

Days 77 – 82

Had an uneventful time driving from Santa Fe up to Colorado Springs. Interestingly, as you cross into Colorado from New Mexico, there's an immediate speed limit reduction concurrent with an elevation drop through the mountains. This area was clearly serving as a revenue generator in that the troopers were out in force, writing tickets left and right. After so many days in a desert environment (ever since halfway between Crater Lake and Yosemite, other than the Monterey and Big Sur areas), it was a relief to get near Colorado Springs and see green trees and grass growing naturally. You could feel the humidity in the air as well. I was invited to stay overnight with Bob Cowan and his wife Michelle, who live in sight of Pike's Peak. We had a pizza for dinner and chatted for hours about cars and things. Bob has a stout car which he regularly tracks and instructs with nasa-Rocky Mountain, with Michelle crewing and providing logistics support; they were class champions last season.

In the morning, the Cowans headed north in their cobra to a car show commitment in Denver, while I headed up to Pikes Peak. As I filled up with gas and diet coke near the base of the mountain, saw a gaggle of hot air balloons taking off in the morning coolness. Very pretty (see pic). Got to the mountain early and had a virtual traffic free run (more like a walk) up to the top. Some portions of the climb take your breath away with the sharp drop offs at the edge of the road. There's a bunch of very tight switchbacks as well. Beautiful views from the peak. I did feel a slight dizziness given the lack of oxygen due to the altitude, probably exacerbated by unintentionally holding my breath during some of the more challenging sections of the upper climb. By the way, if you haven't yet seen the YouTube video of Sebastian Loeb's record setting run up Pikes Peak during last July's race meeting, you have to watch it. I was astounded when I watched it several months ago, but now that I've driven the road myself it's even more awe inspiring.

The rest of the day was spent in a straight forward drive up to route 70, and the eastward run to the Lawrence Kansas lake house for a day with the in laws. It was very hot and sunny with a cloudless sky, and after about a 625 mile day I was pretty loopy by time I arrived at about 10 at night. Following my iPhone directions in the dark, I turned onto a country road that appeared to be the normal way out to the lake. Then I entered a Twilight Zone experience for about a half hour, as the road I was on was about 2 miles west of the road I thought I was on. Everything was similar to what I was used to, but slightly different. Went up and down the road several times before calling the in laws, where upon it took us all awhile to figure out that I was in fact on the next road down. Really a weird, disorienting experience.

Spent a relaxing day sitting on the dock, tubing, reading, eating, and washing down the car/checking it over. The hot weather had broken the day before, and the day was extremely comfortable, as it would prove to be the rest of the trip-I made the correct decision to head north after Phoenix. Took off for home on Labor Day, stopping in Kansas City to visit with a high school friend. Fairly boring run across route 70, stopping for the night in Effingham Illinois at one of those cheapo 'coupon' hotels. While gassing up in St. Louis, this bubbly petite young woman came over to fawn all over the car, as well as invade my personal space. I was about to thank her, but inform her that I was married; then she said "I just knew it was a cobra and I told my husband that I'd come over to verify". Hubby was over at his car gassing it up. For a moment, I had forgotten that given my age, looks, and temperament most women treat me "as if I'm smeared in chick repellent", as my humorous friend Don likes to joke (I think he's joking). Also met a guy named Rick B, who wants to build an FFR in the worst way. He appeared to be a little bit on the fence, not really sure if he could get it done. I recommended he go to build school and

convinced him that it was definitely doable (for about the 20th time on the trip, I used the phrase “if I could do it, you can do it”).

The final day on the road was uneventful. Mostly cool enough to have my heater providing a comfortable driving environment. The mountain run through West Virginia and Western Maryland in the dark was actually kind of fun. While stopped at a rest area, I texted fellow FFR forum member Magnus that I was approaching Hagerstown, expecting to drive to his house. Twenty minutes later as I’m coming down a hill on route 70 up pops a text “right behind you”. What fun! Magnus had stalked me from an on ramp and then chased me down. We pulled off at the next exit to talk and snack at a McDonald’s. How fitting that my trip end with yet another meeting with an FFR owner. We parted and 70 miles later, I was home.

Trip Factoids and Observations:

- Trip Mileage: 14,900 in the Cobra (while Dave Smith can’t use that term, I can), and 1,000 miles in my brother’s Camry.
- Fuel cost: you can figure it out (I don’t want to) using an average of 21 mpg and \$3.75 per gallon
- Mechanical issues on the trip: flasher relay gone bad in Illinois (replaced in Phoenix), windshield crack in Grand Tetons
- I don’t want to offend any users of them, and I know they’re enjoyable once you get to your destination, but in my view motorhomes and trailers are a blight upon the nation. The average one I saw during the trip was of huge proportions. The trailers seemed to be typically oversized for the chassis/tires they rolled on. There must have been 10 or 20 thousand unsold copies of them stored on the many huge RV sale lots dotting the country. Foreigners must think “what are these crazy Americans doing, driving around the country in their huge trucks towing their house, or driving their house and towing their car/truck?” The fuel consumption must be enormous but the real problem is that their drivers sometimes fail to show common courtesy to other road users; clogging up the parks and campgrounds, failing to use the turnouts and thus holding up long lines of other drivers; excruciatingly long 0.5 mph speed differential passing on the interstates.....But, it’s a free country and they pay road taxes so what are you gonna do?
- Rear tire nearing wear bars after 24,000 miles
- Amount of air needed to be added to tires on trip (other than erroneously by Sturgis mechanic during an oil change-immediately reversed): Zero
- As I noted before, the central/northern part of America that I visited is one giant farm, periodically interrupted by a town or city
- During the summer vacation months, entry/visits to national parks are a lot more enjoyable if you get there first thing in the morning
- Michigan has a great set of State Parks
- Oregon in summer is gorgeous.
- Most of the west is currently experiencing some level of drought.
- The greater LA area gets more crowded each passing year
- The FFR builders I met were a universally nice, capable bunch; and tend to share a common political/social outlook.
- America is a friendly place – had literally a thousand conversations with strangers, of all colors and races; typically started by either “what kind of car is that?” or “is that a real one?”

- A smart phone is an invaluable tool while on the road. Paper maps are superfluous, except for sometimes getting the big picture.
- Having access to the forums and social media meant I was never really alone and help was just an email/call away (other than during the occasional “no service” areas). I really appreciated all the offers of help, provisions of places to stay, companionship experienced, and positive feedback to my “travelogue”.
- What an absolutely awesome, fun trip; exceeding my expectations in all areas!
- Bucket list item: