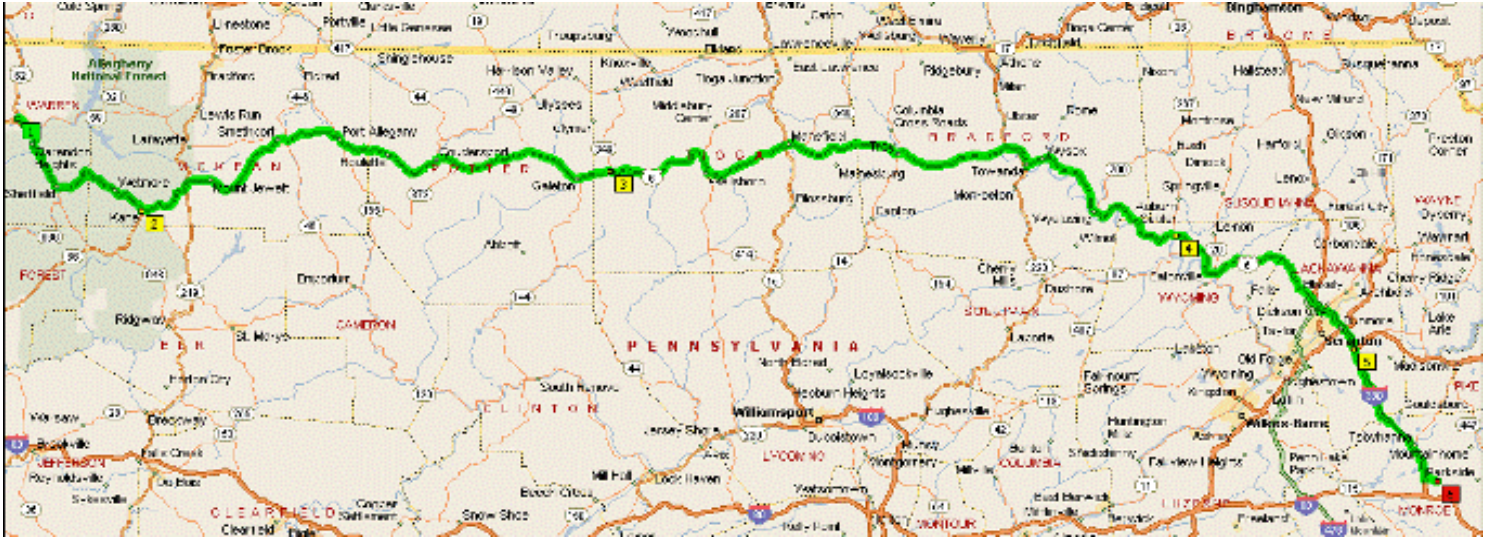


The Long Long Trip to the Poconos

By: Mike Bouse



My trip to the 25th Annual Fiat Freak Out actually began right after Christmas, in January 2008. Hearing the call from Bobb to ATTEND, ATTEND, ATTEND the event; I grabbed a few of my friends together to plan and execute a caravan from Michigan to the Pocono Manor. Dale Crandall from Greenville Ohio, Jon Prisbe from Fruitport Michigan, and Lee Putman from Streamwood Illinois all participated with me via a mountain of emails to produce a stupendous two day event which culminated in attendance at the Freak Out.

Since I first purchased my Spider back in 1995, I have yearned to drive my car in the mountains of Pennsylvania. I have deep family ties in north western PA, and I practically grew up driving this or that in the Allegheny National Forest and the surrounding mountains. The experiences of a pre-teen boy, coasting down a mountainside in a pre-WWII Ford pickup with his foot shoving the clutch pedal through the floor, was ever present in my mind as we began to make our plans. This would be my fourth FFO in a row, and I was certain it was going to be the grandest of them all. I was actually going to get an opportunity to drive my Spider in the mountains of Pennsylvania. What else could I ask for, but to share that experience with 40 or 50 of my closest friends?

For weeks on end, the four of us discussed who would be invited (everyone) who would be targeted (Great Lakes area residents) and who would be responsible for what. Jon has a knack for producing maps, so he volunteered to create turn-by-turn maps. Dale is an Ohio native, so he had some great ideas about what to do across that state. Lee has great access to brand new FLU members, ripe for the plucking as participants. My only absolute in our planning was insisting that the trek across Pennsylvania be on the US 6 highway. I would get to travel right past relatives' houses with a pack of Fiats.



Eventually, we ended up with participants from Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and New York. CHI-FLU, WM-FLU, F.L.U.I.D., Indiana, and the Ohio Valley chapters all sent representation for the cruise. The first batch left my driveway at 7 am on Thursday. We met with 12 other vehicles in Bowling Green Ohio, leaving the Meijer Gas Station with a total of sixteen cars, twelve of which were Italian under their own power, and two Spiders being towed.

The trek across Ohio was much more than any of us anticipated; hot, sticky, and laden with slow traffic. The passage around Cleveland was a nightmare. Got any idea how long it takes for this crew to fill a gas tank and freshen up? How about 45 minutes. Do that two times and get slowed down by some construction crews once or twice and you'll no longer wonder why our clocks no longer matched the posted schedule.

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We arrived at our chosen lunch stop a full two hours late. Never did I see 30 some folks so glad to climb out of their sports cars than this group was. Fortunately, the gathered group of an additional four vehicles waited patiently at Punderson State Park for our arrival. After a quick bite and a bathroom break, twenty vehicles shoved off again. This time, the going was much quicker; everyone seemed to be in more of a hurry to arrive at our evening's destination, Warren Pennsylvania. Bob and Laura Riegel met us along the path. We were now officially a 21 vehicle caravan, excluding the two Spiders on trailers.



By the time we arrived at the Red Carpet Inn (which has NO red carpeting, by the way), we were three full hours behind schedule. Ohhh, were we hungry!! Fortunately, my uncle and aunt were on hand waiting for us when we arrived. Uncle Tom had pre-arranged dinner reservations at the local Italian restaurant. The staff of Ferro Cucina, and owner Chiodos were gracious enough to wait for us; and the dinner was certainly worth the wait. Every dish was prepared in cast iron skillet, a house specialty; and I can attest that the linguini was delicious. Everyone seemed to crash in bed quite early; between 10-10:30. And we were all up early Friday morning, still wondering where our red carpet had been hidden.

Friday brought its own set of surprises, starting with a downpour from 6 to 7 am. We departed at 8, in about four or five different groups as some had decided to make some time, or travel by selected other routes. Still in all, each traveled with at least one other vehicle. And for good measure! I'm sure you heard about the car from Detroit with a cracked water pump, or the Spider from Ohio with the whining differential, or the X 1/9 that nearly suffered an engine fire. Camaraderie on the road was essential both Thursday and Friday.

My wife Missy and I chose to continue along US 6 for the duration of the trip. We started with a small group including a late arrival from Chicago. Dave Reisig makes car #22, but who is counting? CB radios are quite the entertainment item now a days, remember them? Seems that most every channel is very quiet most of the time, mostly because everyone else is using cell phones. Our chattering back and forth on our radios helped keep us alert. Three radios between four cars is quite fun, and I bet if anyone was eavesdropping, they were really wondering what these city slickers were up to.



Lee Putman saw quite the patch of fog on the side of a mountain early Friday morning. He commented that we were about to drive through a cloud. Well, wouldn't you know that Lee's cloud would continue to follow us for the next four hours, dropping rain hard enough for us to put our tops up more than once.

Two thirds of our way across PA on US 6, we stopped for lunch. We met up with Tim and Tracy Wells and the family pulling their 128 to the show. The Wells family makes #23 for the caravan. Yes, I am still counting even if we are now in five groups. After all, three of the groups meet us at this rest stop within five minutes of me getting out of the car.

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If you are counting along with me, you will quickly realize that this caravan and its participants represented in excess of 10% of the total show field for the Saturday display. I cannot wait to see the panorama shot so I can smile as I recognize everyone that shared their vacation with me.



As I mentioned earlier, this trip was not without mechanical issues. Dave Reisig was able to get his oil leak fixed (cam cover bolt sealant). Joe and Mary LoPiccolo eventually were able to breathe easy after being shepherded to the Inn by a great sub-group. Thanks again Kevin Lingbeck for being the mechanic of the weekend, and saving the LoPiccolo wedding anniversary!! Thanks also to Dave Voss and Dale Crandall for assisting John & Cindy Kristoff with their differential issues. Cross country trips in an antique vehicle can be trying enough without mechanical issues. That we have friends to share the load is a blessing to all FLUsters.

With the addition of some more back roads driving on my journey home, I now know full well why there are so many Fiat owners in Pennsylvania. It is just naturally fun to own and operate such a vehicle as ours in this great state.