

TRIP TO CHINCOTEAGUE, VIRGINIA
14-17 MAY 2014

Story by Jon Miller

Photos by Jon Miller & Steve Meyer

Prologue

Our creative Activities Director, Steve Meyer, had planned this May 2014 club trip to Chincoteague back in December 2013. Butch Cornes secured our hotel rooms but, unfortunately, at the last minute was unable to participate. Our planned day of departure was 14 May with all day devoted to a leisurely drive from central Maryland to Chincoteague, Virginia. Steve's brother, TJ, works for NASA at their Wallops Island facility and helped Steve in arranging an all-day tour of this facility on 15 May. For 16 May, Steve had planned a tour of the Ker House historic mansion in Onancock, VA to be followed by lunch at the Mallards at the Wharf restaurant before driving to the Chatham Vineyards in Machipongo, VA for a winery tour and wine tasting. We would drive home on 17 May. We had invited the Susquehanna Valley Region Model A club to join us for this tour and 14 members of their club planned on driving to Chincoteague on 14 May, joining us for the NASA tour on 15 May, and then driving back home on 16 May.

As the date of departure drew near, the weather forecast became more and more ominous. Severe storms were forecast to hit the mid-Atlantic region sometime during 15-16 May and we all became concerned about driving our Model A's on this trip. Since the Susquehanna Valley club had the furthest to drive, and would be driving back to Pennsylvania during the forecast height of the storm on 16 May, they elected to drive modern cars to Chincoteague and leave their Model A's at home. After much discussion among our club participants who were driving their cars (Steve Meyer, Jon Miller, Ken Godfrey, Milton Hartig, and Dave Kehne), we concluded that since we were not going to be driving back to Maryland until after the storm was forecast to have passed, we elected to drive our Model A's to Chincoteague.

14 May 2014

All the intrepid travelers met at Steve's house in Clarksville to assemble for the trip. The ever-ebullient Bud Carroll would be riding with Steve and providing his excellent navigation skills to lead our group through the traffic-choked streets between Clarksville and the Bay Bridge until we could reach clear sailing on the roads of the Eastern Shore where he would then navigate us to the Best Western Plus hotel on Chincoteague Island. Nancy Godfrey accompanied husband Ken and was a wonderful source of knowledge for many aspects of our sightseeing along the way. The seven of us then departed Steve's house and began our four-day adventure.

All was well for the first 60 minutes. However, my car began running progressively worse as we continued towards the Bay Bridge. I had replaced my faulty side-bowl Zenith carburetor with my spare regular Zenith about a week before the trip and, during my pre-trip road tests, it seemed to be performing as it should. However, as I drove, it was clear that something was wrong and that the engine seemed starved for fuel. No GAV or spark advance adjustments made any difference and, by the time we reached the Naval Academy, I had experienced severe rough running and several large backfires, one of which is evident by the new, and noticeable, bulge in my muffler. I signaled the other guys to pull over and was ready to return home and transfer to my modern car to continue the trip. The consensus of my traveling companions was to try to get to our first planned fuel stop where we could try to diagnose, and then fix, what was wrong. I agreed and chugged and popped for the next several miles to the Exxon station just before the Bay Bridge. Once there, after listening to the engine, Bud, Milton, Dave, and Ken thought that I had a blockage of some sort in my carburetor and should swap out the carb. Steve was carrying a spare carb and we put it on my car. When I connected the gas line to the carb, it was instantly clear that the float valve on Steve's carb was stuck open so I removed the carb from the car after tapping it with a hammer did not unstick the float valve. Milton knew exactly what to do and, in a fury of moving fingers, had disassembled the carb, adjusted the float mounting mechanism, and put it back together again. I then reinstalled the carb and it worked perfectly! I was back on the road and my car was running great! Onwards to Chincoteague!

The remainder of the drive to Chincoteague was uneventful (always a good thing!) and had us arriving at our hotel on schedule at about 4 pm. The Susquehanna Valley club members had already arrived and

came down to the parking lot to greet us. The hotel had reserved parking places for our Model A's so we had a dedicated place to park and to permit the other guests to easily look at all of our cars. All 21 people of our travelling group then made our way to AJ's restaurant just a short drive from the hotel for a nice dinner and great opportunity to relax and chat.

15 May 2014

A beautiful sunrise harkened a great day for our visit to Wallops Island. After breakfast, we got our cars running and proceeded to the NASA Visitor Center for our private tour. We then proceeded to the Balloon Program office for a detailed and highly entertaining briefing followed by a visit to NASA's Range Control Center where we learned some of the processes and procedures invoked prior to a rocket launch from Wallops Island. Following this presentation, those of us who drove our Model A's stayed with our cars in the parking lot to show them to NASA employees and answer their questions before we had lunch in the Chesapeake Room of the NASA cafeteria. After lunch, we had a tour of the Aircraft Hangar with a discussion of how some of the flights over Greenland and the Antarctic were conducted. A very interesting day with NASA! Special thanks to TJ Meyer for all his assistance in coordinating this visit!

Since there were still about two hours before our dinner reservation, we decided to take our Model A's for a drive to Assateague Island and stop by the Visitor Center and then take a drive on the Wildlife Loop. One of the highlights of the Visitor Center was their "Eagle Cam" watching the nest of a Bald Eagle and two fledglings almost ready to leave the nest. Mother Nature sure is amazing! Following this, we drove onto the beach road on Assateague Island and drew many onlookers once we had parked literally in the sand just next to the beach. It seemed like each one of us had a group of people who were interested in our cars, or at least wanted to know why we were driving them next to the beach! Lots of fun!

For dinner, our large group went to Bill's Seafood Restaurant, proclaimed by many as the best seafood restaurant in Chincoteague. I would not argue this point as my dinner was fantastic. Another great opportunity for fellowship with friends in the Susquehanna Valley club! After dinner, some of us were tempted by the lure of ice cream at a little shop on our way back to the hotel. Our cars attracted much attention when we pulled into the parking lot and we then showed them off to quite a few onlookers. The day being just about done, most of us went back to the hotel to get a good night's rest before the next day's activities.

16 May 2014

Well, as we came to breakfast in the hotel, we could see that the forecast storm had arrived as predicted. It was raining ferociously along with almost gale-force winds and deep standing water in many places along the road and in the hotel parking lot. The Susquehanna club folks were packing up to depart for home and knew they would be driving for several hours in the brunt of the storm. We said our goodbyes and wished our friends a safe trip back home to Pennsylvania. For those of us in our Model A's, we decided that we would proceed with our planned activities. After breakfast, we hopped into our Model A's and departed for Onancock and our planned visit to historic Ker Place, a 1799 Federal plantation home listed on the National Register. It soon became clear that most of our cars were not as watertight as we had thought or hoped. The rain was torrential and, with the high winds, made visibility very poor. We now know why defrosters were invented! My vacuum wiper worked flawlessly as designed but could not keep up with the onslaught of water on the windshield. My windshield leaked extensively as did the roof seam (which I thought I had completely sealed after my previous drive in a monsoon—I guess not!) and my front carpeting became soaked. Having two rolls of paper towels on board proved to be a smart idea! Our group of five Model A's finally made it to Onancock in spite of the very poor visibility of road signs so we parked and visited a small café to get a morning snack since we were a bit early for our tour of Ker Place. After the snack, we drove to the Ker Place historic mansion and had a great tour (we were the only visitors at the time). Since the torrential rain was continuing to fall, we skipped the outside tour of the gardens and spent more time inside asking questions of our tour guide.

Following this great tour, we proceeded to drive to the planned restaurant for lunch. Lo and behold, when we got there, the parking lot was under water and the restaurant was closed due to flooding. We quickly drove up a hill away from the restaurant as I could see the water actually rising and getting closer to where our cars had stopped. Steve and Bud then began looking out for another restaurant as we began driving out of town. Just a short distance away, they found one with a number of police cars parked out

front. We figured this must be a good place to eat and so it was! Plus, while we were having a great lunch, the rain stopped! The remainder of the day could only get better!

After lunch, we drove to the Chatham Vineyards in Machipongo for a tour and wine tasting. The owner of the vineyard owns a Model T and Model A truck as well as some other antique vehicles. After the wine tasting and quick tour of the winery, the owner's wife took us to their barn to show us the Model T and Model A trucks. We had a nice time discussing the origins of the vineyard and how both trucks are still used for chores around the place. Before we departed, the owner of the vineyard arrived and we showed him our cars and told him that his wife had showed us his antique trucks. Milton also gave him a copy of the current Brattons catalogue since he was unfamiliar with this source of Model A parts. Since we were a bit behind schedule now, and wanted to arrive back at our hotel before dark, we canceled our plans for dinner at a local seafood restaurant and simply stopped at a McDonalds along the way for dinner. This proved to be a smart idea since we did not arrive back at the hotel until minutes before dark.

17 May 2014

We departed our hotel around 8 am and decided to travel a different route home than we took coming to Chincoteague. The weather was beautiful and driving with all the windows open gave each of our cars a chance to dry out a bit from the previous day's drenching. Our drive home took us to the tiny town of Whitehaven where we had to cross the Wicomico River via a three-car ferry (the ferry has operated at that spot since 1685) to get to the town. Once we had all crossed, the proprietor of the Whitehaven Hotel saw our cars and asked if she could take some pictures of the cars in front of her hotel in exchange for her giving us a tour of the hotel. We readily agreed! The fully restored hotel has been in operation since 1810, catering to passing steamships and stagecoaches and now more modern travelers, and is part of the Maryland Historical Trust. The proprietor then asked if we could give a ride in one of our cars to her elderly mother who lived just down the street. I took the proprietor in my car and Milton took her mother in his car and both ladies were quite thrilled with their rides, albeit short ones since the tiny town is only about two blocks long and wide. We then continued on our way driving through the very scenic Eastern Shore countryside. We stopped for lunch in Denton and made our final gasoline stop just after crossing the Bay Bridge. For our final travel leg, we continued on to Steve's house for a stretch break and for Steve and I to say goodbye to Ken, Nancy, Bud, Dave, and Milton who then continued uneventfully back home.

Epilogue

This was a great four-day trip and, once again, many thanks to Steve for arranging it. Thanks again to Butch for securing the hotel rooms. I think we all had our year's supply of driving in the rain and going through deep standing water on the road and continuously wiping the inside of the windshield. I learned how easy it is to change a carburetor on the side of the road and how important it is to carry spare parts! We also know that the sturdy Model A is not fazed by torrential downpours (our engines purred and brakes worked fine) and the interior dries out pretty quickly when wet! I am again reminded how much of an improvement in transportation the Model A was when introduced as it certainly is more comfortable than riding a horse and much faster than riding in a wagon. We had a great time with our friends from the Susquehanna Valley Region Model A club and had the opportunity to see some great historical places in Virginia and Maryland. This truly was a great trip and I am eagerly looking forward to the next one!