

PROLOGUE

By Steve Meyer

This is the story of five intrepid adventurers and their Model A's. Their goal was to attend a MARC Membership meet in distant Ohio in mid-April. The challenge was to cross the Alleghany Mountains in uncertain weather, not just once but twice, in their vintage cars! The following stories herein describe what they did at the meet, the people they met on the journey, and the many challenges they faced driving old Fords across the mountains! Let the journey begin.

Tuesday, April 10th, 2018
Day One
By Steve Meyer

Jon Miller, Dave and Laurie McLeish, and Don Keller met me at my house at 8:30am. We were fresh and ready to roll. We didn't know what to expect but felt ready for anything and man were we gonna get it!! The day was cold but pleasant as we pulled out of the driveway and headed west. We motored thru the bucolic Montgomery County countryside, crossed the Potomac at Point of Rocks, and headed towards Winchester, Virginia where we would stop for lunch at McDonalds. After a quick lunch we headed to Warrenton, Virginia to stop for gas. At this point we had traveled about 125 miles and things were going smooth. TOO SMOOTH! While at the gas station a gentlemen invited us to his restoration shop about a mile down the road. He was thrilled to get some pictures of our cars in front of the shop. We always like to please the locals cause you never know when you might need 'em and besides it is good karma.



Hhmmm, we definitely were going to need all the karma we could get! After saying good bye to him I went to plug in my GPS only to find that somehow I had fried my power cable. Yep the end was all melted and it wasn't going to fit into the phone no matter how hard I tried. Luckily Dave and Laurie jumped right in and volunteered to "Lead the Way". Right after Warrenton we hopped onto Corridor H (Route 48) which is a new four lane highway built just for cruising Model A's, Audis, BMWs, and Mercedes in a hurry.

This highway will take you to Canaan Valley from DC in a relative heartbeat compared to the twisty, windy, hilly old roads. I have no idea why it is called Corridor H but you can google it! We all agreed it was a great way to travel the next 80 miles or so especially since we wanted to get to the Blackwater Falls Lodge, our final destination, as soon as possible. We had just turned onto Blackwater Lodge Road (the sign said the Lodge was one mile away) when Don called out over the radio that his car just died. Sure enough he had pulled off on the side of the road with the hood open. Not a good sign. But as we approached we heard it cough back to life and we hustled the last mile to our hotel in the woods.



After checking in to our rooms we met in the lobby and piled into two cars (not Don's) and made our way to Blackwater Falls. The falls drops about 62 feet over a sandstone ledge. It was very remote and beautiful with light snow on the ground and icicles hanging from rocks on the shoreline. Yes, it was cold in them thar hills! And colder yet on our return trip.



After wandering around and taking thousands of pictures we drove into the town of Davis and had quite a nice dinner at Sirianni's pizza joint. A small quaint place with quite an eclectic decor and pizza to die for! If you have a restaurant in the middle of nowhere you better be good. And it was! After dinner we drove back to the Lodge, tucked our trusty Model A's in for the night, and retired to our rooms. None of gave any thought as to why Don's car died just a mile down the road. Good thing we didn't waste too much time thinking about it because we couldn't figure it out the next day either and that was after 3 hours of trying! We were just happy to have survived day one.

April 11th, 2018
Day Two
By Don Keller

Wednesday morning at the Blackwater Falls Lodge started off a little slow. The Smokehouse restaurant did not open until 8am till the sun rises above the mountains. So, we did not get started for Ohio until 9:30am. We decided to take another road to avoid city traffic. We decided not to take the route thru the town of Parsons. Well our choice of road turned out to be so steep that I thought we were going down the Grand Canyon. We did not get too far down before Dave McLeish said his brake pedal was almost to the floor. He was able to stop Thank God. So, we had no choice but to do a brake adjustment in the middle of the road because the road was so narrow we could not turn around or back up the hill.



Afterwards, we finished our trip down the Grand Canyon and everything was rolling smoothly till around 11 o'clock when my car just came to a complete stop with a back fire that sounded like a cannon going off. We opened the hood and started with the distributor and found that the rotor had been hitting the tips of the distributor body which in turn left brass shavings inside the distributor. So, we changed the distributor. It still would not start so we tried the coil, but that was not the problem, tried the fuse box and that was not the problem, tried the coil wire and that was not the problem.



We then took the coil wire to the terminal box off and replaced the wire with an alligator clip and that did not work either. We finally disconnected the ignition switch and cable from the distributor and replaced it with an emergency ignition jumper cable and then the little baby started up. After that, we were off 3 hours later. Oh! Did I mention that we talked to Milt Hartig and Dave Sturges to pick their brains? And the people in West Virginia stopped to try to help, offering to lend tools if needed, and one gentleman even offered to go home to get his trailer to tow my car to his house till we could come back at another time to get it. Well, we made it finally to the Hampton Inn around 8:30pm and that was just the start of the week from hell and back. Much more to follow!

April 12th, 2018
Day Three
By Laurie McLeish

Don got an early start working on his car. Once the others were up and finished with breakfast, they lent their support to the repair operation. Even after all that he still had the red alligator clip and the ignition jumper cable in place to make the car run! At this point he was resigned to drive it home that way. After lunch at the Honey Baked Ham Cafe, we drove to the host hotel and got checked into the MARC Meet. All except Steve who unfortunately stayed at the hotel recovering from food poisoning contracted from the Sheetz the day before. I can spare everyone the details! We met up there with Dick and Betty Fisher who arrived the day before after making the trip in their modern vehicle.

At 2:30pm, Dick and Betty Fisher, Jon Miller, Don Keller, Dave and I all made our way to the Velvet Ice Cream Factory Tour at Ye Olde Mill. After an ice cream trivia quiz, we had an informative tour where they covered the history of the four generations of the same family running the company which started in 1914. They still produce ice cream in "small batches". They were very proud of the fact that they never had a "recall" for any reason. After the tour, we all got a "Single Scoop Cone" to sample the ice cream. Their most popular flavor is "Buckeye Classic" - Peanut butter swirled with Chocolate Fudge and Chocolate covered Peanut Butter Candies. One of our "Ice Cream Addicts" figured out if you gave them a \$1.00 you could get a second scoop!



Before heading off, we all decided to meet at Olive Garden for dinner, though a bit later since we'd had huge servings of ice cream after the tour.

April 13th, 2018
Day Four
By Jon Miller

Our day began with breakfast at the hotel looking outside towards a beautiful day. I had signed up for an 8am seminar on Henry Ford's first internal combustion engine so he departed early for the host hotel, about five miles away. Upon arrival, I learned that there had been some type of communication problem and the presenter would not be there at 8am as scheduled. The meet organizers indicated they would attempt to reschedule this presentation for 3:30pm that day but were not sure at that point if this was possible. I had also signed up for a seminar on front-end alignment scheduled for 1:30pm that day, so I would be back at the host hotel if the 8am seminar was rescheduled for 3:30pm.

So, with the morning now free, I returned to the hotel and found Don beginning to perform some additional troubleshooting on his car. I joined him and we began checking electrical circuits again to determine where the problem might be hiding. We reinstalled the fuse holder assembly back on the starter so there would not be any more wiring overheating or ammeter melting (hopefully). The "hotwire" jumper wire was removed from the distributor and the pop-out ignition cable was reinstalled. When the battery was reconnected, the fuse did not blow so an attempt was made to start the engine since the horn and lights were working. The engine immediately started and ran fine. Happy that the engine started, but perplexed that it actually did with a suspect ignition cable, the decision was made to reinstall the instrument panel (previously removed to replace the ammeter and left dangling by the ignition and speedometer cables). As soon as Don began positioning the instrument panel into place, and the back of the pop-out switch housing touched the metal cowl, the fuse blew and the engine died. Eureka, there was proof positive that the ignition switch had an intermittent short and was the cause of the fuse blowing and engine failure to start. As a result of this finding, the pop-out ignition cable was once again removed from the distributor and the "hotwire" jumper wire was reinstalled. After the blown fuse was replaced, the engine started and ran just fine. Don decided that this would be the solution for the remainder of the road trip and he would replace the ignition switch after the group returned home.

Don then departed to join Dave, Steve, and Dick in attending the seminar on restoring the Model A shock absorber. Steve brought four shocks to the seminar to leave with the presenter, John Holland, for rebuilding.

After a quick lunch at the café next to the hotel, I departed for the host hotel to attend the 1:30pm seminar on front end alignment. After I arrived I learned that the 8am seminar had indeed been rescheduled for 3:30pm so I planned to remain for that one also.

The front end alignment seminar was very interesting. The presenter, Dan Manola, covered material in the Ford 1936 service manual regarding front end alignment which includes all Model A Fords. The concepts of caster, camber, and toe-in were discussed as was the importance of having each set to factory specifications for the best driving experience and maximum front tire life. Caster and camber adjustments require the use of a mechanical press to actually bend the front axle in the needed direction but toe-in can be done in a home garage (or under a hotel canopy—keep reading!!). Our club has a tool that makes it very simple for one person to adjust the toe-in. Then, I attended the seminar on Henry Ford's first internal combustion engine. Dubbed the "kitchen sink" engine, Henry Ford built it from materials he cobbled together while he was working as an engineer for Thomas Edison and tested it one night in 1893 over his kitchen sink. His wife Clara assisted by holding a spoon and dripped fuel into the cylinder since Henry had not yet developed a method for metering a fuel supply to this engine. The engine ran so the "proof-of concept" model was indeed a success. Although unrecognized at that time, this was the birth of The Ford Motor Company. The presenters, Brent and Nancy Mize, brought a full scale model of this engine and demonstrated how it works.

I then returned to the hotel to join up with the others. The group decision was made to drive into Newark, Ohio for dinner at a restaurant recommended by the hotel front desk. The restaurant was on the town square just across from the Licking County Court House which is a beautiful architectural design from the late 1800's.



April 14th, 2018
Day Four
By Dave McLeish

Saturday morning Laurie attended the ERA Fashion seminar on 1931 Fashions and Jon attended the Seminar on "Carpets and Mats." Don and Steve worked in the parking lot on their cars and picked up a few spare parts at Lowes and the NAPA store. They ventured to the Heisey Glass Museum and then met Jon at "The Works Museum" after he finished the "Carpets and Mats" seminar.



Laurie and I ventured to the Heisey Glass Museum after Laurie's seminar was over. The Heisey Glass Company opened in April of 1896. They employed nearly seven hundred people. There was a great demand for the fine glassware, and Heisey sold it all over the world. They closed in 1957.



Laurie attended the "Make Your Own ERA Hat" seminar and came away with a black hat with flower decorations. You may see her sporting her new hat on our next trip. As Mileage Coordinator for the MARC organization, Dick and Betty attended the Membership Meeting and the Awards Banquet. We decided to try out the Red Oak Tavern for dinner.

Upon returning to the hotel, folks went to check over their cars before retiring for the evening. It was then that Don discovered that the tread had been worn off his right front tire with the cord beginning to show. Some additional work would be required on his car in the morning to check the tightness of the front suspension bolts and to adjust the toe-in.

April 15th, 2018
Day Five
By Steve Meyer

Sunday, day five, dawned cool, gloomy and very rainy. After breakfast, as we were preparing to leave for the Blackwater Lodge, we found poor Don in his usual spot. He was under the car fixing his front end with Jon as his assistant. The front end problem was discovered the night before when Don was looking at the other three cars' bumper alignment and discovered his right front tire was worn out. He was quite fortunate on Sunday morning to have found a dry spot under the hotel lobby canopy. Don's new name became Don "Under the Car" Keller.



We were planning to leave the hotel at 8:30am and we actually left at 9:10am. This was amazing given the fact that Don had to switch his spare with the worn tire, tighten his front end bolts and then adjust his toe-in which was out by a whopping one and half inches! His mechanical knowledge (and ours) improved with each passing day of this trip! As we made our way out of the parking lot it was pouring rain and our windshields were all fogged up! Between paper towels and RainEx we were doing real good! Little did we know that by tomorrow Mother Nature was going to throw more stuff our way! As we approached Parkersburg, WV, the rain let up and we had a dry ride the rest of the way to the Lodge. Looking at the weather report though we knew the rain (and much more) would catch up to us soon! We took a different route back to avoid the 'Grand Canyon' hill as Don described it. We took highway Route 50 and unbeknownst to us this required us to climb two huge mountains. Not as steep as the 'Grand Canyon but twice as long. Needless to say we all dropped to second gear to make it to the top which seemed impossible to reach. About three quarters up to the top of the second 'hill' we heard Don say he had pulled over due to overheating and he needed to let the engine cool. Jon pulled over with him but Dave, Laurie and I were almost at the top. We said we would pull over as soon as possible. At this point we were only about 30 miles from our destination. We waited at the top for about 20 minutes and got the report that Don added a gallon and a half of water but now his car wouldn't start. ARRGH!! So close! But as Dave and I made

plans to go back down the hill to give assistance (I was thinking AAA), Jon calls back with “it started” when Don tightened down the battery negative cable which had worked its way loose. Eureka! We dodged another bullet and within minutes there were Don and Jon cresting the mountain top! We were on our way and made it to the Lodge in quick order and before the rains came. We quickly checked in and drove to the nearby town of Davis for pizza at Sirianni’s, our new favorite restaurant. After another great meal we emerged from the restaurant into a cold driving rain. We all prayed that it would stay only rain but we braced for the worst. SNOW was in the forecast!!

April 16th, 2018

Day Six

By Steve Meyer

We woke up the next morning to only rain, had a continental breakfast, packed our baggage and started our cars. Everyone fired up except Jon. We hear him honking his aaaaoooga horn and wonder what is going on. Turns out, after two short starts of his engine but no movement by the starter on the third starting attempt, he was checking his electrical system and he determined that the starter was just stuck. He waved me over and asked if I would give him a push so he could pop the clutch and start the car. I pushed, it rolled forward, and it fired up with release of the clutch. Whheww! Good thing to because the rain had just turned to SNOW!



The snow was really coming down now in big heavy wet flakes. It hit the windshield as we were driving and just stuck. We now had fog on the inside and wet snow clinging to the windshields on the outside. Visibility was near zero! Paper towels work really well on the inside but how to clean the outside while driving was a real problem. I have NEVER used the windshield wiper on my car but I figured now was the time to find out if it was worth the money I paid for it! It really worked quite well to clear the snow from my ‘viewing area’! It proved itself to more useful than just an ornament. Luckily Jon and Don’s wipers worked just as well and, well, poor Dave and Laurie were not so fortunate. Their wiper wouldn’t work so they needed to open the windows and use their scrapers while driving! Now that is roughing it! We only went a mile or so when alerts us over the radio that he hears a loud whine coming from his tranny. We quickly duck into the last

gas station before we hit the highway and before you can say ‘Road trip from hell’, Don “Under the Car” Keller is ripping out the floor boards under the gas station canopy as snow swirls relentlessly all around him. To say he was ticked would be an understatement. He was ready to give that car away! We added transmission fluid and called Dave Sturges for any advice he could give. His sage advice was to add transmission fluid and drive home if at all possible. So we drove out on the highway with snow flying everywhere at the top speed of 30MPH. We chose that speed because that was all the louder Don could stand the whining! About 10 miles down the road Don asks by radio if anyone has a grease gun. He wanted to grease up the clutch bearing and the U joint. The suggestion was made to Google a repair shop in the area and call to see if they had one. Sure enough we found a truck repair shop about 5 miles from Mt. Storm (aptly named) and right along the highway. We pulled in and Don spoke with a young fellow named Craig who threw open the huge bay door and guided Don as he drove his coupe over one of the many grease pits.



When we walked inside we were amazed at the enormity of the place. Biggest Man Cave ever! Huge dump trucks and rollbacks just on the side we could see! The place reeked of diesel fuel and grease. We were sure this young fellow had a grease gun or three! I introduced Don as a guy that used to sell truck parts and Don then told him about the Keller truck part company. Jon quickly chimed in with “and this is Mr. Keller”! After that introduction, Don and Craig started talking about all the folks they knew in the truck business whilst the rest of us just stood around amazed. After a matter of minutes we were ready to say our goodbyes and I asked Craig when the snow might stop. He said get to the bottom of the “hill” and it will all be over and darn if he wasn’t right. We rolled into Winchester ready for lunch under grey skies and dry pavement. I had mentioned to Laurie to find a Chick-fil-A in Winchester and she found one that was a half-mile walk from the parking lot deep in the bowels of the Greater Winchester Medical Center! We walked past ICU’s, PICU’S, Advanced Cardiac units, the Morgue, up elevators, down elevators, past patients lying on gurneys till we finally asked someone and they pointed us in the direction of the cafeteria. Eureka! We found it! Thanks Laurie it was worth it! In case you were wondering it was just as hard to find our way back to the cars in the parking lot! Good news was that Don reported that his car’s transmission actually sounded better – not better than ever just better than before! So with that news we hopped back in the cars rolled over the Shenandoah, past Harpers Ferry and over the Potomac to the Little Red Barn Ice Cream Café in Jefferson, Md. They have the biggest single scoops ever and our resident ice cream connoisseur gave the place a big thumbs up! It was here

that we said our final good byes and Jon and I agreed to follow Don home to ensure that the coupe arrived home safely. With Don's state of mind who knows what he might have done with it! At Don's house we ensured that it was put away safely in his garage and then made our way home.

Epilogue

So ends the tale of five hardy and hale travelers (especially you Don) and their 4 trusty Model A's. Not only did they cross the mountains once bur twice in all kinds of trying weather. Hats off to them and their wonderful driving machines! Even yours Don!!