van scraped across the door of the booth with ear piercing screeches of ripping metal.

I had my driver's license already in hand. He gratefully scanned it into his computer. I commiserated and offered my opinion that automated cars will be a good thing for the masses who can't drive. The guard noted,

"In the old days the worst drivers were old people who couldn't see very well or react quickly. Their major issue was confusion. Now it's young people who are horrible drivers. They have fast reflexes and good eyesight but they are inconsiderate, self absorbed and always on their cell phones."

We eventually got around to the purpose of my trip and duration of stay.

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"I'm going through the Midwest for about a month. See some deserts. There's also a long list of car museums that I want to see."

After checking for banned foods he waved me through.

In Blaine, Washington I dumped gas in the tank and got moving. It was already 3 PM. Traffic was thick. The guy ahead of me was driving right on the bumper of the car in front of him going 75 MPH. He was too close and kept applying the brakes once every second or two. These distracting cries of wolf looked like some kind of Morse code shooting out from his brake lights. The guy ahead of the tailgater finally got exasperated and pulled out of the way.

Predictably, the total jackass who had been tailgating continued on at the exact same speed he was already going. He had no intention of going any faster. A few brazen idiots were actually texting on the freeway. I gotta get away from these dazed cattle herding themselves to the slaughter.

Instead of dealing with the crushing traffic I browsed the bookstores and antique shops in Bellingham, Washington. My entire outlook was renewed and changed by the time I loaded up with super cheap bulk food from the Grocery Outlet on Ellis Street. Time out allowed the traffic to disperse.

It was easy going when I got back on the I-5 later, gliding through the light evening traffic. The Marauder floated through the cool night air in a freedom of the spirit that seldom happens anymore. We have built up a big nostalgia for the old days of just 'getting in a car and going somewhere'. Washington greenery and cities slid past my window dreamily. I was just 'going somewhere' and enjoying the smooth languid cruise of the car.

It was dinner time when I filled up the gas tank at the Chevron in Burlington which is north of Mount Vernon. The Skagit River separates the two but I always regard them as one integral city. The waterfront is nice and there are plenty of older buildings that give this area an old town feel.

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The cruise south to Tacoma went by quickly. I checked the oil at a 76 station near the Air Force Base. Back on the road it seemed like no time went by before Ridgefield, Washington popped up. I gassed up at the Chevron.

Ridgefield lies alongside the Columbia River which is running south at this point. The Columbia turns inland a few miles further down. The I-5 funnels traffic onto large bridges that take you over the river into Oregon State depositing you in Portland.

After a few clubs and bars in Portland it was suddenly closing time. I burned off the alcohol exploring the cobblestone downtown core on foot. Late in the night I crossed the steel bridge from the old downtown core to the eastern area that led out of town. The AM radio played oldies.

Heading out of Portland east on Interstate 84 the road hugged the southern side of the Columbia River working eastward into the continent. The road wove up down and around like a rollercoaster. Cement side barriers combined with the wavy drops reminded me of a kid's slide in a water park. Misty mountains provided a spectacular backdrop as the car ate up the shadowy scenery at high speed.

Aside from the high end trim level, the most important extra that Parklanes add over the lower models is power. The popular 390 c.i. engine comes in lowest horsepower form with 2 barrel carburetor and single exhaust in the base Mercury Monterey line. Parklanes get bumped up to 300 HP with a 4 barrel carburetor and dual exhaust. The Marauder fastback window also helped the car slip through the air more easily making best use of all that power.

Despite its massive 4,400 pound bulk the Parklane sucked away grades without a flicker of effort charging through the hills surging ahead with just the slightest hint of pressure on the gas pedal.

DAY TWO- Portland, The Dalles, Biggs, Rufus, Wasco, Boardman, Pendleton, LaGrande, Baker Valley Rest Area

,
Ontario, OR/ Boise, Bliss, ID

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Turning a tight curve moved the edge of the mountain out of the way sending a blinding sun rise into the car. The sun had just fully cleared the horizon when I pulled into a 76 brand gas station to eat an apple and a muffin. Gassing up in The Dalles, Oregon the clock in the station said 6:45 AM while the receipt said 5:45 AM. Either way it was time for sleep.

After 2 hours I awoke. The dream of being rocked around was actually real. The wind was buffeting the car. The Marauder was perched on top of a hill right in the wind flow.

I got moving slowly. My joints were stiff in the chilling early morning damp. I bought milk for my morning cereal in Biggs.

In Rufus, Oregon at Jack's Mini Market a traveling Mexican brass band huddled in the parking lot. Their elaborate green costumes with huge oversize sombreros were being whipped by the wind. They quickly gobbled hot dogs chased down with Coca Cola. The sun was bright and hot. The Mexican band piled uncomfortably into their minivan. I luxuriated in the vast interior room of the Marauder very glad I wasn't in that minivan.

In the Boardman Rest Stop a raspy voiced blonde with a dark brown tan wearing a skimpy halter top took a deep drag on her cigarette and asked,

"What year is your car?"

"Sixty Four."

"Guess you haven't had it since it was new, huh? You weren't born yet were ya darlin?"

She winked. For an older woman she filled out her skintight black leather pants pretty well. Of course she may have been younger than she appeared. Her face might be prematurely aged

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from years of riding bikes and smoking. She was stacked, too. Her cleavage was darkly tanned like her face. She flirted while the wind buffeted her hair around. When I told her the car was named a Marauder she giggled,

"Marauder. Well that sounds exciting!"

She was with a group of bikers heading for Sturgis, South Dakota for the annual summer biker gathering. She had kicked her 'old man' out 2 months ago and was riding alone. She showed off her Harley with front fairing and sidebags. Most of her friends were outfitted the same way. These bikes transformed long distance biking from an endurance test into a fairly comfortable experience.

"When you're on a long ride you start to love the fairing, and the storage. And electric starters are just amazing. I even have a stereo system on this bike!"

She showed me all the various state of the art features of her bike. She had a thorough knowledge of the advances modern cycles built into their engines nowadays. I learned quite a bit about cycles. She pulled on a heavy leather jacket and popped on her helmet as everyone started firing up. She repeated the name of the particular bar in Sturgis she and her friends frequented and said,

"Be sure you stop in!"

She blew a kiss and roared out. Back on the sun scorched highway the pale yellow hills dropped downwards steeply into a basin. Allowing the Marauder to roll free on a desolate stretch of mountains saved the drum brakes from overheating. The giant Mercury gained momentum shooting down a steep grade devoid of traffic.

The speedometer needle hit 95 MPH which was really about 87 MPH. Extrapolating the discrepancy between the odometer readings and the mile markers on the highway kept my mind active. I was focused razor sharp despite minimal sleep.

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The roaring wind quieted down as the Marauder coasted back down to normal speed. The road flattened out leading into the city of Pendleton, Oregon. Once outside the city limits the highway climbed up high again.

Back up top at a viewpoint parking area the intense sun created hard and dry ground with straw like brittle yellow grass over rounded hills. A trucker pointed to what looked like a rad leak in the Marauder. The rad was in perfect shape, rodded and recored and well sealed but unfortunately lacking a modern overflow tank. Cars from the early 1960s just puke out the excess fluid from the rad cap relief spring.

While we were discussing the radiator gusting wind ripped my cowboy hat off my head. As I ran after it the wind also whipped some bags of food right out of the open trunk. I chased down my hat and food across the parched dry grassy plain which was as hard as concrete.

Back on the highway hills and curves wove through the hot bright day. An offramp from the Interstate morphed into a winding descent leading down into La Grande, Oregon. Highway 30 flattened out becoming a slow ride through town as Adams Street. The La Grande digital town clock announced that it was 1:13 PM and 74 degrees F.

The visitor information center people at 102 Elm Street sent me over to Earth Bookstore. The store had a nifty movie tie in collection taking up several shelves. I recalled all those old 1970s films as I flipped through the selection. I bought a movie tie in book THUNDERBOLT AND LIGHTFOOT which was a buddy car travel film starring Clint Eastwood and Jeff Bridges.

Cruising the wide streets of LaGrande created a huge contrast to the tight pressing streets of Vancouver, B.C. Speed limits here are 20 MPH and the entire town has a peaceful feel to it. Houses have large yards and a driveway for each car leaving clear sight lines on the road. I didn't see any apartment buildings.

The size of the Marauder seemed totally in keeping with the wide streets here. I wasn't tailgated or cut off. No one runs red lights here and everyone is too old to text. Pretty relaxed. This is the type of driving that existed when the Marauder was a new car. I bet that car insurance is really

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cheap here.

At a Chevron gas station a burly guy with old school tattoos on his forearms dashed over to have a look at the Marauder. While I checked the oil he had plenty of time to look over the 390 engine and ask a bunch of questions about the car. Inside the station the girl told me she'd been up to Vancouver one summer to watch the Indy racing. I inquired about gyms or community centers.

I got a shower and a workout for 9 bucks at Grande Ronde Fitness workout center. The walls featured painted murals of Olympian gods on podiums in bodybuilder poses. After some weights I zoned out doing backstroke in the pool with a view of steel girders supporting the ceiling. They were starting to rust from the humid air.

I spread out a dry towel on the rear package tray of the car then placed my wet clothes freshly washed from the shower into the searing heat blasting through the rear window. The clothes dried out in record time. I had now worked out, showered and done laundry and it was only lunch time.

There were 2 Mexican restaurants (new management signs), a sports bar with steaks and cocktails, a shack steak sandwich in/ out takeaway and a Chinese buffet. The Elkhorn Restaurant seemed to be the top dining joint in town.

The gravely voiced owner of the Elkhorn appeared in an apron. He was a rancher type of guy. Country music was blasting,

"You can take the girl out of the honky tonk but you can't take the honky tonk out of the girl..."

I settled into a booth with blue leather wrap around seats that extended up above the top of my head. There was a dance floor, stone walls and wooden posts. A huge mirror and some Elk paintings hung over the wallpaper finished the effect. Christmas lights decorated the bar. For 18 bucks no tax I enjoyed a 14 ounce steak, baked potato, peas, salad with roll and watermelon. The only downside to the Elkhorn was the haze of cigarette smoke from other customers.

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Highway 30 took me back onto the Interstate. The Marauder was purring along smoothly with the vent windows open wide. Swirling air blasted around the cavernous interior. The 2 door Parklane with fastback makes for a sleek looking car but it is actually noisier than the 'Breezeway' versions which circulate air quietly via an awkward looking reverse slanted rear window that can be raised and lowered.

The aerodynamic fastback on the Marauder model was designed for the NASCAR Mercury racecars . Marauders are adorned with chrome crossed checkered flag logos on the front fenders to remind you of the Mercury feats in competition on Pike's Peak and the oval racetracks.

Despite the 1960s design paradigm of long, low and wide the car is so big that even with the proportionately low roofline my black leather cowboy hat didn't touch the headliner. This car was built in an era where men typically wore suits which included a hat worn outdoors.

The curved vista view glass falls way back from the dash on all sides. There is so much space in this car you need to stretch to reach the passenger door handle or window crank when belted into the driver's seat. The massively wide and long hood appeared to completely fill the lane as it hovered up the road casually burning away the miles. After fighting modern gridlock this experience was a throwback to roadtrips of olden days. I enjoyed my precious freedom in clear lanes ahead of me.

Driving up through the mountains my eyes started to burn from operating on 2 hours sleep. The big work out and heavy meal were pulling me under. Parking around 6 PM I took a nap in the front seat under blazing hot sun in a rest stop.

After an hour I awoke to the buzzing of flies on the hot steel hood of the car. The entire hood was covered as was the windshield. Other bugs leaped about, too. The pack of motorcyclists I'd seen earlier when I passed out were gone now.

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Baker Valley rest stop is about 10 miles outside of Baker which is close to the border of Idaho. The rest stop seemed desolate with the bugs crawling and the sun waning.

The Interstate worked east and south through mountains. Everytime I pass through Ontario, Oregon there seems to be a strong smell of sulfur.

A big radar sign said.

"Your speed is 72 MPH"

The Marauder speedometer read 80 MPH which agreed with the approximate 10% exaggeration of the odometer I had noted earlier. Correcting for speedometer exaggeration the Marauder was getting about 13.8 MPG. I decided to cruise a little slower. There was no hurry to be anywhere so why burn up cash on gas?

Filling up in Boise, Idaho the gas mileage had leaped up to 16 MPG while cruising an indicated 70 which was probably about 63 MPH.

In Boise a huge T/A travel stop offered numerous pumps and special trucker services. The T/A acronym means Travel America. As it turned out the acronym should stand for Totally Annoying. Not that it had anything to do with the T/A people themselves. The place was clean and it had good bathrooms. It was the local pests that were Totally Annoying.

While I was gassing up a big diesel pickup loaded with junk pulled into the station. The driver was about 6 foot 1 and 220 pounds wearing several layers of clothes. He aggressively asked me how to use the gas pump which was merely a pretext to start an aggravating monologue.

He had a flat brim hat and wads of cotton stuffed in his ears. Blue lensed sunglasses angled

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awkwardly over squinting eyes because the bridge of his nose had been previously broken. I already felt like flattening his nose again after a few minutes of his obnoxious personality.

He ran through a rehearsed story that ended with him aggressively begging money with a sense of entitlement like he was owed something from the world.

I said no and ignored him as I pumped gas. He kept on talking. I warned him,

"Don't talk to me."

He kept talking.

He stayed rooted to the spot trying to intimidate me demanding cash with a threatening edge.

He blocked the gas pump. I yelled at him and walked a straight line that would pass through him. He scuttled away like a crab barely avoiding getting the steel gas pump jabbed into his torso as I hung it up with a crash.

The T/A pest began hovering around the pumps further down trying to engage other people in conversation as a segue to launch into his obviously practiced routine.

This spot seemed to be a magnet for pests. As I began my oil check a new pest appeared. A brush cut kid came up trying to sell me a 1985 Cadillac for \$500.00. It was his former bosses' car and he droned through some complicated paperwork story. It wasn't in his name but you don't need the title to bla bla bla. My temper was boiling,

"I have a car. I don't need a car."

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The whole time I was adding oil his boring voice drilled through the air. His job unloading a truck left him stranded here.

He was offered a job selling magazines door to door and he told the guys to shove the job up their ass. But he wasn't too proud to beg. There was no concern on his part that he simultaneously had a 'boss' with a Cadillac to sell while also claiming to have no job. He embellished his hard luck tale rounding it out with the claim that he hadn't eaten all day. He looked well fed.

I gave him a hard boiled egg and an apple. Instead of devouring it instantly like a hungry person would he nodded glumly and looked at the food in his hand wishing it was cash. He was just another lying T/A pest: Totally Annoying. Total Asshole.

He wasn't hungry and certainly wasn't grateful. An annoying nasal complaint started to issue forth from his inventory or whining 'hard luck' stories. I cut him off with barely contained rage,

"Get away from me."

He wilted away immediately. After slashing through this onslaught of pests the travel center felt akin to someone hacking their way through jungle vines and brambles just to get some gas and oil into my car. Wading through a jungle thick barrage of T/ A Total Assholes. The rapier sword of the Marauder sweeping away the flotsam and jetsam

. Cutting down the dross and dregs of the world.

Driving into the night warm air on a sparsely traveled highway I settled into a nice cruise. Just outside of Bliss, Idaho a rest stop beckoned. The Marauder is pretty comfortable for sleeping but not wide enough for me to lie flat. I lay on my back with my knees bent. My knees got stiff from not being able to fully extend them all night combined with very cold night temperatures. I would probably be far enough south by tomorrow night to avoid freezing at night for the rest of the trip.

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DAY 3- Bliss, Twin Falls, ID/ Jackpot, Wells, West Wendover, NV/ Bonneville Salt Flats, UT

Next morning at sunrise while I was topping up the radiator a State Trooper rolled over to check things out. After a pleasant conversation he was on his way.

Highway 30 led into Bliss, Idaho and the Stinker Country store and gas station. This place was relaxed. Some leather necked farmers and truckers congregated inside. Standing in line I had a view of the back of a farmer's neck. It was riddled with deep fissures from years of sun, like dark cracked clay or rock weathered in the desert. His slow and measured rapport with the store owner made the whole world slow down and take notice of what is around you. This guy was in tune with the moment.

These small town guys were not talking about anything important but they were fully engaged with each other. Most people small talking have their minds off thinking about something else. Nothing about these people seemed to be preoccupied or distracted. They were fully rooted in the spot. They also seemed to all know one another very well.

I stocked up on oil, milk, fruit and veggies. There were some old cars and trucks sitting in a lot outside the store where I set up my breakfast in the hot sun.

Cruising south east on Interstate 84 I bought a gallon jug of Quaker State oil from Schuck's on Blue Jay Blvd in Twin Falls, Idaho. Only 7 bucks and change. The car was using a bit of oil simply due to heat evaporation.

The 93 ran south to the I-80 or I could continue along the hypotenuse of the triangle and eventually merge with the 80.

The switch to Highway 93 sent the Marauder directly south. The divided 4 lane highway soon reduced into a 2 lane blacktop stretching through the desert. A strong smell of charcoal in the air preceded a gaggle of firefighters in stubby Brinx type

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firetrucks. They had just extinguished a fire. Burnt black charred land smoldered and dust blew over the highway.

Even the big Marauder was rocked by the power of the wind gusts high in the 6,000 foot elevation mountains, but it tracked straight and true. Out here on virtually deserted highways the massive Marauder was perfectly at home doing what it was designed to do. All that bulk makes for a good highway car.

Mercury built the Marauder using the Ford Galaxie platform and drivetrain. Mercury moved the mounting point of the rear axle back an extra inch on the leaf springs. Salesmen could quote a longer wheelbase as compared to Ford despite both cars using the same frame. Mercury's 120 inch wheelbase supposedly created a smoother ride. It was mainly psychological.

Bigger is better.

Back in the 1960s 'bigger' equated with longer, wider and lower. Car photographers loaded cars with bricks to lower them and used trick lenses to stretch the apparent length of cars for advertisements.

The 1964 Galaxie is 209.9 inches long while the Parklane is 215 inches long in 2 door format. That is nearly 18 feet long. The Parklane is 80 inches wide and only 55.7 inches tall. Some extra chrome and more standard features round out the difference between the Mercury and the Ford Galaxie. That extra weight of the Mercury does help steady the ride when cruising the Interstate.

The full size 1960s cars are so wide and long that even some people back in the day felt they were too big. The 'just right' sized intermediates were about the same size as the full size cars of the 1950s. Once roads and parking spots became cramped the full size car went into decline. By the end of the 1960s the intermediates began slowly stealing away former full size devotees.

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It is ironic that the intermediate cars were taking over in the 1970s began because the Interstate system was mostly in place by this time. Major stretches were totally completed during the 1980s and 1990s at a time when serious downsizing was transforming domestic vehicles. The wide gently graded and subtle curves of the Interstate lends itself well to gigantic cars like the Marauder but these cars are now virtually extinct.

Now car manufacturers push SUVs, trucks and minivans as the new version of 'bigger is better'. SUVs provide space and comfort by packaging things in a narrower, shorter, much taller format. Designers know how ugly these trucks are. Anyone in design knows that the pinnacle of aesthetic shape was achieved in the 1960s with 'longer, lower and wider' cars. But customers don't know anything about taste. They are mindlessly buying up SUVs which are flat out UGLY because they are told to.

Manufacturers managed to con the public into believing that these hideous boxes are status symbols. Trucks are subject to less stringent emissions standards and lower Corporate Average Fuel Economy numbers since they are not cars. Aside from dodging the CAFE standards trucks are more profitable for the manufacturers. The companies need to make money so they do what they have to do even it means not selling cars anymore. The designers still come up with fantastic designs for cars but unfortunately cars are now in the minority of sales.

The border of Nevada appeared over the horizon marked by gambling joints rising out of the hazy desolation in a sudden influx of gaudy and bright glittering reflections. Jackpot, Nevada is pretty small but has enough casinos on hand to satisfy any gamblers coming down Highway 93. In Cactus Pete's Casino parking lot I ate a snack then entered the freezing air conditioning to refill my water bottles from a water fountain.

The smokey noisy casino was full of tourists lurching and lumbering about in a kind of daze. In the washroom I sat on the can listening to voices of players at the urinals discussing heavy losses and their lucky hands. They eventually focused their discussion on the one guy at the table they couldn't read. It occurred to me that a smart gambler would hire a 'can man' to sit in a stall and just monitor conversations.

Coming back outside out of the A/C the blast of hot desert air was a knock out punch. This really is the desert. I wanted more heat and now here it is in spades. Soon Highway 93 would

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intersect with Interstate 80 which would carry me east through nice hot weather.

Highway 93 sailed down a cliff showing 100 MPH on the speedometer. The road dropped off like a steep shelf down into Wells, Nevada. Down along older streets and buildings just past the railway tracks some joker had placed a mailbox 10 feet up in the air and labeled it 'junk mail'. The secondary streets trailed off into dirt roads with some boarded up houses and a few trailers. I wandered about a bit on foot then took the car onto some of the roads branching out.

Eventually hunger dictated that I backtrack to the main 4 way intersection on Highway 93 and Interstate 80 where a truck stop/ cafe/ hotel dominated the town. I got some basic stuff at the Flying J then crossed the street to the 4 Way Truck Stop and Casino. Similarly named 4 Way Bar Cafe adjoining the building had an 'Oriental Pork Soup' and halibut buffet which I devoured with gusto. A big mirror lined the buffet. Very large fat people slowly went back for seconds.

A pretty young girl sat sobbing mumbling about her wins and of course the inevitable losses. Her companions gravely nodded in supportive empathy. In contrast to that unconditional buffering a girl behind me bluntly said,

"Don't gamble more than you can afford to lose."

The matter of fact statement came from a long tall blonde at the adjoining table. Her name was Jenn. I'd noticed Jenn leading her very young hot girlfriends into the buffet. The one who had caught my eye and returned my glance was standing back behind the others. But I could sense her vibe buzzing under the noise and talk.

Jenn was from Salt Lake City. She chain smoked which was the first clue that she wasn't a Mormon.

She was a nurse.

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"If you're a nurse why are you smoking?"

"We're not nurses yet. There's plenty of time to quit. We're still young."

Probably the only person in the entire building NOT smoking was me. All these old casinos built in the 1970s seem to have a mandatory Always Be Smoking rule. All of the future nurses were chain smoking. The one I had my eye on was named Nita and soon she hovered close. I kept looking over at her. She was petite and exotic looking. Soon Nita and I were engaged in a flirtatious exchange. The girls wanted to go to the West Wendover Casino. Nita got in the Marauder while her friends in the mini van followed us.

"Oh wow! This car is so huge! Is it fast?"

I goosed the gas squealing the rear tires. The front of the car lifted upwards as it launched forwards with an impressive roar. The Marauder lived up to its name as it rammed us back into the seat and tore through the hot desert air. She laughed and was all smiles having a ball in the car. We tooted along waiting for the wheezing mini van to catch up to us.

Nita had a sensual mouth that moved deliberately when she spoke forming her words carefully. Her eyes were almost veiled. In the sun they were no more than slits. Inside the casino in low light they were soft and dreamy. Her family was from Thailand and ran a restaurant in Salt Lake City. She was a waitress in the family business but was mainly occupied with her courses in nursing. The girls were all in the same class and celebrating their summer off with a cross country trip in a rented minivan.

In West Wendover the casino guy informed me that the time was 7:20 PM Mountain Standard Time. The border of the 2 states juggled legal and illegal gambling laws along with varied time zones. Wendover, Utah is basically joined to West Wendover, Nevada but doesn't have legal gambling.

The Rainbow Casino blasted light through kaleidoscopic mirrors and neon flashing everywhere.

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Written by Double Dragon

Wednesday, 08 July 2015 16:03 - Last Updated Monday, 05 February 2018 22:16

Sinatra blared out of the sound system. There were no water fountains. Nothing free here. You had to spend for drinks on top of losing money gambling. Vegas has the right attitude. Vegas comps you drinks for free. I hung by Nita's side while she played card games with her friends. After steadily losing money at the tables some of them wandered over to the slot machines.

I was famished again and took Nita to the Red Garter Hotel and Casino next door for dinner. Nita's experience in the restaurant business made her instantly pissed off. We sat at a table in the cafe and not one of the 5 waitresses standing around the counter came over. The vibe was strained in here. I looked at Nita,

"Remember those old black and white TV dramas where a heist was coming down and everyone was acting strangely and the hero walks into the middle of it?"

I seriously wondered if there was something going on here like that. I'm super paranoid at times. Nita shook her head angrily,

"Don't be silly! This isn't some crime show. They're just plain lazy!"

Nita told me sometimes ethnic looking people got worse service and maybe it was true this time because service was exaggeratedly slow. Nita was mad,

"Everyone in my restaurant gets top notch service right away as soon as they come in the door no matter who they are rich or poor and no racism!"

After a bad experience in the cafe coupled with a long night of gambling stretching ahead it was time to cut out. Nita gave me a significant look when I suggested leaving. Nothing was said, but the thrill of her look spread right through me. She told her friends we were going for a walk and would be back in an hour or two. The girls teased her and admonished me to 'watch myself'.

We actually did take a walk. To the car. Nita simply said,

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"Let's go to my hotel."

The hot evening air blew through the open windows. Nita slid across the bench seat and practically sat in my lap. Without a word she just started kissing me. It was intoxicating. She was soft and smelled lush and nice. She sat back and directed me to her hotel. Emancipated modern women make life easy sometimes. I was curious. I thought most Thai girls were conservative. Nita had talked mostly about her home life dramas with her sisters. She was clearly close to the family. Nita corrected me,

"I'm an American girl just like my friends. My younger sister keeps with tradition and acts like a nun but I like to live my life. I'm an adult now and I can make my own decisions."

Thank God for adult decisions!

I raced full speed to her hotel. Luckily this Marauder didn't have the bucket seat option. She was snuggled up for the whole ride with her soft flesh pressing against me. At Nita's hotel things developed at breakneck pace. While we were lazing about in the afterglow she got on her cell phone to one of the girls back at the casino. She said we were going to 'talk' for awhile longer. Nita assured the friend that everything was OK. She smiled in response to something on the other end of the line. Her friends were teasing her about 'talking' so long.

The girls were heading to California tomorrow and planned to make it to Disneyland early the next day. Nita quizzed me about the likelihood of me passing through Salt Lake City in the future and commented on the cliché of the two ships in the night. She was going west and I was headed east. We exchanged information but it seemed unlikely I was going to be in Utah or her in Vancouver in the immediate future. She emailed and called me long distance regularly for a few months after that glorious night and then gradually she faded away.

After stretching out our time we lazily got ourselves together and drove slowly back to the casino. We entered the Rainbow nearly 4 hours after we had left. Jenn and the girls were nursing drinks in the lounge. Jenn smirked at me and said,

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"That must have been some WALK you guys had."

Nita's friends had long lost interest in gambling or drinking. Nita's exhausted friends crawled into the mini van to go back to their hotel. Nita and I followed in the Marauder. A girl peeked out of the hotel window as we made out in the car. Nita said goodbye and I headed out into the Salt Flats to sleep in the car.

The Salt Flats are part of Salt Lake which is a dried up lakebed on the outskirts of Salt Lake City. The powerful Marauder engine hummed along a ten mile strip of flat openness. The narrow road was nearly 10 feet above the lakebed in places. I rode along the thin raised line stretching above vast flatness.

At the end of the road when the engine cut out an instant silence and peace settled over everything. No buzz of electricity, no sounds. A camper was parked nearby with all lights out. I reviewed my whirlwind day and night romance with Nita. I was lying back in the dark quiet of the car. Everything was great as I drifted off to sleep remembering her voice... her eyes... fading into dark...

The vast open space and wonderful silence was shattered by the arrival of shitbox rice rockets with big blatty exhaust pipes and booming rap music. People from the camper trying to sleep were rebuffed in their request for peace. They called the cops.

The cops finally showed up and told the Rice Rocketeers to cool it and douse a fire they had blazing. They sniveled and promised saying 'sir' over and over. Hypocrite fakes. The minute the cops were gone all the bravado talk about offing the pigs resumed. Then the stupid stereos in their shitty cars came back so loud that the THUMP THUMP THUMP of the bass actually rattled their cars from the vibrations. The hatchback on one was open to make sure the noise was broadcast as far and loud as possible.

The people in the camper angrily loaded up and pulled out of the area. Now the Rice Rocketeers
the ante by setting off loud firecrackers, too. A new fire was burning.

upped

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I got out of the car and asked them nicely to either turn it down or relocate up the road,

"The reason people try to sleep here at the end of the road is because this is the only place to park right off the road to avoid getting hit by another car. You guys have your headlights on and music going and fires and all the rest of it. No one is going to accidentally hit you if you party half a mile up the road."

They not only listened to rap but copied the belligerent attitude too. A bunch of white suburban posers gesticulating and trying to talk gangsta rap is just so idiotic it has to be seen and heard to be believed. A barrage of threats and shit talking tough guy garbage was directed my way.

I had tried being nice and now I was really angry. I got the tire iron out of the trunk and warned them,

"20 guys can win a fight but the first one gets it."

Suddenly the white lake bed was bathed in red and blue flashing lights. The cops reappeared before the confrontation reached critical mass. It seems the campers had called in a followup complaint after being driven away by

The
Rice Rocketeers.

The Rice Rocketeers stood passively heads down mumbling 'yes sir' like a bunch of pansies after spending all night tough talking. There was a lot of phony sorrow but n o rap bravado was forthcoming as the cops searched their cars and poured out their remaining beers and confiscated fireworks.

I passed out as the sun came up. It was getting very hazy as the temperature climbed. It became impossible to sleep as the supernova sun rose.

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DAY 4- Bonneville Salt Flats, Wendover, Grassy Mountain, Aragonite, Grantsville, Salt Lake City, Murray, UT

It was so hot and sticky at sunrise that I gave up on attempts at sleep. My hair and neck were saturated with sweat. I added a gallon of water/ antifreeze mix to the car. The oil was OK. I was tired, hot and angry.

While checking tire pressure the tire gauge suddenly broke. After being kept awake all night that was enough to make me throw a tantrum. Those

Rice Rocketeering

Fake Rap idiots should thank their lucky stars they were miles away from me at that moment.

I cruised slowly east along the Lincoln highway 80 aware that my lack of sleep created the danger of making a mistake. I stopped at every rest stop to keep myself sharp. At the Bonneville Salt Flats rest area white desert stretched into the horizon where jagged mountains cut into the blue sky.

A sullen Mexican girl was sweeping and washing the front steps of the Star Mart in Wendover, Utah . I probably looked just as irritable as she did. Aside from being achy tired and cranky, I was also dehydrated. I bought milk and ate cereal in the blazing sun of the Star Mart Parking lot. My nose started bleeding from the dry heat and lack of water and sleep. Or maybe the high altitude. The lowest grade of gasoline here begins with 85 octane instead of the usual 87. The octane requirements are lower due to the thinner air at high elevation.

At Grassy Mountain rest stop near the whistle stop of Aragonite my mood was forced to improve when a sociable guy took a picture of the Marauder. His wife had the same color scheme of red with black painted top on her Mercury Montclair which they had owned since 1972. This area of desert is within the city limits of Grantsville which is a suburb of Salt Lake City.

Cruising into Salt Lake City the heat was close to 100 degrees F. It was hot and sticky and

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actually so humid it was hard to breathe. After a good meal in the air conditioning of JB's Restaurant on W S Temple. I took a walk around downtown. The sun was like a branding iron on my face. My skin felt clogged up. I came south for heat and now I had more than I could handle.

Back inside the car the interior was burning hot. The red seats felt like a stovetop and the steering wheel was too hot to touch. I got a burn on my stomach from the white hot metal seat belt buckle. A woman moving her car from one side of the street to the other to get beneath some shade explained that most people strategically re arranged their cars throughout the day to stay out of direct sunlight.

I was sopping wet and gritty with dirt and sweat. My streaming sweat was stinging my eyes. I needed a shower desperately and a workout to clear out the old Adrenalin from the night/morning anger. I pulled into a 7-11 to get directions to a cheap gym or community center. A super cute little blonde girl buying a coffee at the counter got involved. She told me about a Gold's Gym just outside the city limits with good equipment and only 10 dollar drop in. I asked,

"Do you work out?"

She bashfully shook her head no.

"One of my roommates has a boyfriend who works out there."

She was gorgeous. Her name was Sandi. She was barely 5 feet tall and very petite but with scrumptiously distributed curves. She tried to draw me a map then offered to ride over with me. There was a strong attraction sparking already as we walked to the Marauder.

She loved the car. Sandi grew up with musclecars and described her childhood riding around in her stepdad's 1970s Vette. She loved lying flat on her back looking at the sky through the rear window while riding in that car.

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"I was only 4 years old and already a car freak!"

She was the youngest born in the family and a wanderer by nature. Right now she was 'grounded' in SLC for a year or so while she completed a long haul trucker course. I failed to hide my disbelief then quickly tried to cover up with fumbling explanations. She smiled and said,

"It's OK! No one looks at me and thinks 'trucker'! But I love to drive cars and big trucks are a real thrill."

Sitting in the passenger seat she seemed to be almost ethereal. She looked too small to shift 16 gears double clutching holding that big steering wheel rim. Her body language was relaxed but under it she radiated a vibrant energetic power. She had forceful movements despite her dainty appearance. Her blonde eyebrows were naturally very faint and thin which made her eyes seem to glow. Her short skirt kept my eyes wandering down to her fantastic legs. Her rapid fire speech was quite humorous and easy going and kept the interaction light and natural.

Sandi directed me along Interstate 15 down to a big mall on State Route 152 which is known as South Van Winkle Expressway. I was scheming about how to prolong our acquaintanceship but she was way ahead. She made it sound like it was obvious that we were going to be staying together,

"I'll go look in some of the stores and then I'll see you back at the car in an hour."

Having missed a nights sleep my workout was less than stellar but I got a long shower. Since I had Sandi lined up I also shaved. The first thing she did was run her hand over my smooth shaven jaw.

"Nice."

She kept her hand on my face. A terrific wave of energy surged through me. She kept smiling.

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The attraction was blazing. I felt high. I must be 'on' these days. Last night there was Nita and now it looked like I was on track with Sandi. Although Sandi seemed to be a situation beyond good luck. It wouldn't have mattered when I met her. There was a palpably strong attraction between us from the first instant we met in the store.

Murray, Utah is a suburb of SLC and right now heavy traffic was buzzing everywhere. After filling up at a Chevron we sat in a Denny's in Murray while we waited out traffic. I devoured a 5 dollar 'Grand Slam' which consisted of eggs, bacon, sausage, grits, and pancakes with big slabs of real butter. Sandi wrinkled her nose as she watched me pour ridiculous amounts of syrup on the pancakes . She drank a black coffee and reminisced about her life and how certain minor developments had capitulated her into different directions.

Walking to the car she asked,

"Want to see my place?"

I nodded. She had already warned me about her roommates. Young party girls coming and going. Sandi was 32 although she barely looked 20. She explained that she was quieter and more mature than her roommates prepping me for mayhem and drama. We parked in front of her rental place which was old but not shabby. She led the way walking fast and purposefully.

Sandi cautiously opened the door and called out. There was no one home. She locked the door. I kissed her right away and she embraced me wholeheartedly. The whole day had felt completely natural with her but even so I was surprised at just how good our chemistry was. She commented on it, too. There was 'something' that just clicked creating an unusual effortless flow between us. Later in the night I was lying back on the bed floating away after being up all night the day before.

Crash!

The front door opened and in stormed one of her roommates with friends in tow. A girl yelled,

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"Hey Sandi! You gotta come out front! You'll love this! There's a car here that..."

Before the roommate could finish telling Sandi about the Marauder parked in front of their house she stopped halfway into Sandi's room when she spotted me.

"Oops, sorry!"

Introductions were made all around while Sandi wrapped the sheets around me strategically. The girls sat on the end of the bed asking me questions about the car, my trip, Canada and about 10 million other things. Sandi ushered them out after a few minutes and snuggled back up in the bed with me. Then the front door crashed open again and another roommate came charging in.

Sandi went out to run interference. Music was blaring and conversation babbled on. I heard Sandi giving them shit and the music came down a few notches. Sandi came back to the room and hesitantly asked if I was OK. She was worried about me being up the night before. I smiled,

"If it keeps up for another hour i'm getting the tire iron out of the trunk!"

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DAYS 5,6,7- Salt Lake City, Echo Reservoir, UT

Now that I had a good thing going with Sandi I was 'grounded' in SLC just like she was. It was a happy time for me. The only problem was the roommates. They were plain stone crazy party girls who only seemed to sleep when they accidentally passed out. Then it all started again. The smoke was too heavy inside the house during the day for me to stay and try to catch up on sleep. The noise levels also prevented sleep. The stereo was perpetually blaring. In the daytime

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when Sandi was occupied I parked the Marauder up in the hills under tree shade in tranquil neighborhoods. I experimented with dead ends up on A Street near 8 Avenue, down in Canyon River Way and other desolate still spots trying to catch a nap. But it was so hot the sleep was never deep.

Sandi was the 'mom' in the house keeping the place spotless and doing all the cooking. Her roommates were often away in early evening partying in clubs and we got our alone time. Sandi told me that her favourite things were sex, cleaning and driving. It sounded like some kind of male fantasy joke but it was true. Part of it flowed from her incredible energy levels. She was a little dynamo. She said what she thought without editing herself and she moved with the same unfiltered unrestrained purpose. She was a very exciting self assured girl. A bright shining glowing girl brimming with irrepressible energy.

We took the Marauder out after dinner most nights and she directed me to some nice viewpoints as well as hunting down old cars. We went to Orange Street where she had seen an old car abandoned near the Utah Steel building which was nearly obscured by overgrown vegetation. The car was gone. We also cruised high into the hills outside town looking down on the glittering lights. She threw her pack of cigarettes out the window and vowed to quit smoking if we stayed together. She was getting serious in a hurry.

I explored the city with her as my guide. The center of town was set up in a grid with Temple Street housing the Mormon church and research library. Mormons believe that baptizing their deceased relatives will save their souls retroactively. Hence the Mormons need to research their ancestry to determine the identity of ancestors in need of baptism. This has led to the Mormons actively touring the world copying documents and tombstone inscriptions and organizing it into a well indexed database.

Sandi told me a rumor she heard,

"They have a huge warehouse with back up copies of every last bit of research packed away in an underground bunker. It's tunneled inside a mountain and can survive a nuclear war."

SLC is pretty clean and well organized. The expected ghetto area common to most major cities was just about nonexistent here. The Mormons were friendly and polite. Somehow they

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managed to look fresh and clean in this heat despite wearing black suits, fully buttoned up with ties and crisp white shirts. This is amidst a humid 100 degrees F.

At mid day the asphalt undulates under your feet. I actually left footprints because the road had turned to mush under the blazing sun. I tried to read a sign that became nearly invisible in a haze of reflected blinding sunlight. A bag of carrots left in the trunk of the car for one day melted. Sandi asked for them when she was making dinner. All that remained was a bag full of weird

gelatinous

orange slime. Leaving the white sidewalk to cross the street walking on black broiling tarmac heat rays radiate up

so intensely it actually hurts your legs.

Yet here were the Mormons cool as cucumbers in full dress.

Traffic was surprisingly easy to handle with big well laid out streets and mostly careful good drivers. The lack of crime was driven home to us vividly when my keys, identification and money fell out of my pocket as I was getting out of the car. I was wearing stupid shorts which have slash type pockets which allow everything to come tumbling out if you have been sitting down in a car.

It wasn't until it was time to pay in a restaurant that I discovered everything was gone. Sandi threw some money on the table and we dashed out without waiting for the change. Racing to retrace our steps I didn't expect to get lucky but there it was. All my money and identification and the keys to the car were lying on the sticky hot black asphalt beside the driver's door. Some loose bills had blown under the car and gotten pressed up against the curb. This stuff wouldn't have lasted 2 seconds in most big cities where roaming scumbags are forever scanning the streets and sidewalks for anything they can grab.

After 4 days together Sandi asked me about my thoughts on marriage and settling down. It was posed as a theoretical question but it underlined how fast things were happening between us. Some unusually powerful connection between us seemed to intensify with each passing day.

She tugged me one way while a voice in my head told me to keep moving. Despite knowing I would regret not following this up I got ready to move on anyways. The Marauder plunders and moves on...

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Sandi wistfully said she'd love to travel with me. I reminded her that she had to finish her time in SLC. It was better to split up early in the game before it got too hard to leave her. Of course the voice inside me was right. The regret came on very strongly as I left town and I never forgot her over the years. What was so important out there on the road anyways? There is nothing there that won't be there later. But that marauding urge within me was strong. The impulse to move.

I located a cheaper gym than the Golds'. It was called Central City Recreation Center and cost only 4 bucks for a drop in. The place was down on 615 S 300 East and oriented towards crime deterrence, channeling street gang types into meaningful activity. Posters for HIV tests, anti drug things, and transitioning into work adorned the walls. Fernando who checked me in informed me that the swimming pool had been filled in with cement years earlier but there were plenty of free weights.

Back on the road it was 100 degrees F. Sweat poured down burning my eyes with its saltiness. I checked the oil and cut my hand on a sharp piece of metal. I was saturated in sweat, dirty with bloody knuckles and black grease all over my hands. I looked grimy again even though I had a shower after my workout.

While eating a whole precooked chicken from Albertson's sitting on the grass in the shade by the parking lot shoppers regarded me with suspicion. I looked like some street guy. The transformation had taken mere hours after leaving Sandi's place.

Headed east on Highway 80 I didn't make it far out of town before days of built up sleep debt forced me to pull off the highway. Exit 86 led to a dark viewpoint in the Echo Reservoir. The high elevation dropped the temperature. The ground was damp from a recent rainfall. A big truck idled its engine to keep the A/C working. I asked myself why I was filthy dirty, clogged with sweat sleeping in a car breathing diesel exhaust in some remote area when I could have been with Sandi in her house.

We always look for that 'certain someone' in life but the impetus to keep moving is also a strong force. All those songs about rambling and so on wouldn't have been written if not for some genuine underlying motive in humans to explore. All the way back to stone age there have been pioneers roaming into new territory crossing oceans and impassable land in search of... what?

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DAY 8- Echo Reservoir, Echo, Fire Canyon, Henefer, UT/ Rawlins, Sinclair, Benton, Fort Fred Steele, Ch
eyenne, WY/ Sidney, NB

After awakening in the rest stop I replenished the radiator then seated the boots on each plug wire while the engine was cold. The engine seemed to idle much smoother now.

While eating one of the hard boiled eggs Sandi had packed for me I paused to think about her. There was no hurry to be anywhere and I wasn't far out of town yet. Why not go back for a few days? I pondered the idea of returning to her but then got back on the road. The impetus to move got me going as if some inner force was directing me.

A few minutes after heading out I encountered the intersection of Interstate 80 and 84 which deposited me into downtown Echo, Utah. The gas station and cafe were closed. A railway on my left stretched into the distant horizon as I rolled west along Old Highway 30. The rails led to Fire Canyon where the proprietor of a cafe suggested going little further west into Henefer where the gas was cheap.

Meanwhile a bearded guy in a baseball cap came over. He collects Camaros and was currently driving a LeMans Blue Camaro Z28. He buys and sells cars to finance his Camaro habit. He had just sold a 1970 Pontiac GTO and gave the Marauder a good lookover.

At Grump's Gas and Grocery on Main Street, Henefer they still used the old charge slips with the metal imprinter. The gas brand here was Amaco. One of the guys spotted a dark stain growing under the Marauder where the car was leaking a bit of gas. Craning my head under the tank led to the discovery that the filler neck was a little loose. When the tank is completely topped up into the filler neck a bit of gas will leak where the filler neck attaches to the tank. This led to a conversation about my plan to cross the country. A gruff old buzzard man in overalls stated,

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"You'll never make it in that car."

I shrugged but didn't bother to argue with him. The belts, hoses, ignition, fluids, brakes and tires were new and the engine and transmission were rock solid. This car could suck up another 100,000 miles without blinking.

I got on 1-84 and headed east doubling back the way I just came from to the merger with Interstate 80. The railway tracked me along 80. The vibrant red rock landscape gradually drained away to a pale colored stone. The wind pounded the sides of the car. Up high in the mountains there were raised yellow barriers that can be lowered in the event of snow emergencies. Signs explained that jail or fines awaited people who didn't turn back to the nearest town when the snow emergency was in effect. A sign informed me that I had just crossed the Continental Divide at an elevation of 6,930 feet.

I pulled into Rawlins, Wyoming around 1 PM. After idling up Cedar Street I filled up with gas at Hilltop Conoco then went looking for lunch. My waitress at The Blake House was named Faith and wore a Chinese necklace. The restaurant inhabited the original 1881 home of Frank Blake which was actually built on the site of the original Rawlins cemetery. It remained in Blake's family until 1983 then opened as a family restaurant in 1985.

The Strand Theater building at 216 Cedar was still standing but it had been renovated and renamed The Fox. The old painted sign is still visible on the side of the building. Beside it is the H. Larsen building constructed in 1923 by Hans Larsen. Further down there was The Rifleman Club Bar at 120 4th Street with cheap drinks, pool tables and real life cowboys. I got a flirtatious look of approval from a 'cowgirl' as I walked in. That prompted some angry hostile looking cowboy to jab me in the chest and challenge me regarding my black suede leather cowboy hat,

"Ya-all think you're a REAL cowboy cuz of that hat? We're supposed to think you're tough cuz you got yourself a black hat?"

I answered with disdain,

"I don't give a shit what you think."

I slowly finished my drink while the threatening tone of his voice droned like a mosquito providing an irritating backdrop. I observed the girl. She was actually friends with a gaggle of dufus idiots and this loser was their spokesperson. No point following up on the girl. Bright sunlight bathed me in warmth as I left the darkness of the bar. Booze spread through my body as I walked up the dusty street.

Hidden Treasures Antique Mall a little further down at 214 4th Street also housed The Department of Corrections and Parole upstairs. Small towns often have disparate things lumped into one building like this. I loaded up on Popular Mechanics magazines from the 1960s that were in mint shape and priced reasonably.

I didn't venture upstairs! I bet the guy that hassled me in the bar had to report to a parole officer in this building regularly. The huge brick historic Penitentiary up the street probably housed rowdy cowboys just like the guy from the Rifleman Bar. The names change and it was a different century but otherwise guys like that bar drunk are spewed out into the world and then housed in jails regularly and predictably.

The Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins began accepting prisoners from the old Territorial Prison in Laramie in 1901 until it closed in 1981. It is now a museum. Every rowdy cowboy from the old west was cycled through various jails and penitentiaries as a matter of course and some ended up here. Most of them were long forgotten but some really outrageous characters were highlighted in the prison displays.

A mug shot of a Rasputin-ish prisoner named Henry Edmonson #377 was accompanied by an excerpt from a prison diary "The Sweet Smell of Sagebrush". Edmonson was the only prisoner to have a full beard in this prison. Edmonson told the guards they would have to put him in the barber chair by force and promised that anyone who shaved him would have shaved his last man. This guy was one bad dude. When he was pardoned in 1915 it was on condition that he immediately leave the State of Wyoming and never return.

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Another intriguing prisoner file was that of John Jacob McDaniel who was described as "an escape artist with extraordinary intelligence, photographic memory, mythical misdirection, superhuman strength and also possibly double jointed." Paired to this was a crazy quilt character description: "A good old-fashioned country boy, risk taker, foolhardy, anti social, con man, cut up, humorless planner, eccentric genius, temperate burglar, grand larcenist, safe cracker..."

I later found more on McDaniel in a Daily Chronicle article from Centralia, Washington Oct 15, 1964. It stated that John Jacob McDaniel was age 38 and had escaped from state and federal prisons in at least seven states. He escaped from Washington, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, and Terminal Island near San Pedro, California.

"In September, 1963 McDaniel not only went through an area of the Wyoming Penitentiary with four locked doors and then scaled the gate, but he left behind a note mocking the prison's maximum security unit. Earlier he had escaped the Wyoming Penitentiary hospital but failed to get outside the walls, but it took authorities 36 hours to track him down within the prison compound. His last known escape was from Washington State prison at Walla Walla August 10."

McDaniel was arrested in a Winnemucca, Nevada restaurant Sep 14, 1964 for carrying a concealed .32 automatic. He was questioned regarding a number of burglaries then sent to McNeil Island Federal Prison in Washington state which is very difficult to escape from. McDaniel was first charged in federal court for stolen mail in Reno but the charge was dropped.

McDaniel later appeared in the town of Happy Camp, California driving a car with Colorado plates. He was arrested when he blew someone up. McDaniel appealed his conviction for attempted murder on Feb 11, 1976. He had insisted on representing himself at the trial. McDaniel saw Dale Attebury beating his live in girlfriend Priscilla Spence and offered to kill him. Despite her refusal he booby trapped the trailer with dynamite

. The story mentions McDaniel serving a 1961 Wyoming burglary conviction, but not his escape.

A genealogist fills in some more details from the family bible: John Jacob McDaniel was born August 20, 1926 to 'Josheph' Walter McDaniel and Frances Lucille Valcik McDaniel. Frances discovered a silver mine around the time of John's birth called Big Four near Kremmling, Colorado in Grand County. Family lore states that in the 1980s John's own

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nefarious doings infringed upon a mafia scam of painting lead bars with gold to induce people to buy into defunct mines. A hit was placed on John and his corpse was hidden inside a mineshaft that was detonated.

There is a record for a John Jacob McDaniel born Aug 20, 1926 to the same parents listed above in Wichita County, Texas. A death record also exists for the same name and birthdate stating John died Aug 14, 1981 and is buried at site # 692 in Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver, Colorado. He was a veteran of World War II as a private in the Air Forces. In the Rawlins, Wyoming Penitentiary museum it mentioned that he had been A.W.O.L. which matches this detail.

Leaving Rawlins I passed the Buckaroo Motel and a sign for The Golden West Motel. Further along Spruce Street there was a bar with drive up liquor named Hole In the Wall which references a pass that was used as a hide out by Butch Cassidy and his gang. I was tempted to look inside but wasn't in the mood for a repeat hassle along the lines of the The Rifleman Bar. I got back on the Interstate and put on some miles.

I pulled into Sinclair, Wyoming at Colwell's Tires on 101 N. 8th. This town is dominated by the huge Sinclair gasoline refinery. This town was renamed Sinclair when the original town Parco was bought by Sinclair. The oil company Producers and Refiners Corporation (Parco for short) established Parco as a company town. Some old signs and other memorabilia is on display in the old bank building in the Parco/ Sinclair Museum.

The Sinclair green dinosaur logo still appears on midwestern gas pumps and some stations have giant models of this mascot 'Dino' at the entrance to their stations.

I stayed off the highway seeking out remnants of the 'Sodom and Gomorrah of the west' ghost town named Benton. While the railroad was being built tent towns sprouted up with gamblers and whores siphoning off the money being made. The 'Hell on Wheels' gangs in wagons followed the towns created in sync with railway construction. Rowdiness and daily shootings were the norm. Benton was infamous for exceeding the norm.

I found no trace of Benton and carried on into Old Fort Steele. It was about 5 PM and the sun angled across the waves of water rippling peacefully in the background. The fort was e

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established

June 20, 1868 near

the railway crossing of the North Platte River. The fort is named for Civil War hero Major General Frederick Steele. Fort Fred Steele housed soldiers for a couple of decades to guard against Indian attacks while the transcontinental railroad was being built.

After 1886 the soldiers were gone but the sawmill continued to operate. Sheep farming kept the location alive after that. The old fort buildings were used from 1920 to 1939 to house gas stations, hotels etc to service traffic when the Lincoln Highway (#30) ran through town. Route 30 was relocated and timber industry waned. By WWII Fort Fred Steele was a ghost town.

Up near Interstate 80 some 1970s era attempt to run a gas station apparently ended in failure almost immediately as attested by the overgrowth of vegetation through the concrete. The old wooden railway bridge has been replaced with a concrete Union Pacific bridge.

In Cheyenne, Wyoming I gassed up at a Conoco station around 8:30 PM. Driving under the highway and over a bridge put me beside a Union Pacific train yard glowing from a huge lit sign to the left of me. I maneuvered right onto Lincoln (this is the old Lincoln Highway 30) and entered the parking lot of The Village Inn Restaurant on E 16th. The Village Inn served turkey with mashed potatoes and gravy.

My waitress was named Erica and she had her hair pulled up on top of her head in an elaborate hairstyle. After dinner I cruised the Marauder along the strip of bars and hotels. The Wyoming State Capitol building was about 1 mile north of the Village Inn. I found a service road leading to Interstate 80.

As I crossed the border of Nebraska the moon was rising. It appeared to race across the surface of the highway blazing red, then as it rose softening to orange then fading to yellow. An hour later the moon was higher in the sky, smaller looking and faded to its normal bright grey color.

I wasn't tired yet and passed by the first rest stop in Nebraska. The Marauder pressed on through the quiet night. I slept at a rest stop outside Sidney, Nebraska. A towel draped over the passenger window helped block the blazing light pouring into the interior of the car. It was hard to sleep bathed in light and my knee was sore from a few days of sleeping in the car without being able to stretch my leg out straight. The warmer temperatures were helping alleviate knee

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joint stiffness.

DAY 9- Sidney, Chappell, Hershey, North Platte, Lexington, Waverly, Omaha, NB

I woke at sunup and dumped some antifreeze/ water mix in the radiator and filled up my glass drinking water bottles before leaving the rest area. Back on the highway exit 55 took me through some farmland into Sidney, Nebraska via Highway 30 which is named the Lincoln Highway.

Traffic was quiet as I pulled into a Safeway parking lot around 8 AM. Inside the store I was checking a pineapple when Sandy, the produce manager cut open the fruit to determine how fresh it was. It was a little on the old side and he marked it down on the spot to 50 cents. You can't beat a deal and service like this.

Union Pacific trains shuttled back and forth behind the Safeway parking lot while I ate the pineapple. The sun began to bear down hard on me. A pristine sun faded 1961 Buick LeSabre 4 door sedan pulled in. It was still being used as a daily driver after all these years and had a trailer hitch out back.

The Lincoln Highway is known as Illinois Street when it passes through town. Illinois Street contains some hotels, one story buildings and the Fox Theater which had an old style sign out front. At a Napa store on Illinois Street I gambled 7 bucks on a new radiator cap to see if it might stem the constant stream of coolant pouring out of the car.

Milling around the shelves of the Napa a pack of guys in tank tops were killing time talking tough and buck knife equipped. They dispersed nervously when a 60 year old real cowboy stepped in. He was tall and straight with a square lean build. His cowboy hat and denim shirt were weathered. A long scar ran across his face leading down to a big jutting jaw. His eye above the scar was covered with a black patch. This guy was a real deal tough old western character right out of the 1880s.

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At the next rest stop in Chappell, Nebraska it was 85 degrees F and the new cap was still leaking out coolant. Oh, well. I dumped in some more coolant and water. An hour further east along the highway a sign announced a change to Central Standard Time.

Driving into the blazing heat the distant mirror water reflecting haze of mirage warbling at the end of the highway remained always just out of reach. Time floated away in the groove and it really didn't matter what time zone I was in.

The exit to the village of Hershey, Nebraska deposited me on the main drag Lincoln which cut north over the South Platte River and through town over the railway tracks. A building bore a stark sign that said just: 'Bar'. At an old bank building cars were parked on sideways angles. Among the modern cars an old 1960s Blue Pontiac had a for sale sign in the window. Lincoln Street intersected with the Lincoln Highway; Number 30.

Highway 30 is north of and parallel to I-80. 30 carried me east into North Platte, Nebraska above a massive railway yard. I found out later that Bailey Yard is the largest in the world.

It was about 1 PM. I decided to eat then look around the town. The town is famous for being the spot Buffalo Bill first assembled his 'circus' named Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

The Lincoln Museum cost 3 bucks. I decided to eat first, then get a ticket and look around. I had just started to eat a few bites of lunch sitting in the car when the irate officious shrew in charge of collecting tickets called the cops. The Marauder was in the (90 percent empty) authorized parking only area and bla bla bla. D espite my intention to buy a ticket after eating she worked herself into a self righteous frenzy. After being harassed this way I changed my mind about buying a ticket. I would never buy anything she was selling.

I nonchalantly packed up, seriously doubting cops would come for something trivial and petty like this.

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A cop car came racing into the parking lot crashing over the roadway dip without slowing and bottomed out with a THOOM of grating frame rail crunches. These guys were driving like this was an emergency call!

While they galloped over to the office I slowly rolled out the other end of the lot. I spotted a community center on South McDonald Road and parked at the very back of the lot shielded from view by a large truck. Moments later the cop car came barreling down the road in 'hot pursuit'. The road fed onto the Interstate. I had visions of them doing triple digit speeds down I-80 frantically trying to catch me. There probably isn't a lot of crime in this town if unauthorized parking can illicit such a fuss.

The community center was an ideal place to lay low. I could kill some time with a workout and shower which I would have done anyways. It was only \$4.50 for a drop in. Strong chlorine fumes and 100 degree humid air soon had me out of breath during a hard swim. A cute blonde workout girl chatting with me about my travels mentioned that it takes awhile for people to acclimatize to the high altitude here.

After my swim I ate at the Hong Kong Restaurant on South Dewey once more pulling the car all the way round back out of sight. While eating an enormous US style Chinese buffet I was amused to note a cop car trawling past. Was this the same guys from earlier? If so; were they still on the hunt for The One Man Crime Wave in his Marauder?

I was sucked into a tourist trap called Fort Cody Trading Post with a huge stockade and Buffalo Bill likeness that towered over the cars. Dummies of soldiers line the top of the wood stockade walls.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West

There were knives for sale, books and other items.

Inside a really elaborate glassed in diorama of
dominated the room.

Around 5 PM I was ready to move on. After prepaying for gas I noticed that the price at the pump was \$2.36 a gallon instead of the advertised price \$2.19 on the big price sign below the Conoco street sign. And this stuff was laced with 10 percent ethanol to add insult to injury. I went inside and demanded they cancel the transaction and refund my money. Two places managed to drive away my business in one afternoon. First it was the needlessly abrasive Parking Lot Enforcer and now the False Advertising gas station.

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At a Kwik Stop gas station on Platte Oasis Parkway I located 87 octane gas but it also had the dreaded ethanol in it. I only put in 10 bucks hoping to just stretch it long enough to find pure gasoline again. Ethanol is death to old cars. It ruins rubber and plastic components in old fuel systems. Ethanol also attracts water which messes up your fuel tank. Ethanol content in Midwest gas was also likely responsible for lowering my gas mileage since there is less energy in ethanol than in gasoline.

I got off the Interstate around 6:30 PM at an Ampride gas station on Plum Creek Parkway in Lexington, Nebraska. Plum Creek Parkway was named after Plum Creek Fort which later became Lexington. The Parkway is located along the North Platte River which provides some nice scenery.

Driving into the night traffic was sparse. Trying to avoid ethanol and only putting in small quantities of gas in the tank backfired on me. My gas level quickly dropped to empty.

In Lincoln, Nebraska I scanned for an exit with a cluster of gas stations signs close to the highway. This ensures the best price and quality of gas due to high turnover. I also wanted to avoid running around back country in the dark with the gas tank on empty.

The Lincoln exits flashed by without much in the way of business lights. Lincoln is the State Capitol and a big city but I somehow missed the central exit. The highway plunged into total darkness. The Marauder displayed E minus on the fuel gauge running on fumes when I pulled off the Interstate at the end of Lincoln city limits. The Marauder chugged through darkness for 3 miles on Highway 6. The sign promised this thin line into blackness would lead to gas. Would the Marauder run out of gas before the station appeared?

I made it to the Gas N Shop out in farm country of Waverly, Nebraska. It was Saturday night, still 90 degrees hot and everyone was whooping it up. A Ford Mustang pulled a huge burnout. Guys hung out in the beds of their pickup trucks swapping stories and brews. The gas here was also infested with infernal 10 percent ethanol. I filled up with the ethanol laced gas to avoid running my tank down low again.

No receipt came out of my pump after gassing up at pump number 1. The door said 'NO shirt NO service'. I put on my shirt instantly feeling 10 degrees hotter. My polite inquiry for a receipt was rebuffed with

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surliness and nasty exasperation.

I explained the obvious situation:

"If you refilled the paper in the pumps people wouldn't need to ask you for anything. You did this to yourself. The whole time I've been here there was no one in the store so you weren't too busy to do your job."

She mumbled something that made no sense. I bought a power bar to justify using my time to go inside and then headed out into the night again.

The secondary highway led into downtown Omaha, Nebraska running through a quaint section of town with old cobblestones. About 11:30 PM I stopped at a Phillips 66 station named Cubby's Old Market at 601 S 13th Street to get 'dinner'. A cast of dubious characters hanging round the tables were talking at people angling for a hook to lead into a handout. It was like the T/ A pests all over again. I ate a ham sandwich and blew off the barrage of stupid fake friendly quips with a stony stare.

The sharks moved away from me and settled around a nervous looking guy who made the mistake of trying to respond in friendly fashion to this scum. Soon they dropped the phony friendliness and he was mired in their illogical very hostile 'you owe us' loop.

Back in the night Dodge Street (which is also Highway 6) carried me all the way out to I-80. I backtracked into town on 24th down to Winston learning the grid. Spooky dark underground passages under train bridges lent a spectral air to the night. A waterfront glowed from a large dimmed complex. Black nearly still water shimmered under moonlight. Mounted police rode around S 20th Street and Farnham.

Driving on Howard Street I suddenly realized this was the bad area of town. The windows in the Marauder were rolled down because of the heat. Timing things to avoid stopping still for a red light worked at a few intersections until I got caught by a red light. I unbuckled to get my passenger window rolled up. Appearing from nowhere a strung out black crack head thrust her leering nightmare skull partly in the window as I was rolling it up. She was hyper aggressive,

"How much money you got!?"

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"Nothing for you."

Like a switch was flipped as soon as intimidation proved futile she dropped the hard edge and started running a new cloying fake friendly script calling me 'Daddy' with her head still jammed through the partly open window. The light finally changed and I glided away. Her skeletal hand was holding the windshield pillar until I slowly increased speed to shake off that scary apparition.

Thug types were lolling about with menacing stares. It was too hot to drive around with the windows up and nothing to see but gold tooth gangsta fools. This did not fit my preconceived notion of Omaha as some kind of open tractor laden farmland. Is there no escape from rap video baggy pant ghetto bullshit and vulture asshole T/A pests hovering everywhere? Time to blow this scene. At

2:20 AM on

Vinton and 13th I gassed up at the Becky's BP Express and shot up the ramp to the I-80.

At the first rest stop in Iowa it was still amazingly hot.

DAY 10- Omaha, NB/ Underwood, Neola, Sioux City, IA/ Vermillion, Junction City, Sioux Falls, Beaver Creek, SD/ Manley, MN

Next morning at the Underwood, Iowa rest stop I was pouring some coolant into the rad when a traveling diesel mechanic came over to dispense advice. Bob was semi retired at age 66. He used to work for Caterpillar and now did small jobs for truckers operating out of his mobile truck trailer. He and his dog had been traveling from Montana. He abhorred Quaker State oil and declared that it was like wax and would destroy the engine. He vehemently insisted only Castrol oil was any good.

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He correctly noted that my clutch fan was wobbling a bit. I knew about this already but the fan tips weren't moving more than 1/4 inch laterally as far as I could see. He was certain it was wobbling too much since it was noticeable at idle.

"That's going to kill your water pump bearings if you let it go on. Then it's going to gouge out your rad one day."

He had a new clutch fan still in the box. Why not? I paid him to install it. The new fan clutch didn't wobble.

From there he took out the thermostat, gutted it and reinstalled it. He stated that taking out the innards of the thermostat would allow the coolant to circulate more quickly and hence reduce the puking coolant situation. Whenever someone thinks they know more than the original engineers I am skeptical but I was losing so much coolant he couldn't worsen the situation. He also sold me a 16 pound rad cap.

Driving in the heat the needle stayed exactly at the same 1/3 to 1/2 spot on the temperature gauge that it always did. The net effect of the gutted thermostat was nil. Most likely gutting the thermostat allows the coolant to circulate TOO quickly and hence doesn't allow enough time for the radiator to throw off the heat before the coolant makes another circuit of the system.

At 1 PM I ate lunch in the parking lot of a Kum and Go gas station in Neola, Iowa which was completely devoid of shade. I was starting to get irritable from the heat and realized I had gone too far south after all. Heading north would alleviate the intensity of the sun and the radiator puking ritual.

Heading north on Highway 29 a viewpoint offered a panorama of greenery again instead of yellow scorched out sun baked territory. The wind whipped away. This may have been the rest stop near Onawa or maybe the one in Lakeport/ Sergeant Bluff, or Liberty, Iowa. Who knows? It was somewhere.

In Sioux City, Iowa I ate lunch in a Culver's. The Missouri River runs alongside the 29 at one

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point and wound its way through the city. South Sioux City was on the other side of the river and hence in Nebraska. East of the river you are in Iowa. After cruising around town I stopped on 'historic' 4th Street around 4:40 PM. It was just north of railway yards.

I'd been in the car since lunch and needed to take a piss. I spotted an antique store. The proprietor aggressively demanded to know if I was going to be a paying customer or not. I'd been buying *Mechanix Illustrated*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Hot Rod*, and *Car Life* magazines all the across the country so I probably WOULD have bought something in this place.

By withholding the bathroom as blackmail ransom he inspired me to immediately walk out without a piss and blast out of town. It occurred to me that the Marauding theme of this trip featured some plunder in the form of some beautiful girls but also almost daily personality clashes. It all centered around gas, food, bathrooms and sleep. In short; unavoidable situations.

The Vermillion, South Dakota Information Center gave me a free map. This would be a safe rest stop to sleep in. It was well fortified with a fleet of cop cars parked out front. The City of Vermillion was actually a few miles west along Highway 50. The rest area was technically in Junction City, South Dakota.

Interstate 29 headed north into Sioux Falls, South Dakota. At a Pilot gas station on North Cliff Avenue I was filling up when a cowboy in battered old hat and fairly new pickup regarded the Marauder with skepticism and said,

"Good luck."

His tone implied he didn't believe I was going to make it.

While eating a steak in Bosselman's truck stop in a restaurant called Grandma Max's I enjoyed a continuous flirtation with a pair of blonde girls at an adjoining table. The girls had eyebrows so faint they were nearly invisible. They reminded me vaguely of Sandi from Salt Lake City who also had very faint eyebrows.

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After dinner I cruised through Sioux Falls downtown core. The whole place seemed to be 'under construction' right now. The girls with no eyebrows told me that the city was booming and people were streaming into town for jobs. In fact at first they had assumed that was why I was in town.

As I crossed a big bridge to the main strip lightning cracked open the sky. It was 10:30 PM when I stopped to eat a powerbar in the parking lot of a Denny's. Buffeting cold damp wind sucked the energy out of me. Black clouds suddenly transformed as the entire sky became bright white every few seconds. The boom of thunder was coming hard on the heels of the lightning flashes.

A torrential downpour hammered down. The roads instantly flooded forcing me to pull into a Kum and Go station at 4700 12th. I waited it out beneath the cover of the gas pump awnings. A few hours earlier I'd been feeling greasy and hot and sweat soaked with matted hair. Standing under the cold downpour cleared me out. I toweled off and watched the black storm waters race upwards over curbs and then spread out in giant oozing pools covering sidewalks. Soon I was feeling chilled to the bone. One extreme to the next! I should have just stayed south in the hot sun. This rainstorm was vicious.

When the storm abated to 'just' heavy rain I took Interstate 90 out of town heading east. I thought I had crossed the border into Minnesota, but the first rest area at the border is called Beaver Creek Travel Information Center and it is in South Dakota. It was pitch black and damp cold. The relentless rain drummed me to sleep echoing off the giant metal roof of the Marauder.

DAY 11- Beaver Creek, Valley Springs, SD/ Manley, Luverne, Blue Earth, Hayward, Austin,
Stewartville, MN/
Lyndon,
Poynette
, WI

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The rain was letting up a bit by morning. The first town I came upon after the rest area was supposedly Valley Springs, South Dakota. That was what the exit ramp said. Guys in the confusingly named Manley Tire & Oil Service directed me to a grocery store. Their sign states they are from Manley, Minnesota but their business card lists them as being in Valley Springs, South Dakota. Manley is a mile east of Valley Springs and in another state. The intersection of Country Road 4 and 20th sits within Manley according to maps. I was straddling the border of South Dakota and Minnesota.

The grocery store they sent me to in Manley only sold milk in gallon jugs. I needed a pint of milk for my morning cereal. Following through the lush greenery of the countryside I cruised east to Luverne, Minnesota. A Philips 66 lacked small jugs of milk. They sent me to the Shell a short distance north on South Kniss Ave.

After breakfast at Shell I drove into town where an abundance of antique stores awaited me on Mall Street. I had a look at The Palace movie theater on Main Street. It was built in 1915 and still shows movies.

At the Rock County Pool & Fitness Center on N Blue Mound Ave a cute brunette girl took my 6 bucks and signed me up at the front desk then went inside with me. She was also the lifeguard. I put in a good workout with weights and had a leisurely swim. After my usual ritual of washing my clothes in the shower I laid them out in the back window but the sun had vanished while I was working out. Black clouds came racing across the sky and quickly darkened the street in a downpour.

In a Country Kitchen restaurant back on S Kniss a good looking friendly girl named Amber seated me in a booth behind a huge farmer who dwarfed the large booth he was sitting in. Similarly big farmers were sprinkled throughout the place settling in for lunch. I bet to myself that they served big portions here. I was right.

A friendly guy who noticed my Marauder started talking across the way about cars. He owned a 50th Anniversary 2003 Corvette serial number 33 which would seem to make it a pilot vehicle and not a production vehicle.

Back on the road the workout and giant meal at Country Kitchen conspired with minimal sleep

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last night. I was bleary and pulled over in a corn field in Blue Earth, Minnesota about 120 miles east of Luverne to take a short nap. Machine gun staccato rain pelting the car roof woke me. The storm had caught up with me again. I gassed up at a co-op gas station in Hayward, Minnesota just off I-90 on Highway 26. I tried to drive ahead of the rain but it got even worse.

In Austin, Minnesota the storm battered the world while I ate a massive meal in the King Buffet on 1801 14th Street. I flirted with the slim Chinese hostess and forgot about the storm for awhile until locals at nearby tables talking about the storm mentioned that the Cedar River flooded last year. Cedar River runs through the town. They told me it had flooded several times in the past. This storm was more of a flash in the pan destined to end quickly but the possibility was still there.

Rolling slowly east on the Interstate the storm became so heavy it was impossible to see anything. Using the tail lights of a truck as a guide only worked until the intensity of the rain increased the depth of water on the road. The truck threw off so much water from it's tires it was like being inside an industrial style car wash being blasted with water.

In Stewartville I joined a group of cars parked under the pump canopy of a Cit Go gas station on Main Street around 6:30 PM. People discussing the storm confirmed my suspicion that the storm was racing east along the Interstate 90 corridor. It was supposedly shifting north east which would eventually lift it up off the I-90 but for now it was tracking us. Everyone chatted and shivered under the shelter or sat in their cars with heaters blasting.

A couple of giggly gregarious girls working up their nerve to check out some adult shop a bit north on Highway 63 recruited several other rain refugees to follow them. They justified the expedition to themselves saying, "It beats standing out in the rain."

A few of us drove north along the industrial road past a Dairy Queen and some other generic buildings. We parked at what seemed to be a trucker oriented kind of industrial style building named Pure Pleasure. It was about 7:30 PM but it was packed. Inside there were as many women as men and no furtive guys in raincoats. In fact it was mainly couples shopping together. There were plenty of costumes hanging up on display for the girls from the gas station to giggle about. From the expression on the clerk's face you could tell he had dealt with his share of novelty seekers in here and found the whole routine tedious.

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I passed the peak zone of the storm where visibility was zero and made it through to the other side of the storm. I needed gas but didn't want to lose my lead on the rain. I quickly pulled off in Lyndon Station, Wisconsin to get gas from their local BP station on 470 N County Road HH. I immediately got back on the road before the storm could catch up with me. It was still raining but not bad. The Marauder shot along at an indicated 85 MPH which would hopefully keep me ahead of the storm.

Racing the rain ended when the entire highway shut down for a flipped semi truck. Cops with lights flashing and a huge backup of cars closed everything down. We inched along while the storm came up from behind overtaking us.

In the Rest Area 11 in Poynette, Wisconsin the power was out due to the storm. It would have been a quiet and dark spot to sleep except some inconsiderate moron had his pickup angled so that he was beaming his headlights directly into everyone's cars and sending his exhaust fumes downwind into our faces
. People erected barriers of clothes, put suitcases in their windows and so on trying to block the blazing high beams.

After 15 minutes of this asinine situation people got out of their cars in the parking lot to confer. A tall no nonsense guy from one of the cars walked over with me and attempted to reason in a friendly, direct manner with the belligerent asshole in the pickup truck. This idiot was intent on sitting there for hours while he drank endless beers and played his radio at full volume.

The tall guy's voice became strained as the thick beefy tattooed jerk in his tank top continuously squirted tobacco juice out the window of his truck nearly hitting us. No amount of reasoning could alter this nasty vicious jerk's stubborn determination to inconvenience 8 carloads of people. The Jerk sneered,

"You piss ant faggots can't do nothing about me. Fuck you!"

He sloshed beer at us. The tall guy got soaked. I'm very fast. I dodged the jet of foam, clamping the jerk's wrist wrenching his arm back and forcing it down pinning his armpit into the door frame. He struggled futilely until it became obvious to him I was far stronger than he was. Then

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he started whining.

I

reached across the steering column with my left hand and turned off his truck. I threw The Jerk's keys high and far through the air where they landed in the distant trees.

First problem solved. I hit his headlight switch. All problems solved: no more headlights; no more exhaust fumes. The radio kept playing while the Jerk sat silently staring at a point somewhere below the dashboard while I raged at him insulting him in Marauder Mode. He turned off the radio.

The tall guy's wife dashed up with her cell phone ready to call 911. But the jerk was scared and completely subdued now.

After we returned to our cars The Jerk made the obviously hopeless trek out to the trees to see if through some miracle he could locate his keys. The dark rest stop was quiet for a few hours. Then came the sound of a tow truck slowly loading The Jerk's pick up truck onto a flat bed. The whine of the motor winching it in place hummed through the air signalling the departure of The Jerk.

DAY 12- Poynette, Lodi, Door Creek, Cottage Grove, Cambridge, Oakland, Fort Atkinsons, Whi
tewater,
La Grange,
Abbells Corners
, Elkhorn,
Como, Lake Geneva,
Pell Lake, Genoa City,
WI/ Richmond,
Solon Mills,
Spring Grove,
Pistakee Highlands,
Fox Lake,
Volo,
Wauconda,
Lake Zurich,

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Kildeer,
Palatine, Arlington Heights,
Mt. Prospect, Des Plaines,
Chicago, IL/
Hammond, IN

At sun up I discovered that the rest area bathrooms were closed due to the power outage caused by last night's storm. The tall guy from the night before had his beer soaked shirt and pants washed out with water and strung out to dry but it seemed to have rained again during the night and they looked pretty sodden wet.

The Interstate 90 headed south to Lodi, Wisconsin. I bought some milk from All Stop Plaza off exit 119 on Sunset Drive while the sun was still rising. It was 6:52 AM. I drove south through Madison, Wisconsin and got off the Interstate.

I followed Highway 12 and passed through a small community named Door Creek which is part of Cottage Grove. The next town quickly popped up. The digital town clock said it was 8:06 AM and 72 degrees F as the Marauder entered Cambridge slowly cruising Main Street. I rolled down into Oakland and Fort Atkinson which had an antique mall. I visited White Elephant Antiques in Whitewater, Wisconsin.

Driving south east through green countryside I stopped in the smallish towns of La Grange, Abells Corners, and Elkhorn, Wisconsin. Elkhorn Antique Flea Market Everything was wet and the towns were quiet. 12 passed through Como which was located on Lake Como. Just below it another large city Lake Geneva was also located on a lake. Another lake city Pell Lake passed by on my right. Genoa City was the last Wisconsin town I passed through right on the border of Illinois.

The highway crossed the state line over into Illinois leading into Richmond, Illinois which was right on the border. It had a strip of well preserved brick buildings with old style town clocks on corners of the sidewalk. After browsing an antique shop in town I continued south on Highway 12 to Solon Mills.

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In Spring Grove the Auto Gallery Museum is run by Louie Savaglio. He grew up racing cars and working in bodyshops.

for Mercedes.

He has a soft spot

r to Volo this

Simila

museum sells cars and also displays the merchandise up for sale along with painted tin signs, gas pumps

and collectibles. Cars ranged from foreign cars like a

1962 Mercedes 190SL Roadster, 1955 Porsche 550 Spyder with Beck Body #62 (a James Dean clone from the Movie "Crash"), and a 1967 Sunbeam Tiger. Domestic stuff also ranged across the years with a 1962 Chevrolet Impala SS, 1950 Pontiac sedan delivery, two 1987 Buick Grand Nationals, and some Corvettes etc.

I continued southeast through Pistakee Highlands which straddled Pistakee Lake. A bridge carried me into Fox Lake. I soon arrived in Volo, Illinois. The Volo Auto Museum was established in 1964 and is filled with classic cars including a giant muscle car collection. Everything is for sale. They have historic gas pumps, signs as well as very old vehicles and military vehicles. Volo even offers financing. Car prices quoted a monthly payment. Lesser cars were outside while the top cars were indoors.

Some of the nicer cars had mirrors placed beneath them so you could view the frame off restored undercarriages. Volo had a black Yenko Camaro 427, red Hemi Cuda, Z- 28s, Shelbys, convertible 442 pace car and other pinnacle musclecars. A really nice 1970 Starlight Black GTO convertible frame off resto was listed for \$62,998.00 or \$990.00 per month.

A rust free repaint (original paint in jambs and trunk) 1970 Ford Torino GT 429 originally from Georgia was listed for \$32,998.00. It was Calypso Coral with blackout hood and black interior. It was 1 of only 255 429-370 HP C-6 auto cars built.

Some of the 'second tier' musclecars were represented here, too. Guys who can't afford a 1960s heavy hitter can get a similar bodystyle and plenty of graphics from a 1970s muscle machine. A 1980 Trans Am Pace car with the turbo 4.9 L (301 cubic inch) 210 HP engine was listed for \$18,998.00. For an extra thousand bucks you could get a Heritage Brown 1979 Trans Am with the L-78 400 220 HP and 4 speed. Pontiac installed 'leftover' 1978 400s into T/As for the 1979 model year. Most 1979 T/As had the Olds 403 and automatic so this is a somewhat 'rare' T/A. A mint 27,000 mile Sky Blue 1977 Pontiac Grand Prix SJ with 400 was available for \$11,998.00.

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There were also famous TV and movie cars on display. A 'General Lee' Dodge Charger from Dukes of Hazzard, The Batmobile, and The Munstermobile. Gangster Frank 'The Enforcer' Nitti's 1938 Cadillac was on display in a period Texaco station.

In the adjoining antique malls I bought some POPULAR MECHANICS magazines from a purple haired girl and a couple of old Route 66 episodes on VHS from an old man with suspenders. At the gift shop I picked up a disposable camera with a built in flash. My high end flash had suddenly failed. Any picture is better than none.

Highway 12 passed south through the city of Wauconda and deposited me at Culver's in Lake Zurich, Illinois where rain relentlessly crashed down outside. The waitress explained that Culver's signature combination is a 'ButterBurger' (the hamburger bun is buttered) combined with a fresh frozen custard. She also told me that there is indeed a Lake Zurich here which is what the village was named for. It seems every town along Highway 12 has it's own lake to go with it.

Back on the road after passing through Kildeer and Palatine the 12 and 14 drew closer together towards a merger. After stopping in at Arlington Heights around 9:30 PM I continued south to Chicago paying an 80 cent toll fee. I passed through Mt. Prospect and Des Plaines dipping south east to Chicago.

The Jackson bridge took me right down to the lakefront of Chicago. Colored lights shot through strands of water shooting out of Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park. Lake Shore Drive runs right along the shores of Lake Michigan.

After cruising Chicago's downtown grid I slowly expanded my explorations further afield. I gassed up at a Mobil station in a fairly seedy area adjoining projects. Cop cars shuttled about with purpose. This was an area hopping with crime. Further out of the bad area I checked out some bars and clubs on Hubbard; then Division and State but it was all pretty grim going.

Even late at night driving out of Chicago the traffic was relentless. Around 1 AM I stopped at a Citgo on W Wells and added some more gas. The roads funneled through miles of white concrete and lane changes and surprisingly heavy late night traffic.

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At the Indiana Welcome Center in Hammond, Indiana I was ready to pass out but the rest area besieged me with giant signs, "Absolutely No Overnight Parking". An adjacent Wendy's lot had the same message. I drove the car out towards the river on the grass where there was no signage.

DAY 13- Hammond, Lafayette, Monitor, Petit, Edna Mills, Sedalia, Geetingsville, Middle Fork. Rossville, Russiaville, Oakford, Central, Hemlock, Phlox, Point Isabel, Hackleman, Fairmount, Gas City, Marion, Fort Wayne, IN/ Coldwater, Marshall Rest Area, MI

At sunrise I bought milk from the nearby Kennedy Mobil station. The Indiana Welcome Center featured a Dillinger Museum with a wax figure of the bank robber John Dillinger, Jr inside. There was also a car from his era, a jail cell and the fake gun he used to break out of jail.

Heading south on Interstate 65 I stopped at Lafayette, Indiana for lunch in a Denny's. The weather was dry and warm now. I should have just stayed on my southern path all along and avoided that storm.

After lunch I followed County road 26 to Fairmount, Indiana. Signs for 'towns' appeared in what seemed to be just farmland with no visible city center. The names whipped past: Monitor, Petit, Edna Mills, Sedalia, Geetingsville, and Middle Fork. Rossville was a sizable town. After Russiaville, Oakford, Central, Hemlock, Phlox, Point Isabel and Hackleman I came into Fairmount which is a city of about 3,000 people. The Fairmont State Bank digital sign indicated 73 degrees F. The city is famous as the place that James Dean attended school while living on a farm outside of town.

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I bought a book at the James Dean memorabilia shop Rebel Rebel which is located in a well preserved Victorian house. Down the street I bought some old car magazines from the Fairmount Antique Mall. A water tower stood high in the air as I cruised past Dean's old school and the 'James Dean Theater'. A picture of James Dean was painted on one side of the tower and the cartoon cat Garfield on the other. Fairmount is also hometown to Garfield creator Jim Davis. On the outskirts of town I stopped by James Dean's grave in Park Cemetery.

Driving north on the country road bright yellow high corn created a tunnel effect. Lush grass taller than the roof of the car waved in the wind on either side of the hills and curves as I opened up the gas and flew along just like James Dean would have all those decades past.

Gas City is just north of Fairmount and was named for industry built up around natural gas. The town switched over to a glassworks when the gas ran out.

It cost \$5.00 to enter the James Dean Museum in Gas City, Indiana. The museum had some rare items such as James Dean's schoolbooks, a remembrance of working with him from Ronald Reagan back when they acted together, the original Lee jeans Dean wore in the film GIANT and on and on. I looked at original scrips and books and magazines that were printed from obscure locations all around the world. The road sign from Cholame, California was in here. Anything you could imagine related to Dean was here.

I arrived at Dean's birthplace, Marion which was substantially larger than Fairmount with a population around 30,000. After dinner in a Mexican place at 406 E 4th called Mi Pueblo I headed north east on Interstate 69 (yes, that route number is for real). After gassing up around 7:30 PM at a BP gas station in Fort Wayne, Indiana I hit a Kroeger's to stock up on some fruit and veggies.

Interstate 69 followed the night north into Michigan. I took a short break in a Coldwater, Michigan rest area then continued north. It was still dry. The storm seemed to have been shut off by the massive bulk of Lake Michigan.

A truck parking lot in Marshall Rest Area just off Interstate 94 was full. The Marauder was able to squeeze into the dirt shoulder alongside the ramp in line with a truck who was also cramped in on this corner.

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DAY 14- Marshall Rest Area, Marshall, Battle Creek, Pennfield Charter Township, Bedford Charter Township, Hickory Corners, Delton, Cloverdale, Hastings, Woodland, Mulliken, Sunfield Village, Grand Ledge, Lansing, East Lansing, Swartz Creek, MI

I awoke in cold aftermath of all night rain storms feeling stiff from the dampness. Condensed water droplets all over the windows of the car were slowly dispersing as the magic of sunrise began. Steam poured off a lake near the truck parking area. Around the same latitude as Exit 38 a narrow road named F Drive North traveled up and down hills through farm country. Once it ended, Old Highway 27 led to Rose Mary's Shell station in Marshall, Michigan. I bought some milk then ate breakfast at a rustic log building with a porch.

In Battle Creek, Michigan I gassed up at a Marathon station and got directions to the Gilmore Car Museum in Hickory Corners. Country road M-37 (M stands for 'Michigan') took me through small towns named Pennfield Charter Township and Bedford Charter Township. After missing a turn I got on Highway 43 taking the long way round a lake.

Gilmore Car Museum has 90 acres of well maintained grounds and pristine displays stretched through several large barns packed with amazing cars. Donald S. Gilmore and his wife Genevieve opened the collection to the public July 31, 1966. The museum has grown since then with the addition of official chapters of various car clubs establishing permanent displays to augment the original collection.

Donald Sherwood Gilmore was born in 1895 into a family that ran the successful Gilmore Brothers department store. Donald Gilmore became connected to the Upjohn family through marriage to Genevieve Y Upjohn who was 1 year older than he according to the 1930 census, placing her birth approximately 1894. Eventually Donald became CEO of Upjohn drug company.

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When he retired Genevieve gave him a project car to occupy his time. That quickly snowballed into the current museum. Donald died Dec 21, 1979 in Kalamazoo and Genevieve died March 12, 1990 in Kalamazoo but their legacy lives on.

Gilmore only cost 7 bucks with the AAA discount which has to be the best value for dollars spent on this trip. A recreation of a 1930s era Shell station included a period correct truck in the car wash. There was also George & Sally's Blue Moon Diner which is a restored 1941 Art Deco diner transported to this spot from Meridian, Connecticut.

A pristine blue Tucker was on display as well as an interesting Hudson with a slide out rear 'drawer' that was built into the rear trunk area. My main focus zeroed in on a stupendous collection of musclecars.

After hours in the magical displays at Gilmore Country road M-43 carried me north east through the towns Delton, Cloverdale and Hastings. At high noon I entered the township Woodland and Mulliken, Sunfield Village. I ate lunch in the standard spot. The Denny's Grand Slam was getting me across the country. I left the Denny's in Grand Ledge. I was on the border of Lansing. Around 1:30 PM I entered Lansing, Michigan where the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum gives great value for only \$5.00 admission. The museum opened to the public May 18, 1981.

A really nice green 1964 Olds Vista Cruiser with 330 engine was donated to the museum by John Prodan of Rapid City, SD. John was an Air Force employee loaned to NASA from 1962-1970 as Chief of Flight Crew Operations. He joked to his Apollo astronauts that it was no big deal to go to the moon. His Vista Cruiser could do it, "just a lot slower". He celebrated the odometer turning 480,000 miles at the original dealership.

John was born November 17, 1924 in East Orange, New Jersey. His marriage to Ruth Jennie Larson lasted 62 1/2 years. After his retirement from the Air Force he continued as a test pilot and taught classes. John wasn't just an Oldsmobile man. He was a member of Dakotas Chapter of the Studebaker Drivers Club. John died Saturday, May 10, 2008 in Rochester, Minnesota age 83 from complications after surgery.

Just behind John's Vista Cruiser sat a light blue 1964 Olds Dynamic 88 Holiday Coupe with white top. It looked pristine having logged a mere 37,000 original miles. It was loaded with

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factory A/C, ps, pb, Hyrda-Matic trans, radio, whitewalls and deluxe wheelcovers. The 88 used to be the 'hot rod' of the lineup but now the 442 was poised to fill this role through the 1960s. With a 394 engine, the 88 was no slouch.

Beside the 64 Dynamic 88 sat an earlier 1961 Dynamic 88 in white also packing 394 cubes and also a low miles car. This one only had 39,537 miles.

The Olds Museum had the 1966 Hurst Hairy Olds 4-4-Too Much on display. This funny car has 4 wheel drive powered by two hopped up 425 Toronado engines. Just behind it was #77, a NASCAR 1953 Olds 88. A vintage picture with the car shows Dick Passwater with the car at the Detroit Fairgrounds, 1952 which seems hard to accomplish in a 1953 unless the photo was taken late in the year when the 53s were already out.

A very strange car in the collection was a 1968 Olds 'MiniToro' which is a chopped down Toronado. During winter 1967-1968, GM employees at Lansing, MI were getting stuck in the snow of the employee parking lot. The new front wheel drive Toronados were great in snow. Two employees who owned Toros were frequently pushing fellow workers out of snow. The engineers took it one step further. They altered a new 1968 Toro by chopping it's wheelbase down to 101.5" so it was easier to get in and out of tight spots and installed heavy solid rubber bumpers front and rear. This car became the parking lot official 'Pusher' with a 375 HP 455 engine.

A 1969 Hurst Olds with 455 looked mean just sitting there. This was the 2nd year for the Hurst Olds which was a clever way to circumvent the General Motors 400 cubic inch engine size limit for intermediate cars. This particular H/O was lent to the museum by Doug and Judy Gadgley of Lansing, MI.

Chevrolet let some monster 427 cars out of the gate through the COPO loophole, but Olds made more of the 455s. Total 1968 COPO Camaro and Chevelle runs were less than Hurst Olds which built more than 500 in 1968. There were more than 900 Hurst Olds in 1969 and only 323 COPO Chevilles built in 1969. Everything changed in 1970 when GM lifted the 400 cubic inch limit for musclecars and the factory could openly install 454 and 455 engines in the intermediates.

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The last Oldsmobile ever built was on hand: a 2004 Alero built April 29, 2004 on the Lansing, Michigan final assembly line. 79,796 Aleros were built that year. Olds total production for 2004 was 92,671. Oldsmobile had lasted 107 years and built 35,229,218 cars over that time period.

After a quick workout at Gold's Gym on S Hagadorn road in East Lansing I ate some wrap type thing at Menna's Joint next door. The Marauder sucked up some miles heading a bit further north that night to the '129 Mile I-69 E' rest stop which is technically within the city limits of Swartz Creek, Michigan.

DAY 15- Swartz Creek, Flint, Burton, Grand Blanc, Pontiac, Berkley, Royal Oak, Huntington Woods, Fernd
ale, H
azel Park,
Detroit,
Dearborn, Troy, Auburn Hills, Utica, Sterling Heights,
New Baltimore,
Chesterfield,
Marysville,
Kimball,
Blue Water,
MI/ Point Edward, Sarnia, Strathroy, London,
Mississauga,
ON

All night long mosquitoes relentlessly droned and bit. At dawn I drove into Swartz Creek, Michigan. At a quarter to 7 the morning was still quiet when I bought milk for breakfast from a Kroeger's.

First on the list today was the Sloane Museum in Flint, Michigan. The Sloane Museum is dedicated to Buick history and has many original documents on hand. The lack of signage created a frustrating ride up and down and around side streets until I finally closed in on the museum. It wasn't open till 10 AM. My note about this place opening at 9 AM was incorrect as proved by the locked doors.

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With time to kill I headed south to visit the Pontiac Motor Division historical collection in Pontiac, Michigan. This collection is administered through Pontiac Motor Division and ran on business hours. Passing through the city limits of Burton, then Grand Blanc things slowed down a bit by 8:30 AM as the Interstate traffic became heavy going; but it was still moving at 50 MPH. Plenty of time to get over to Pontiac, then back to Flint, right?

Not so.

The directions ended in a weedy lot. It was only a little after 9 AM so there was still time to do some searching. Endless driving up and down and around finally unearthed an employee parking lot for GM Powertrain. The guard at the gatehouse didn't know where 1 Pontiac Plaza was located. At a Marathon gas station on 547 N Perry no one knew where 1 Pontiac Plaza was located. I gassed up and decided to go back to the Sloane Museum.

The onramp heading back up to Flint was deadlocked with cars backed down the ramp and blocking the right hand lane of the road stretching for blocks without movement. No way am I putting myself through that scene. I was already irritated by a night of sleepless mosquito harassment and foiled directions and misinformation. I followed Woodward Ave south to Detroit to find the Henry Ford Museum instead.

Woodward Avenue used to be a hot strip of late night street racing back in the 1960s. Now it is a heavily traveled road. Woodward Avenue carries the designation M-1 because it was the first paved road anywhere in USA.

Just before 11 AM I crossed into the city limits of Birmingham. Around the intersection of 12 Mile Road a sign informed me I had entered the city limits of Berkley which was followed by Royal Oak where the famed Ace Wilson's Royal Oak Pontiac dealership used to be located.

Royal Pontiac was selected by ad man Jim Wangers as a specialist location dedicated to honing razor sharp performance. The Royal Bobcat packages installed at the dealership onto customer cars created a mighty reputation for this dealer. Magazine test cars were tweaked

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here, too. The dealership is gone now. See a history of Royal Oak in the DEALERSHIPS section of this website filed under MICHIGAN/ Detroit Area.

A digital readout on a store sign informed me that it was 85 degrees F. The clock in front of an Art Deco diner named Athens Coney Island said it was 'Time to eat'. I took the hint and ate lunch at Athens.

After lunch Huntington Woods and Ferndale passed by quickly. I headed east and entered Hazel Park then hit the I-75 to get south to Detroit quickly but massive congestion, construction and blockaded exits trapped me in gridlock. The car and my temper were at the boiling point. Finally I escaped the freeway. In defense of Detroit drivers it seemed no one was texting or doing stupid stuff. The roads were annoying but the drivers were alert.

As long as I stuck with Woodward things were simple. Interstate gridlock flashbacks trounced my mind when I tried to get off the main drag. Impenetrable construction and a myriad barrage of detours forced me far away from the route I was trying to plot on the map.

I spotted an information center in downtown Detroit but the client parking lot was completely full. Blocks away I found parking on Fort Street near Cass. I walked past boarded up buildings and a gauntlet of gangsta mofos. No one at the info place knew of a Pontiac Historical museum. It was strange but no one in Motor City seemed to have any knowledge of any General Motors exhibits which supposedly existed. They warned that the highway going up to Pontiac and Flint was so impossibly backed up by afternoon that I would end up spending my whole day in gridlock. They helped me plot out a route to some different museums on my list.

Back at the Marauder I fired up and headed west to Dearborn. I arrived a little after 2 PM eager to see the Henry Ford Museum. The ramp I was supposed to exit from was blocked by orange construction signs. RAMP CLOSED. Driving around and getting off the highway in a mall somewhere and consulting maps devoured patience and time.

The usual wasted time these situations cause was priming me to blow up like a volcano. The visual image of my temper was provided by gigantic quantities of coolant spewing out of the

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radiator in a parking lot when I opened the hood to cool things down. After hours trapped in traffic the rad was like a geyser. It seemed symbolic of my overflowing rage.

Directions provided from a mall employee involved getting on the highway backtracking and then taking a roundabout way to come back onto the Ford Museum from another tack. I somehow ended up northbound on the I-75 by accident.

My Detroit information people earlier had also given directions to the Chrysler Museum which involved I-75 North. I was inadvertently

on the road to the Chrysler Museum. Rather than hassle anymore trying to backtrack once more and then wrangle with the side street detour directions for Ford I continued north through Troy and got off the highway in Auburn Hills.

I left the rest stop this morning at 6 AM and had been driving in constant gridlock. Now finally in late afternoon I was in front of a car museum and it was open. A miracle.

The Walter P. Chrysler Museum cost \$4 bucks admission. This very modern building opened October 5, 1999. The Chrysler Museum gift shop stocked disposable cameras. Once more it was preferable to take a few low quality photos of cars inside the building than have nothing at all.

A glass skylight shone light down the middle of the building where a spiral display held various cars including the Turbine car which was at the top of my list of cars to see. This central tower actually slowly rotates allowing you to get a different view of certain cars from various perspectives if you returned to the display every 15 minutes or so.

The Chrysler turbine car program produced a good looking car powered by a gas turbine engine instead of the conventional piston engines still used to this day in most automobiles. Chrysler built 5 prototypes and 50 cars for public evaluation between 1963 and 1964.

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Chrysler had development experience with turbine engines for planes and saw potential for turbine automobiles. Turbine engines use far fewer parts than piston engines and require minimal tuning. The engines don't stall or need warm up in cold weather and don't require anti freeze or oil changes. An turbine engine of comparable power to a piston engine is lighter and can run on almost any kind of fuel.

During the 1950s engineers worked to improve gas mileage, control high exhaust temperatures and find inexpensive high temperature materials needed to manufacture the turbine engines on a production basis. Chrysler actually built a few generations of running Turbine cars and created public excitement for this futuristic car. The 1963 Chrysler Turbine was the fourth generation car and was designed from the ground up as a turbine car.

The Chrysler Turbine bodies were made by Ghia in Turin, Italy. The turbine theme was picked up in the surrounding area of the headlights and tail lights and a 'turbine' console ran the length of the interior between the individual bucket seats.

The 2 door Turbine cars with four individual bucket seats inside are reminiscent of the Ford Thunderbird from the early 1960s. In the case of the Turbine cars the 'jet themes' in styling are warranted since they really did use a 'jet engine' to power the car. The Turbine cars were all painted a reddish brown 'Frostfire Metallic' paint (which was later renamed 'Turbine Bronze') and had black vinyl roofs .

The completed Turbine bodies were shipped back from Italy to USA and finished in Detroit, Michigan. Length was 201.6 inches, width 72.9 inches, height 53.5 inches and weight was officially 3900 pounds. Chrysler engineers observed that Ghia hand built the bodies using plenty of lead filler which inflated weight to about 4,000 pounds per car.

The Turbines came with Torqueflite automatic transmissions, power steering, power brakes, power windows and an AM radio. The seats were bronze-colored real leather with matching bronze carpet. Instead of a water temperature gauge reading to 200 degrees the Chrysler Turbine has a temp gauge reading to 2,000 degrees! The Turbine Inlet gauge is numbered 500, 1,000, 1,500, and 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

Turbine gauges didn't use bulbs. High voltage was run through special plastic layers, causing

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the gauges to glow with a blue-green light. used this lighting

individual bucket seats with full length console which mimicked original features of the Turbine design. The 1966 Charger body was originally intended to house 500 production turbines but emission requirements proved tricky to meet.

Coronets, Imperials, and 300's also had electroluminescent dash lighting at various times.

The 1966- 1967 Dodge Charger also electroluminescent dash and also had 4

Chrysler made the Turbine cars available to randomly selected members of the public for use in place of their usual cars. The first Turbine test vehicle given to the public was handed to Mr. and Mrs. Richard E. Vlaha on Sep 29, 1963 in Chicago, Illinois. They lived in the Chicago suburb of Broadview. Before it was put to the test a gawker fascinated with the Turbine car rear ended it. The car needed a new rear deck lid.

The turbine engine in the Chrysler Turbine cars sounded like a vacuum cleaner according to some of the test reports. The vibration free engine can turn up to 44,500 RPM and run on almost any fuel although Chrysler cautioned against using leaded pump gas. The tetraethyl lead created too many deposits within the engine. It is assumed many testers probably used leaded gas simply because it was the most available fuel as compared to diesel or unleaded or kerosene etc.

Despite some testers probably using leaded gas the Turbine cars were problem free except that it was easy to stall the engines in high altitudes or by trying to 'warm up the engine' by feeding too much gas into the car using the accelerator pedal.

The public logged 1,100,000 test miles on the 50 loaner cars which is about 22,000 miles for each car. 203 motorists were given the cars to use for 3 months each. Each driver thus averaged about 5,400 miles with their Turbine loaners. 48 states received a Turbine. Turbines were tested in 133 cities.

The incredibly high RPM of the turbine was stepped down using reduction gears before being transferred to the rear wheels. With the output shaft rotating at 3,600 RPM the Turbines produced 130 HP. The most incredible statistic was 425 ft lbs of torque at 0 RPM.

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Chrysler noted an average of 11.5 MPG which would be mostly city stop and go conditions. A Turbine car could hit 60 MPH in about 12 seconds which is OK for the time period but not stellar. It was noted that there was a 1 second lag in response when the gas pedal was goosed.

Chrysler figured the turbine engines would not wear out until 175,00 miles was covered. Many V8s of the time needed a rebuild between 60,000 to 100,000 miles. The bullet proof Chrysler slant six engines often went past 200,000 miles without any major work so the Turbine was about mid way in reliability.

The Turbine car in the Chrysler museum is one of only nine survivors. The rest were destroyed after the consumer test was completed. Chrysler donated six of the cars to museums back in the day with the engines deactivated. Three running cars were kept by Chrysler at the time. One made its way into the Jay Leno collection, one ended up in the Museum of Transportation in St. Louis and this one has stayed with Chrysler.

The turbine program continued at Chrysler until the government bail out situation in 1979 forced it to close down. With hybrid cars nowadays it may be possible to use an electric motor for low speed operation and a turbine for higher speeds. The big problem with the turbine was that it uses a lot of gas at idle and low speeds and generates a lot o heat in stop and go driving.

The museum was sprinkled with Chrysler, Dodge, and Plymouth cars from all eras. There were Jeeps, AMC and Ramblers. There were also some examples of De Soto, Willys Overland, Nash and Hudson. I'd seen as much as possible which was very little, but had people expecting me on the other side of the Canadian border. I decided to leave the USA instead of trying to repeat the traffic fight tomorrow on the chance of finding the other car museums.

Traffic was grinding and temperatures were broiling hot. I passed through Utica and decided to take a break.

In Sterling Heights, the car cooled down in a Bally's parking lot on M-59 East DS... M-59 in this stretch was called Hall Road with open access to the endless malls stretched out along the divided highway. At 8 PM I ate my usual Grand Slam at a Dennys on 44945 Wood Ridge Drive.

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Driving north on the grid took me to 23 Mile Road. I followed 23 east and paused at Toni's Minimart at 30534 23 Mile Road in Chesterfield. I picked up some cheap alcohol to bring over the border to Canada where liquor and beer is much more expensive. Mile 23 dead ended further east in Anchor Bay on the shores of Lake St. Clair in the city of New Baltimore.

In New Baltimore I got onto Interstate 94 which bent round the shores of Lake St. Clair and shot north east towards the base of Lake Huron. After blurring through Marysville heading north on I-94 I stopped at 9 PM to gas up at a Speedway gas station in Kimball. I was close to the border and gas is much cheaper in USA than Canada.

I crossed over into Canada on the Blue Water Bridge which crosses St Claire River into Point Edward, Ontario. Strathroy came up next along Highway 402.

In London, Ontario I renewed contact with Julie who I knew from Vancouver. She was bouncing from city to city as she pursued a bachelor's degree. She is kind of hyper and unsettled and it matched her temperament to transfer schools constantly. She had transferred to Western for her second year of University. I found her place without trouble, arriving mostly on time. London is easy to navigate without any traffic hassles. It seemed serene after the endless construction of Michigan. London has about 300,000 people and is very clean and well laid out. It feels like a small town although it really is fairly big.

It had been years. Julie looked the same. She's a pretty girl with full curves and tiny waist. She gave me a long hug squeezing hard. She noted my bulked up condition,

"You look like you've put on about 20 pounds. You look really rugged now."

That compliment bode well for the rest of the evening! I complimented her on retaining her girlish figure. She told me student life had piled on about 3 pounds. To her this was unacceptable! Apparently in winter she was up 5 pounds and was able to shave off a bit in summer, but it was hard for her to get exercise. Her schedule was hectic. She was working back to back shifts the next couple of days as well as taking classes,

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"I convinced my roommate to stay away until midnight!"

With that imperative in mind she eradicated any doubt as to what would happen. She jumped me. Later in the evening when things were relaxed she popped open a beer from the American six pack I brought to her. She talked a mile a minute about what she had been doing. We spent a nice evening together before her roommate returned to their shoebox apartment.

The roommate and her seemed to be mired in some very intense undercurrent charged situation. Tense fake polite double entendres were exchanged. Julie had a cot in the kitchen/dining area and this probably caused issues for both of them. The place was too small. But that is student life. What can you do? I got out of the melting pot with a passionate kiss send off.

DAY 16, 17, 18- London, Mississauga, Oakville, ON

I left Julie's place feeling light and buoyant. She promising to try and visit Toronto next week so we could explore together. Her life was complicated right now because she was repeating a course in the summer and trying to work full time to save up for the coming school year. I headed out to crash in the larger accommodations at my friend Tamara's place in Oakville.

The final Marauding moment came in Mississauga at the Shell on 3321 Highway 401 E. I filled with gas but was met with rude disdain from the pissy guy inside the station running the cash register. I had somehow missed the exit to Oakville. When I asked for directions or if there were any maps inside the place the nasty evil little prick behind the thick Plexiglas was beyond unhelpful. All he had to do was unfold one of the maps visible on a stand in the store and see what road led to Oakville. Or since this despicable bastard actually had to live nearby to work in the station he could have TOLD me how to get there. He figured his job was to turn the pumps on and off and everyone could go to hell. I explained to him that he was an asshole. A few people in the parking lot gave me the thumbs up for telling the guy off. This was the final Marauding Mad Moment of the trip.

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Another traveler gassing up in the station had a better map than mine and was able to set me straight. As I suspected I had overshot Oakville by about 10 miles. The map showed highway numbers for a quick drop south towards to the lake to get there.

Late in the middle of the night I made to Oakville, Ontario. Oakville is a pleasant quiet suburb on the lakefront. The whole city was dead asleep. I hated to wake up Tamara but she wasn't working the next day and didn't seem bothered by the timing.

Tamara had everything set up for my visit. She was astonished when I opened up that massive 17.1 cubic inch carrying capacity trunk in the Marauder and pulled out a single small gym bag. I travel light.

"There's nothing in there! You could have left half this car back home!"

She giggled about this cavernous trunk echoing with emptiness like a big vast barrel. Tamara and I talked a little that night about things back in Vancouver. Her move from Vancouver to Oakville had turned out well. Under the lighthearted surface she has a strong sense of organization and was currently working in the higher levels of the City of Oakville's administration bureaucracy.

Next morning we took a stroll down to the water. After we went to a gym called The Gym on 11 Lakeshore we got some groceries from Loblaws which is an Ontario tradition. Tamara had the signature blue plastic handled container to hold the soft plastic bags of milk that Loblaws sold. She put a clear plastic bag into the container and snipped off a corner to pour out her milk. This seems to be a unique Loblaws/ Ontario packaging thing.

Tamara has an irrepressibly positive personality best described as bubbly. She giggles and has a good time all day long. We explored the waterfront. Oakville's pristine peaceful air was scented with trees and had a small town atmosphere. Oakville is a pure drop within the massive Toronto suburban sprawl that extends all along the shore of the Lake.

During the day when Tamara was occupied I called Julie to check in on her. Julie cut me off as I

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started to talk and frantically demanded,

"Get here now!"

Her roommate was gone and Julie wasn't working until the afternoon. I made the trip to London blazing down the 401 passing everything like a true Marauder. Julie and I had a jam packed instant of passion. I dropped her off at work and cruised back to Oakville.

Tamara and I went to Colossus of Oakville located on Lakeshore. Back when Tamara lived in Vancouver it was tradition for us to eat massive meals at Paspalos Taverna on West 3rd in North Vancouver. She assured me that this place in Oakville was going to match the old days. It was great.

Another day Tamara needed something from Walmart Oakpark which was further inland from the water. I found a DVD of DIRTY MARY CRAZY LARRY for 4 bucks. Tamara and I filled up some lazy days and then I headed a bit further along the lake to visit friends in Toronto.

DAY 19, 20, 21- Toronto, ON

I cruised east a short distance from Oakville and found myself in the heart of frantic Toronto downtown frenzy. This was all relative of course. Oakville was such an oasis of calm it made T.O. seem crazier than it really was. Toronto is just a small whitewashed and serene little town compared to Chicago or Detroit.

My friends from Vancouver had relocated here because of the active film industry. Lucy was an actress and Dean was a director. They had a cool old house filled with vintage furniture and interesting antiques. Upstairs in his attic studio Dean worked his magic with some of his editing equipment to dub me a CD of Sonic's Rendezvous Band which is just about impossible to

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locate anymore.

After living on Denny's Grand Slams all the way across the continent it was about time I ate some good food. Lucy brought me to Qi Natural Foods on Roncesvalles Avenue. Lucy was determined to teach me how to use the subway and bus system. She mapped out the routes and times and got me to reluctantly use public transit.

One night I went to Old Toronto where another old Vancouver friend, Soline was now working for a law firm on Adelaide Street. It took a bit of getting used to seeing her all decked out in her lawyer suit. We had a great night together catching up on old times.

The attic in Lucy and Dean's place where I was sleeping was exceptionally hot and humid. Even being right on the water, the thick air is not alleviated by any breeze. Ontario air hangs murky and suffocating without relief.

DAYS 22, 23, 24, 25, 26- Ottawa, ON

Heading east along the lakefront of Lake Ontario and later the banks of the St. Lawrence River the 401 runs through Kingston and then Brockville where you can shoot north to Smith's Falls then divert north east into Ottawa, Ontario. Ottawa is the capitol of Canada and has some historic buildings in the downtown core, the most obvious of which are the Parliament Buildings.

On my second night in town I caught up with another old friend from Vancouver. Marie had come to brave the alternately humid and frigid climate of Ottawa to enjoy the arts scene in town. The City has the National Gallery, NAC, Museum of Natural History and so on. We went out drinking with some of her friends in Byward Market. This is the historic area of town where the original town was laid out slightly east of the Parliament Buildings.

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Marie teased me that I looked like a football player. I'd gained a lot of weight since she had last seen me. I had been working out twice daily since I arrived in Ottawa doing split routines with plenty of heavy squats and deadlifts. The extra muscle mass made it easy for me to process an endless stream of vodka martinis and greyhounds without losing my grip. We drank at The Laff which is officially named the Chateau Lafayette and some place across the street.

Later Marie's boyfriend took us to Pub 101 which used to be Minglewoods. Around 2:45 AM a young hottie kept looking my way. Marie noticed it as well. I immediately invited her to our table and become engrossed in conversation with her. Her name was Lisa and she was from Calgary. No one at our table actually lived in Ottawa. A conversion of trajectories all leading to this one spot and time. We toasted travel.

Lisa was very petite and cute. She was mulatto but looked vaguely Spanish. Her hair was long and wavy and thick. Her eyes were so dark as to be almost black. Her face was sensual with full lips and pert nose. We were deep in conversation about her past life and her new start here in Ottawa. Marie winked at me at one point when it was obvious things were progressing really well with Lisa.

Suddenly everyone was gone. Closing time. Lisa directed me to her house. She was renting a small place right in the Byward Market. Parking was a hassle in this neighborhood. We ended up parking far away and walking back arm in arm to her place.



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