

Route 66 – Detour in Arizona.

The Haimes and Howes, still wending their way down Route 66 after the Buick Centenary had now reached Flagstaff, Arizona. The blokes decided that seeing we were so close to TA Performance in Scottsdale (like about five hours drive!) we should head off Route 66 and swing a left south down towards Phoenix. TA Performance make performance parts for Buicks, especially ones like Alan Haime's 1970 Stage One. The route was very scenic through mountains to Sedona and then to the weird little silver mining town of Jerome, perched on the side of a mountain. We picked up the I10 near Phoenix and managed to negotiate the ring road around Phoenix. A tall tower with huge LED readout alternated with the time and temperature - namely 3 p.m. and 111 ° F. Luckily our Buick had great air conditioning.

We checked in at Tucson, realising that it was the weekend and we would have to wait until Monday before we could visit TA Performance. To fill in time we planned our sightseeing and our first visit was to the Titan Space Museum after having a quick look at the San Xavier Mission, one of a chain of Spanish missions swinging across the country from California. We donned hard hats and went underground at the missile site. This was from the cold war era when they were really playing for keeps. If they had to fire a missile the staff had 30 days of food, water and air. They expected to surface to find everything destroyed so it was a tossup whether to even bother coming up to the surface. Nowadays the missile was in situ but the warhead was stored away elsewhere. About three metres depth of concrete cylinder surrounded the missile. The huge covering lid was fixed half open so that satellites passing over now could see that the site was inoperable.



An early "Stage 1" in Tombstone!

The day was developing into a real boiler. We headed off to Tombstone which is very touristy but is still good fun. Its possible to visit the OK Corral and witness how the famous shootout took place. They had no shortage of eyewitnesses to the event. The town hasn't been modernised and apart from vehicles, looks very much like a 19th century frontier town. The old newspaper office, the Tombstone Epitaph was interesting to browse through and you can actually buy a copy of the edition which ran the news of the shootout at OK Corral. Stagecoaches and horses clatter through the streets and women are dressed as saloon girls and men as cowboys and drifters. One tall gent dressed as a US Marshall tipped his hat to me and said "Ma'am." I was about to drop my handkerchief but only had a crumpled tissue which somehow didn't seem the same.

The old courthouse had a magnificent display of photos from the old mining days and also the events that led to the capture of Geronimo. He and his small band certainly gave the local army a run for their money. We stopped for a quick look at Boot Hill just outside town and on a cooler day would have been tempted to browse through the gravestones, however it was never an option on this day.

Lunch was in one of the old buildings on the main street. Naturally we all ordered far too much, would we never learn? One American sandwich has half a cow in it.



The Tombstone Epitaph has been in operation for over 100 years.

The drive back to Tucson was quite spectacular with brooding scenery, lightning and the odd splash of rain. On arrival at our motel the six-packs were broached and the dust and heat of the day settled. We were all still full from lunch so it was all we could do to walk to the nearby Waffle House and have waffles with maple syrup and coffee.

The next day we drove to the Pima Air Base and sat in a little trolley as it drove around their collection of aircraft of all ages and from everywhere. Tony with his aircraft background was in his element. We headed across the road to the Davis-Monthan Airbase where about 20,000 planes are stored in the dry Arizona air. Some are wrapped in a white plastic coating to protect them from the fierce heat. Australia would probably give its back teeth just to head through with a shopping list. It makes you very aware of the enormous wealth of the US that they can just stockpile such aircraft.

Security was very tight as George Dubya's Airforce One was actually on the tarmac at the base. He was up in the mountains in a helicopter inspecting recent fire damage. All aircraft was banned from the area and we saw him return in his chopper to the base. Airforce One was about a kilometre from our bus.

The next day we headed north for Scottsdale and the blokes fossicked around in a couple of wrecking yards. We eventually reached TA Performance and for those interested in having a really fast Buick, their address is 16167 N 81st Street, Scottsdale, Arizona 85260, telephone (480) 922-6807, fax (480) 922-6811. Alan and Tony hopped inside TA and disappeared from sight. Alan managed to order a heap of stuff that he "really needed". Marny and I sat in the car under a tree which had about six leaves and sweltered. It was time to head further north back to Route 66. We called in at some old pueblo ruins called Montezuma's castle and eventually returned to Flagstaff and Route 66.