

NINETEEN DAYS IN AN MGB

— (On the road with Adrienne and Rich) —

by Rich Wagner

Since buying our first MGB in 1991, we've done road trips to Cape Cod, Asheville, New Orleans and Florida. Driving mostly on State Routes, we've also driven down both the Blue Ridge and Natchez Trace Parkways.

This time, our travels took us south and west through Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas on a nineteen day "driving" vacation to Albuquerque, New Mexico. We had done some "on-line" research and began making plans last January. The first decision was to decide when? We knew that we did not want to be driving day after day during July. We had done that with the "MG Indy 96" event when we continued on to New Orleans in 1996 and that wasn't just "warm", it was Hot!

Planning a full week in New Mexico, we scheduled a three week vacation beginning May 4th to avoid the heat. I had planned to head straight south into warmer weather before heading west and my friends at work were quick to point out that I would be driving through "Tornado Alley" at the worst possible time. Choosing to ignore their warnings, I planed an eight day drive, considering that we could loose a day to weather or mechanical problems. Having eight days would allow both flexibility as well as time to visit friends along the way. The second item was packing for the trip. The trunk was my responsibility and I've had lots of practice. In



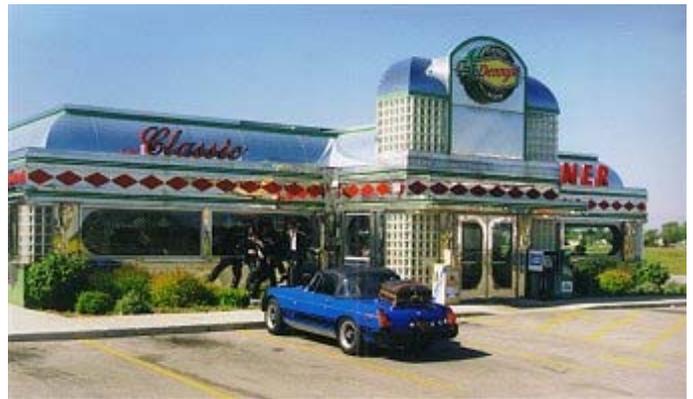
addition to all of my spare parts (they're useless at home), I pack a small propane grill, cooler, large red bag of picnic supplies as well as a camera bag and another case for video equipment. This left just enough room for our toiletry bags. Everything else, Adrienne packs carefully into one suitcase and our shoes go behind the seat in a gym bag.

— The Trip —

It turned out to be a beautiful spring day as we traveled down US-23 through Toledo where it soon changed into a two lane road. Switching to Rte-315 near Columbus, we discovered our first really pretty drive that took us to Grove City and dinner with friends. Up early on day two, we headed out in early morning fog to meet another friend for breakfast. The weather really turned nice, so we lowered the top, said our good-byes, buckled up and turned the key. NOTHING HAPPENED!!

Fortunately, I kept a clear head and quickly remembered that the headlamps had been turned on because of the fog. Imagine how foolish I could have looked if I had tried to find another

reason without first checking the battery? As soon as we could, we were on our way. It was a great top-down day and heading down US-62, we discovered more scenic countryside and our first photo opportunity. Right out in the middle of nowhere, was a classic diner, one of those stainless beauties



you've seen on postcards. After enjoying a quick Root Beer float, we continued on to US-50 which took us through Cincinnati, across the Ohio River to Florence, Kentucky. Total drive: a modest 150 miles. 350 miles over two days while visiting friends was right on our schedule, but it was time to pick up the pace. Taking US-127 straight south to Jamestown (WWI hero Sgt. York's home town) before heading west, first on Rte.-52, 85 and Rte-53 finishing with 30 miles on I-40 to Lebanon, Tennessee, for a scenic 300 mile day.

Day 4. Driving US-231 to Murfreesboro then heading west on Rte-96, we were just a little southwest of Nashville when we stopped under the Natchez Trace Parkway Bridge. Like two McDonald's Arches stretched end to end, it spans



the valley and Rte 96. Autos and motorcycles travel across it, more than 155 feet up in the air. Since we had traveled over this when we returned from New Orleans, it was another photo opportunity for us. Connecting with Rte.100, we traveled into Sumerville on US-64 and took a break.

It was early afternoon as we approached Memphis to take I-240 across the Mississippi into Arkansas. We reasoned that traffic should not be a problem (since we were driving toward the city), so we continued on. Our guess was right, and we drove the speed limit through town to cross into West Memphis Arkansas. Lucky us, because traffic going the other way looked just like Oakland County at rush hour.

— The First Mistake —

Leaving West Memphis, we drove just four miles on I-40 before switching to US-70 (a great alternate route). Things were going so good that I decided to avoid Little Rock and go north on Rte-31 picking up US-64 to take us to Oklahoma. Right on schedule, we made our turn onto US-64 only to find that the road soon turned into US-67 and US-167. After about 10 miles, we found ourselves driving into Little Rock. After stopping at a Shopping Mall for lunch and to figure things out, we drove to Perryville and continued north on Rte-9 to get back to US-64. Later, when US-64 began to switchback across I-40, we decided to make up some lost time by driving the freeway. It may have been a new highway, but the cement on I-40 gave us a very bumpy ride. Never the less, we continued on it into Oklahoma before getting back onto US-64, stopping in Sallisaw. Because of a wrong turn, we must have wasted nearly 100 of the 400 miles we drove that day.

Day six. Everything was going great until Rte-9 suddenly turned north. Not wanting another wrong turn, we quickly turned around only to find ourselves heading south. Knowing that I needed help, I swallowed my pride, stopped at an office and had Adrienne ask for directions while I used the men's room.

With a 65mph speed limit on Rte-9, we drove west until we had no choice but to get back on I-40. Since the interstate was now the only road, the scenic tree covered backroads became a deserted highway and what was rolling hills and curves was now straight and flat. The day's drive ended at the Irish Inn in Shamrock, Texas where accommodations included an indoor pool and hot tub as well as a lounge. What made this so unusual was that Shamrock is a "Dry County" and no alcohol is allowed! Somehow, it becomes legal to drink, provided, you are a registered guest and charge the drinks to your room. Sounds a little like Michigan's Fireworks where it's legal to sell 'em but you can't use 'em.

Just two days remaining and ahead of schedule, we began looking for places to stop. First up was "Big Texan Steak



Ranch", a big Restaurant/Gift Shop that offered a "Free" 72 oz. Steak to anyone who could eat it in 60 minutes. Sorry, 10am was a little early to try, but we spent almost that long taking pictures and video before heading to Adrian, Texas. This would be our first chance to see Route 66 and "The Mid-point Café".

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by Rich Wagner (continued)

THE REST OF THE STORY

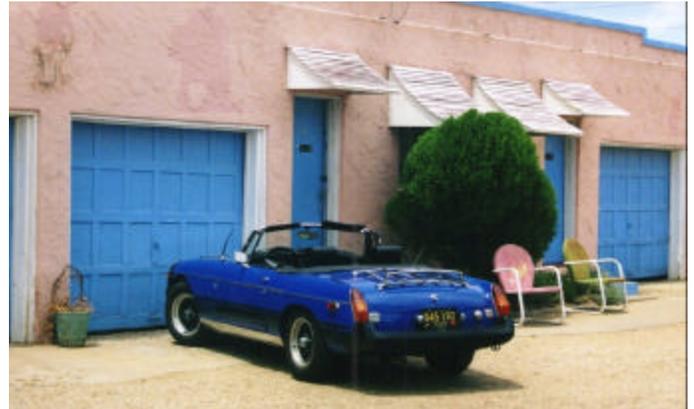
Continuing west through Texas, it wasn't long before we saw signs for "Route 66" and "The Midpoint Cafe". Midpoint's claim to fame is that it's located at the center of the original route between Chicago and California. Historic it



was and even the no-nonsense menu hasn't changed. The waitress sat down to help plan our visit to Albuquerque and we ordered grilled cheese sandwiches to be polite. Another traveler told us about the legendary motels just ahead in Tucumcari, New Mexico and we also met the regulars from the area, which included an elderly man who has a 1952 TD in his garage. "Still runs", he said, but admits to being a little too old to get in and out of it. Finally, there was a couple from Ohio riding a motorcycle who told us their son owns a MGB like ours.

Back on the road, we crossed over into New Mexico and into a new time-zone. Stopping for information, we were handed the Route 66 Traveler's Guide with a picture of "The

Blue Swallow" motel on the cover. With all this promotion, the motel had become larger than life, but when we approached and actually saw it, we began having some real res-



ervations (pun intended) about staying the night. These places still exist but who'd ever...., Anyhow, we rang the Night Bell and asked to see a room. What a Nice Surprise!! The tidy place was fresh and clean, furnished with antiques and live plants. We knew right away we'd be spending the night.

With time to kill, we explored the deserted downtown that may have once been the "Hot Spot" postcards had boasted about. Today, Rte. 66 only goes through the mostly abandoned strip of stores and motels, leaving just one restaurant, gift shop and two original motels.

We stopped at the restaurant and discovered our Harley friends already there having dinner. For us, this was a day for cooking steaks, so it was off to the market for what was needed to make our "Backyard BBQ" dinner at the motel. That night, with the roadway less than 100 feet from the door, we learned that staying the night at "The Blue Swallow" could never be better than today. Imagine what it must have been like in the good ole' days with all the traffic on Route 66. Today, when the sun goes down, everything closes, making it a very peaceful night along this deserted highway. The next morning, we had a good & spicy breakfast at "The Pow Wow Inn" before starting our final drive. Just ahead was "The Route 66 Auto Museum" and how could I not stop?

Getting back on I40, another sign said that 40 miles ahead was a "Dairy Queen" at a place called Bowlin's Ranch. We had a good laugh just before getting there when we saw what must have been at least 20 signs side by side, each one advertising something different at Bowlin's! After spending some extra time checking out the mammoth gift shop, we drove the final few miles to our condo in Albuquerque.

Eight days and just over 2,100 miles, it was another good trip for us. Were we tired from our trip? How could we be? Driving for us was not a chore, but the best part of our vacation.

————— IN ALBUQUERQUE —————

Once we were unpacked, I telephoned another MG owner who I didn't know, but had gotten his number from the internet. Presumptuous? Perhaps, but it was the only way to introduce myself. Later, he called and after some introductions, a Tuesday dinner was planned. Looking up MG in the phone



book, I also discovered a listing for "MGB Experts". Now, that's presumptuous! We'd have to meet these guys.

{If you'd like to read all about our week in New Mexico, here is the site} <http://community.webtv.net/OurMGandTR/TheDrive>.

On Tuesday, we drove to the address listed for "MG Experts" and said hello to the owners of "Taos Garage", an exclusively British repair shop. From there it was off to lunch in "Old Town" where we spent hours carefully going through each shop. We needed lots of time to walk off lunch because this was only a short distance to where we would be meeting the Hollies for dinner. Don and Linda Hollie made us feel like old friends with small talk and useful tips about our visit. I kept thinking what a clever idea this was because both of us finally had someone else to visit with.

Wednesday, we headed up the Turquoise Trail. Stopping at a gift shop in Santa Fe, the owner introduced herself and told us that both she and her brother each have MGTDs. Business must be pretty good because she also owns one of the new Ford T-Birds.

————— THE RETURN TRIP —————



We ended our visit after six full days and began our drive home. Heading north, the route took us through a kaleidoscope of changing terrain that ended in Taos. Heading east on a cool Saturday morning, the drive was so pretty that after stopping for lunch in Cimarron, I lowered the top and hooked up the camcorder. Too late! The road soon straightened out and the speed limit became 65MPH.

About 100 miles outside of Dodge City, the drive really lost its charm when we encountered huge cattle stockades along the highway. The stench from the cattle was just overwhelming, so much so that we would have welcomed the scent of skunks or even Gary, Indiana compared to this mountain of manure. Believe it or not, they actually do stack the stuff!

We reached Dodge City and spent the night just up the street from "Boot Hill".

Sunday, we continued on the Oregon Trail and Pony Express Route. These routes were not made for sight seeing, so it was another high speed day down straight roads. We rewarded ourselves that night in St. Joseph, MO with a visit to

Whiskey Creek Bar & Grill for dinner before a visit to the car wash.

Monday, after another day of driving, we were ready to stop. Problem was, driving the backroads, there isn't any way of knowing where the motels are. Thanks to the "Traveler's Guide" coupon book, we found our location and saw that motels were just a few miles out of our way. These booklets proved to be a valuable resource, since we never planned more than one day at a time.

Tuesday, we headed straight east on Route 36 to Indianapolis where we planned to connect with Route 31 North. Filled with confidence, we headed straight into the city where it soon looked like the area around Joe Louis and Cobo Hall. I knew my connection had to be here someplace in the center of town, so I headed north as soon as I saw a road called Meridian. This road took us right up to huge statues and buildings before taking us to a roundabout (circle) drive. As we began to circle, I turned right again when I saw the sign Meridian, but it wasn't until 117th Street that we learned that this was indeed Route 31.

Out of the city, we were back in the countryside, stopping to see covered bridges and another auto museum in Kokomo, Indiana. We ended the day in South Bend at a Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge for a final night away from home. Mr. Majestic sat parked proudly out front by the road under a British flag just as if the space had been reserved for him. Mr. Majestic? Oh, he's our MGB.



Long distance driving has been a big part of our British car experience for over ten years. We've seen the beauty of America from behind the wheel of our cars and can tell you that the backroads have never been better maintained or more deserted than they are today. Adrienne enjoys the looks we get from kids as we drive by and the world seems a much friendlier place. Everywhere we stop, folks say hello and tell us all about cars that they've owned.

We've also learned that the legendary roads like Route 66 were roads designed for travel and never provided the scenic drives that the legend has created. Here in Michigan (and in our surrounding states), scenic drives can take you almost anywhere. The ride may take you a little longer, but you'll cherish the memories.