

## SEATTLE TO FLINT

Thanks to the enthusiasm of Alan and Lois Haime, a group of us from Western Australia secured accommodation in Flint for the centennial Celebrations at a very early stage.

My attending this event was an on again off again proposition what with the fluctuating Aussie Dollar, wars in the middle east and general work commitments (not to mention trying to restore a 1950 Buick)

I am in frequent contact via email with Bill Stoneberg from Houston Texas. He has helped me with the restoration of the 50 as he is currently restoring a similar vehicle. Bill is also the President of the Lone Star State Chapter of the BCA. At one stage he was organising what they refer to as a "caravan" to attend the Centennial Meet. This fell through because of Bill's work commitments but I had become keen on the idea of joining one of the American BCA Chapter caravans heading to Flint.



Being a BCA member and receiving the Bugle, I kept up to date with what caravans were being put together. The Cascade Chapter intended to drive Seattle to Flint, a distance of about 2,500 miles.

I contacted the organiser, Brian Lawrence and received the following response:

**Dear Stuart,**

**We can indeed provide transportation for you to Flint! We have been actively seeking passengers from Australia and New Zealand, but have not yet heard from anyone who is looking for a ride.**

I will forward additional information to you when I have a few more moments this weekend, but we can offer you a ride with a single male (age 60) in a very fine original 1947 Special sedan or with a very nice older couple driving a newly-restored 1955 Super convertible. We have someone who is willing to greet you at Seattle's airport and host you at their home for a couple days.

We will leave the Seattle area for Flint on Thursday morning, July 17. The drive is approximately 2,500 miles, and we have a wonderful adventure planned.

I will be in contact.

Regards,

Brian Laurance, BCA #5168

It was decided I should ride with the single male in his original 1947 sedan. The single male wound up being a great bloke by the name of John Stewart. He had lived all his life in Seattle and had worked for Boeing most of his working life.

John volunteered to pick me up from the Seattle airport, he said he would wear a Hawaiian shirt so I could recognise him.



I arrived safely at Seattle and sure enough there was John in his Hawaiian shirt. Had to wait a fair while for my bag, when it arrived it had a tag on it and a nice little note from the Homeland Security people saying they had been through it, and if it had been locked they had forced it open, and they accepted no responsibility for broken locks!!!

Things looked up though once we got to the carpark. John had decided to pick me up in the 55 Riviera, a lovely car which turned heads on the drive to John's home, about 15 miles north of the city.

John was pretty excited about the drive to Flint and was taking his 15 year old grandson for the trip. He had purchased a 1965 vintage camper trailer and intended staying at camping grounds on the trip so I took over the motel rooms he had previously booked.

Day 1 we were packed and on the road by about 5.30, heading for a prearranged meeting place on the outskirts of Seattle. Arrived there in time to have a Maccas for breakfast and then meet the other travellers. Some really magnificent Buicks were intending to make the trek. In all about 35 cars left Seattle with others to join on the way through various states.

The oldest car to leave Seattle was a 1909 Model, in a trailer, and the oldest to travel the entire distance under its own steam was a 1931 model 96C Convertible Coupe.



The trip took us on the following route:

Thursday, July 17, 2003:

Seattle, Washington to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho  
300 Miles

This saw us travelling through beautiful mountain country and traversing mountain passes. John pointed out one pass where they had an old army tank stationed so they could fire a few rounds into snow held precariously on the mountainside and prevent build-up and subsequent large avalanche potential. I thought he was pulling my leg but apparently this is a true story.

Mountains and Buick fuel consumption are not a good mix, about 10MPG in the 47 that day.

There was a car show organised at Coeur d'Alene in conjunction with a local car club and the Buick dealership. It was about 100 degrees in the waterbag but a lot of really interesting cars joined us and the local Mayor made a speech. We all then headed to a famous restaurant called the Hot Rod Café in Post Falls about 10 miles away.



Someone had pulled some strings and organised a Police escort all the way, which was pretty fortunate as we went in convey all behind the 1909 doing about 35MPH.

The Coors was pretty good

Friday, July 18, 2003:

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to Livingstone, Montana  
360 Miles

Still more uphill passes and long climbs which were hard on the older cars, and some of the newer ones. Temperatures were still in the high eighties and the 47 was running quite hot. John's solution when I pointed this out to him while I was driving was to turn on the heater and use that extra bit of water in the system. Didn't alter the temperature of the motor but it sure warmed things up inside the car.

One of the Rivas did a water pump and had to get it rebuilt at a service station (at great expense).

John had picked up a 1940's accessory air cooler which hung out the rear window. The theory is a bit like a Coolgardie safe and the expectation was cooler air would be expelled into the car from this contraption. If you consider buying one of these from ebay (they sell for US two or three hundred dollars) don't bother, they don't work, although it was a great conversation piece.

Mountains, heat and Buick fuel consumption aren't a good mix, about 10MPG again.

Accommodation in Livingston was some of the best and the Coors was really cool.

Saturday, July 19, 2003:

Livingstone, Montana to Dickinson, North Dakota  
404 Miles

This was the longest days drive of the trip, and the hottest. Beautiful country through Montana and North Dakota, very reminiscent of the Pilbara region in WA, very hard to imagine it snows in the area for long winter periods.

This is very remote country, sparsely populated yet it's amazing to see non-stop traffic travelling in both directions on the interstate. One thing I noticed about Americans and interstates, they drive very fast on them.

I missed the fuel stop while having my turn at the wheel. John reckoned we should turn around and go back but I said, "she'll be right, trust me".



We almost made it (well within 15 miles) but got rescued by a cowboy (Bubbah) who cut across the medium strip (very dangerous illegal activity!!!) in his 1964 International Scout and produced a jerry can with a couple of gallons of gas (petrol).

Now I discovered speed and Buicks aren't a good mix, still about 10MPG, although John was making excuses about running oversize tyres and we had to recalculate and he decided it was closer to 12MPG. John felt better, but the tank was still taking plenty of fuel every stop.

When we got into Dickinson all the paved bitumen in front of the motel had melted. A few people were upset about losing shoes into “ the tar pit “ so the motel management got a bobcat to come along and spread metal dust over it. That really put a nice dust covering over a lot of cars.

The Coors was really cool in Dickinson.



Sunday, July 20, 2003:

Dickinson, North Dakota to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota  
340 Miles

Another long drive and John decided we should make an early start. The temperature was cooler and it was a pretty easy days drive into a very picturesque area. Motel accommodation was good and there was a drivers' meeting held that night. By this stage most people would congregate around the car park and complete daily engine bay checks and some really enthusiastic owners washed/polished their cars. This seemed a bit of a waste to me, they only got dirty the next day!!! The car park get togethers were really social and a lot of tales (some not so believable) were told, mainly about Buicks of course.

It was amazing just how fast the time was passing.

The fuel consumption still didn't seem to improve, must be because we were pulling a trailer (at 65 to 75MPH).

Monday, July 21, 2003:

Detroit Lakes, Minnesota to Ashland, Wisconsin  
300 Miles

More picturesque scenery and of course much more heavily populated areas. As we got closer to Duluth it was evident this is the part of the US where they use salt on the road. The effects on relatively new cars are unbelievable, whole panels just gone. This is not the area to buy a car from. Interesting to see large numbers of pick-ups with snow blades on the front.

The motel in Ashland looked a hundred years old and was quite impressive with views across Lake Superior. In reality it was quite new and had only been built to look old, although, the lift wasn't working so those of us on the third floor had some healthy exercise.

That night there was another meeting as a number of new caravaners had joined us at Ashland and the previous day. There were three other Australians on the Caravan, Dave and Aileen Chaffey from Tasmania and David Gribble from South Australia. We all got to stand up and say what a great time we were having.

Tuesday, July 22, 2003:

Ashland, Wisconsin to St. Ignace, Michigan  
350 Miles

This was another long drive through reasonably well-populated, heavily wooded country and along the western shores of Lake Michigan. Everyone was keen to get to St Ignace early so they could really get into cleaning and polishing the cars. All vehicles in the caravan were still going strong with only minor defects being easily rectified. It was amazing to watch the combined expertise of four or five Buick enthusiasts discuss and solve mechanical problems.

I was running short of clean clothes so opted to make St Ignace a wash stop. Wasn't bad though, filled up the washing machine and wandered between laundry and car park.

The Coors was cold yet again!!

Wednesday, July 23, 2003:

St. Ignace, Michigan to Flint / Grand Blanc, Michigan  
240 Miles

The final day and many very excited caravaners.

There was a very nice 1953 Special Riviera in the group, which was set up the same as my current restoration project. It ran a 263 motor, Dynaflo transmission and 3.6 to 1 rear end and seemed to go pretty well. I was offered a drive, which naturally I had to accept. It was very lively and handled the road well at speed, which dispelled some of the rumours I have heard about the Dynaflo transmission. If mine handles anything like this car did I will be well pleased.

A reception committee had been arranged to meet the caravan at a rest bay about 10 miles before Flint. This included media and representatives from the Buick Club of America. The participants were arranged in year of manufacture order (by this time in excess of 50 cars) and with yet another police escort we headed into the Cultural Centre in Flint to register.

Arriving at Flint the first people I ran into were other Perth Club members, it was nice to talk Australian again!!



The rest is history, the centennial celebrations were great, the hospitality tent was legendary and I am pleased I didn't miss them.

The trip from Seattle to Flint was really a great opportunity and I have made what I am sure are lasting friendships and contacts in the Buick movement.

I am hoping some of the participants will join us in Western Australia for the Australian National Meet next year. Maybe they will be able to join a Sydney to Perth caravan and get to meet Australians and see this country as I saw theirs in the best possible way, from the seat of a Buick!!!!

*Stuart Syme (Western Buicks)*