

POSTCARD FROM THE USA

The Alan and Lois Haime/Tony and Marny Howe “long distance driving team” (the same that did 3,000 miles on Route 66 after the Buick Nationals) once again headed to the USA with the plan of driving from the north-eastern states down the east coast to the most southern tip of the USA, Key West in Florida (naturally in a Buick). A visit to the car meets at Carlisle and Hershey was also part of the agenda.

After a few hectic days in New York getting through our “to do” list which included going up the Empire State building, visiting Ground Zero, walking through Central Park, visiting Harlem, Chinatown, Greenwich Village, taking a boat trip around Manhattan, seeing the dinosaur display at the Museum of Natural History and catching a Broadway show, we caught a cab out from Manhattan to the National Car Rental office at La Guardia Airport. Initially we chose a Buick LaCrosse but later turned it in on a Buick LeSabre which had a much roomier boot in preparation for shopping at Carlisle and Hershey.



View from the Empire State Building

Leaving the built up area of New York State, it was nice to head to Cape Cod, Vermont and through the Adirondack Mountains. This northern area was very picturesque with covered bridges, quilt museums and the start of the fall colours on the trees. Luckily we headed south before very heavy rains hit the north-east resulting in severe flooding.

At Carlisle, Pennsylvania the town was gearing up for the big car meet. While modern day Carlisle is famous for the car show/meet, it is also famous for its military history, an army barracks being established here in 1757. The US Army

War College was relocated here in 1951 as the Army's senior educational institution. Such wartime heroes such as General Normal Schwarzkof, General Matthew Ridgway, General Omar Bradley, General George Patton and President Dwight Eisenhower all received training here.

Every large truck in the USA seemed to be bearing down on Carlisle as vendors and goods arrived. On the afternoon of 28 September we deposited our luggage in a nearby motel and headed to the showgrounds. Most vendors were still setting up but some Buick sellers were tracked down from the excellent maps provided, shopping lists were produced and buying commenced. Car manuals were definitely a good buy. The afternoon was very warm and humid so it was decided a cooling ale would settle the dust once we left the showground. Never let anyone say that Australia has outdated licensing laws - Australia is positively liberated compared to the US. It seems if a restaurant has "family" in its title, you can bet your boots they won't sell a beer! We did manage to find an "Applebees" which is a franchise bar/grill and which we knew from previous occasions, served good food and a cold beer. It took twice as long to get back to the motel because of one-way roads (which weren't there when we drove to the restaurant) and roads splitting into Y-shaped intersections.

The next day the heavens opened and down it came. Luckily we could buy ponchos inside the showground and splash happily around, keeping mainly dry. Early Auto (magazine) had a pavilion of cars for sale, in particular an immaculate 1965 white Riviera which looked as though it had just come off the production line - for \$US20K.

Car covers were purchased and all sorts of things which all of a sudden seemed to just about fill the Le Sabre's trunk.

The organisers of Carlisle definitely deserve a pat on the back. The maps of vendors stalls were easy to follow, toilets were plentiful, great food stalls were dotted everywhere and the literature on cars was incredible.

To fill in time between Carlisle and Hershey we visited nearby Gettysburg battlefield again. We had all been there on previous visits but I think something extra is gained at every visit. The lay out and monuments are very evocative of the tragedy that took place over those few days.

The visit to Hershey and beyond will take place at the next "Postcard".

Some car news

Those who visited at Flint in 2003 and went to the Hamtramck engine plant will recall seeing the new dark red Buick Rainier four-wheel drive on the forecourt. Spotted a few of these in parking areas, they are definitely one big stylish looking SUV. What a pity they aren't imported into Australia, they would definitely give the rice rockets a run for their money.

A car fashion trend in the US is the return of the "woodie". Woodie application is seen on everything from SUVs to PT Cruisers. Saw a 50s Buick woodie which looked great.

Another head turner is the new Chevy ute. Like the PT Cruiser, this has an almost comic book look about it but Chev will be on a winner with this one.

Police cars in Pennsylvania which at the moment are all colours and obviously being mistaken for other agencies, have decided to return to the traditional black-and-white. The state has ordered a bunch of white Chevies (at the moment most police cars are Ford Crown Victorias - probably the equivalent of our Fairlane) and are planning to have the black bits painted on them.

More from the USA later

L. Haime (WA Buicks)



New York's Times Square from the top of a double decker tourist bus