

Our failed attempt to attend the 2009 CHVA tour

The car, my 1972 Pontiac Luxury LeMans had been performing fine for more than a year. Last year we drove it to the Pontiac Oakland Club Convention in Spearfish,ND and had no problems with the car. This year we attended a car show in Albuquerque[a 300 mile round trip] again with no problems. It seemed car problems were not going to be an issue on this trip.

On 15JN09 at 7:30AM we met Harry and Dolly at their motel in

Socorro,NM, topped off the fuel tanks and headed East on US60. Harry and Dolly became impatient with the 55mph speed limit and at Willard,NM headed North toward I-40. We made arrangements to meet the next morning in Oklahoma City and wished each other bon voyage.

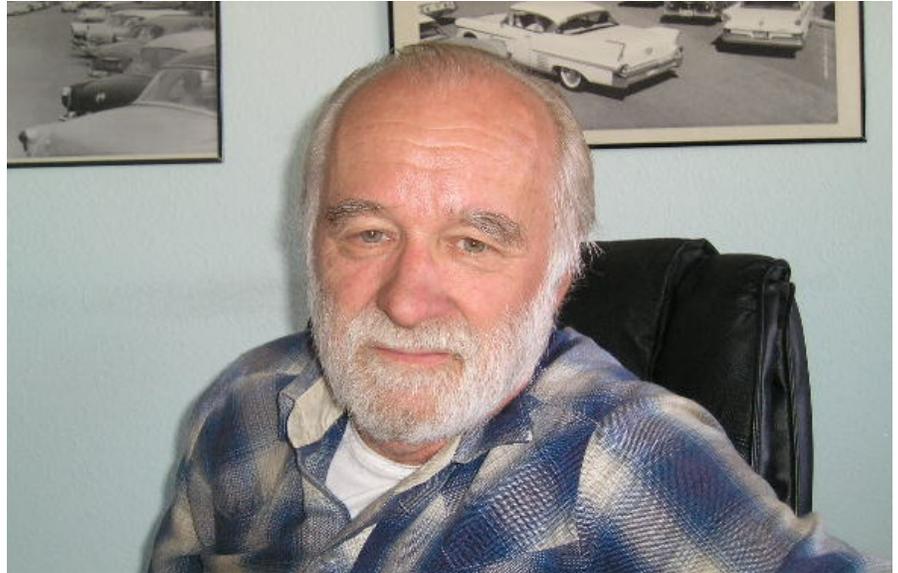
Our 2nd gas stop was in Hereford,TX where the car belched out a considerable amount of coolant while stopped, UH OH! We continued on with no indication of problem until the next gas stop in Erick,OK exit 7 on I-40. I remember it well. After filling up I noticed a modest amount of coolant on the pavement but when I started the car the TEMP light was on. It is about 4:00PM and we are about an hour from our planned stop. My thinking was to add some water, try to get the motel in Weatherford and decide what to do from there. I found a source of water at the Loves gas station we were at and parked as close as I could get.

I have been messing around with cars for 50 years and have dealt with this situation many times. You turn the radiator cap to its first stop. This allows the pressure to disperse and you can then remove the cap and add water. Well, it initially blew out steam and coolant but after a few minutes reduced down to a fizzle [or what I thought was a fizzle]. In spite of Birdie's exclamations 'don't do it you idiot' I removed the cap.

I expected maybe a poof. What I got was a geyser that caught me in the chest and stomach [not my face fortunately] and I collapsed on the pavement in pain and shock. The geyser continued for perhaps 5 seconds or more and a kid leaving the store caught some of the coolant but was too far away to get burned. I pulled off my shirt and folks gathered around with water and ice and someone called 911.

The ambulance took us to Sayre, OK a town 16 miles further East and to a small hospital. The pain up till now was bearable but as time went on the rating went from 6 to 7 to 8 to 9 and they finally administered some pain relief through an IV while a nurse practitioner assessed the situation, consulted with the burn center in Oklahoma City and finally decided to helicopter me to Integris Hospital in Oklahoma City another 130 miles East.

Now the problem was; How was Birdie going to get to Oklahoma City? There is no room in the helicopter; this is a small town, no car rental agencies, no public transportation. One of the hospital staff made futile calls to Ok City car rental agencies but none would pick up at that distance. Finally



Birdie announced that someone has a nephew with a car that wants to make some money and that produced someone's boyfriend who for \$200 and a tank of gas drove her back to the LeMans to get our luggage and on to Ok City to a motel, walking distance from the hospital. She arrived at about 11:30PM and collapsed. By then I was sleeping soundly with painkillers and sleeping aids in my private room in the hospital. My diagnosis was 2nd degree burns so no need for skin grafts, I would heal in about 2 weeks.

Now while I was still in the little hospital in Sayre I called a friend and asked him if he was up to a trip to Oklahoma to pick up the car. He responded yes and I told him how to get Birdie's truck and my trailer and how to hook them up. He recruited another friend and they assembled the truck and trailer that night and left at 4:00AM the next morning and arrived in Erick at about 2:00PM.

Earlier that morning I woke up to an excellent breakfast. Shortly thereafter Birdie showed up and we discussed a new dilemma. Birdie had the keys to the LeMans and the LeMans is in Erick and it can't be loaded on the trailer without the keys. A little while later my son from Cleveland and my daughter from Fayetteville, NC showed up. Collectively we decided that Birdie would rent a car one way to Albuquerque, Lee, my son, would make the 300 mile round trip to Erick to deliver the keys to my friends and we would take the car home whenever I was released from the hospital. He made it to Eric at about 3:00PM and he drove the LeMans on the trailer. My friends started back immediately and drove straight through back home even though I told them I would cover their motel and meals. Later back in OK City Birdie, Lee and Deanne, my daughter, had a nice meal at an Outback restaurant.

I was release from the hospital the next morning and Birdie thought I should rest a day before starting home. This time I listened. I was uncomfortable with the bandages because whenever I moved the shifting of the bandages would hurt but when I remained still there was no pain so I didn't need any medication although I did get the prescription filled.

We left Ok City the next morning, Thursday, stopped overnight in Vaughan, NM and arrived home Friday at about 11:00AM. We immediately did the 4 hour round trip to Albuquerque to return the rental and the ordeal was finally over at about 3:00PM.

Tom and Birdie Stacey
Roadrunners of Southern New Mexico.

