

First Installment of Route 66 Cruise Report

By Tom Oxler



About 3 years ago, my wife, Terrie, and I started talking about a Route 66 trip with our old 1966 GTO. We had done two other trips in the past with a 1998 Bonneville and Terrie's 2006 GTO but really wanted to do one in the 1966 GTO. For these 3 years, we began researching places to stay, places to eat and sights we wanted to see along the route. Our first decision was to bring on Don and Janice Duryea as we quickly realized we needed Route 66 experts and after viewing the Duryea's Route 66 presentation at the 2017 GTOAA Convention in Springfield, Illinois, we knew Don and Janice were just what the Route 66 Street Legends Cruise needed.

The decision to start the Cruise in Pontiac, Illinois was an easy one since GTOAA sponsors a Pontiac Museum Regional event in late September and we would already have a bunch of Pontiacs and GTOs attending. Also, the weather might be a bit cooler on the old GTOs and Pontiacs when we get into New Mexico and Arizona. Weather was also part of the decision to stop the Cruise in Needles, California as Needles is right at the beginning of the Mojave Desert with a long drive in the desert heat and then the traffic in Los Angeles. Terrie and I had completed the entire route twice before and felt the desert and traffic would not work well with the old GTOs and Pontiacs. Thus, we would touch all seven states on Route 66.



Route 66 Cruise - The Introduction



I presented this idea to the GTOAA Board of Directors and they whole heartedly agreed and authorized the purchase of banner, decals and printing necessary for the trip. We had two decals designed, one for everyone who participated and one for everyone who completed the entire route. We also purchased a banner with the whole route shown that would be used each morning at our Drivers Meeting and group photo showing everyone our progress across Route 66.

Notices and articles appeared in both The Legend and Smoke Signals and the registrations began coming in. We ended up with a total of 56 GTOs and Pontiacs with 104 people signing up for part or all of the GTOAA Route 66 Street Legends Cruise. We averaged 27 cars per day with as many as 35 in any one given day except for days when we were joined by several GTOAA and POCI Chapters along the way.

We ended up with 34 GTOs, 8 Pontiacs, a 1963 ½ Ford, a 1968 Cadillac, several daily drives and 2 motorhomes. The GTOAA turn-out was excellent with 36 of the 56 being members of GTOAA. Although we sent info to just GTOAA and POCI publications, several friends of GTO and Pontiac people were allowed in thus the Ford and Cadillac. Looking at the registrations, we had cars from as far away as South Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, Florida, California, Mississippi, Kansas, Texas, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Wisconsin, Alabama and Nevada.

The turn out for the GTOAA Route 66 Street Legends Cruise was spectacular. The GTOs and Pontiacs were a sight to behold especially on some of the very oldest sections of Route 66. Most of the cars made the entire trip with a few, yours truly, being towed home or having our crack team of Pontiac Mechanics make field repairs. The people attending are what we will all remember as we will all be friends for life. You do not spend 14 days with people without getting to know them and Terrie & I can certainly say we have hundreds of new friends across the country because of the GTOAA Route 66 Street Legends Cruise.



Route 66 Cruise - Day 1 - Sept 17, 2018 Pontiac, IL to Raymond IL



Don & Janice Duryea and Terrie & I arrived in front of the Pontiac Museum in Pontiac, IL to a crowd of 21 GTOs, Pontiacs and daily drivers anxious to get going on the first ever GTOAA Route 66 Street Legends Cruise. Terrie handed out goody bags with our special Street Legends Cruise decals. As we would do every morning before we began, Don & I had our Drivers Meeting where we talked about what we would see and do today and any special instructions needed along the way. We got everyone together and drove over to the Route 66 Mural for our Group picture with our banner showing everyone just where we were.

Mayor Bob Russel and Museum Curator, Tim Dye, escorted our 21 vehicles out of Pontiac in the Mayor's Firebird and



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waved good-bye and we proceeded south on old Route 66. Our first stop was Memory Lane in Lexington, IL. This is a very old section of Route 66 was built in 1926 and recently restored. Notice how narrow the lanes are compared to the Wide Track Pontiacs. Two Pontiacs could not pass each other on this old road for sure.

Our next stop was Sprague's Super Service station in Normal, IL. This is an old Cities Service Station built in 1931 by William Sprague as an independent gas station, restaurant and garage that has been completely restored with a nice gift shop. The owner saw us pull in and opened the gift shop as they are normally closed on Mondays. This is very typical of the renaissance that is taking place on Route 66. Many of the old stations are being refurbished to the way they were 80-90 years ago. The girls all found something in the gift store and especially if the shirts had any bling on them.

Continuing through Bloomington, IL to Funks Grove where again, the owners opened

their maple "sirup" store, yes, that is how they spell it, just for us as they had sold all of their sirup several weeks ago. Funk's Grove was founded in 1824 by Isaac Funk to farm and raise Cattle. The maple trees and the sirup were used for personal use until 1891 when the first sirup store was opened. We got some great pictures and sampled some of the sirup. Not like the stuff you buy at the store.

Our lunch stop was at the Palms Café in Atlanta. The Palms first opened in 1934 on old Route 66 had a great buffet waiting for us with fried chicken and all of the fixings like mashed potatoes and gravy. I mention gravy as this will be a recurring theme throughout our entire trip: fried foods smothered in gravy. During lunch, Atlanta volunteer, Bill Thomas, gave us a very interesting history of Atlanta and the Palms Grill. Everyone had plenty of time to walk around Atlanta where pictures with Paul Bunyan seemed to be the most popular.

After lunch, Don & Janice herded the GTOs and Pontiacs back onto the old route and



bypassed Springfield to get to the older portion of Route 66. Several Cruisers went into Springfield to visit the Lincoln Museum, Home and Grave Site which if you have not seen, are really worth your time. Many of us had seen these sights during the GTOAA National Convention in Springfield, IL in 2017.

We pulled off onto an original 1.4 mile brick portion of old Route 66 that was constructed in 1936. Back in the day, many roads were paved with clay bricks so we all had a chance to drive about a mile on one of the oldest sections still in use.

A few miles down Route 4 (old 66) lies the Turkey Tracks. Legend has it that a flock of turkeys walked across the fresh cement leaving their tracks in the old 12-foot pavement back in 1926. The tracks used to be very hard to find but the Illinois Route 66 Foundation has done a great job of marking just where the Turkey Tracks





are located. They may have done it because many people would knock on the farmer's door asking where they were.

From the Turkey Tracks, we headed towards our Host Hotel, the Magnuson in Raymond, IL for some refreshments and dinner. There were no mechanical issues today but the weather was well into the 90s and most of our motors were running hot, even without air conditioning. However, Tom Kelly broke down on his way to Pontiac so he had his GTO towed home and brought his Toyota Pickup. Rich Vie had to get his A/C repaired as it broke on his way to the Pontiac Museum Regional. Little did Rich know that this would be one of many repair issues he would have to deal with. Dale Grunewaldt had some transmission problems that he found while attending the Pontiac Museum Regional but Alan

Finkenbinder from Pontiac called a local repair shop and Dale was able to get his 67 GTO fixed before we left on Monday morning.

