

Planes, Trains and Antique Automobiles

LuAnn and I recently returned from our annual weeklong car tour (with 127 other vehicles) called Motorloway. It's essentially a 1000-mile RAGBRAI (cross-state bicycle ride) except with pre-1981 vintage automobiles instead of bikes, and motels (thank God) instead of tents.

Since this is Motorloway's 11th year touring the same state, we actually ran out of new towns to visit in Iowa so our itinerary took us to Door County in Wisconsin instead.

Some of the funner things we did were visiting the Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame at Lambeau Field, seeing the world's largest steam locomotive at the National Railroad Museum in Ashwaubenon, touring a WWII submarine at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum in Manitowoc, and riding in a 1927 Swallow biplane ("the world's oldest aircraft available for passenger rides") at the OshKosh Experimental Aircraft Association Museum.

The Motorloway tour has its own daily newsletter (Running Lights) which features the very popular Roadkill Report. Our veteran spotters are adept at telling a mashed muskrat from a squashed squab, although we do have the occasional "mystery mass." One day they identified a flattened left blue tennis shoe, followed two miles later by the right one.

Similarly-named brothers Jon and Lon Christensen from Des Moines were along again in their souped-up '73 Ford Mustang convertible. Just to confuse things, they brought along their brother, Ron. It could have been worse - they have two other brothers, Don and Tom.

Touring is fun, but I'm a germaphobe so I get a little nervous eating at strange restaurants every day for a week. However, one day we ate lunch at the Courthouse Pub in Manitowoc that was so squeaky clean that I didn't want to leave.

Even the bathrooms were spotless, and had every automatic gadget imaginable. If it weren't for the manual nature of my biological plumbing, I wouldn't have had to touch anything while I was in there.

The urinal flushed automatically, the soap dispenser sensed my hands and spat soap onto them, the faucet obligingly sprayed water and the towel dispenser ejected towels when I passed my hand in front of it. Even the waste can had a lid with an infrared sensor that magically raised its top when I waived my paper towel over it. It was heavenly.

Finally I turned toward the inward-opening men's room door and looked in disbelief at the handle. I was standing there comically with my forearms in front of me (palms inward) like a scrubbed surgeon, helplessly looking for a way to exit the restroom without touching the (presumably) germ-ridden handle.

What a cruel joke for them to take me all this way in an antiseptic Utopia just to trash it all with a door handle! Fortunately, I only had to wait a few minutes for someone else to walk in so I could catch the door with my foot and escape.

On Motorloway, each car is issued a front license plate with two alphanumeric digits – the first letter of the owner's last name plus a number assigned alphabetically. We were P1 on the tour for years, until Rod and Angie Parham (from Corydon) driving a 1950 Ford fire truck joined the tour, demoting us to the less-desirable (in my mind) P2.

One night I felt compelled to switch our 1969 Jaguar XKE's P2 plate with them, and they never noticed. The only downside was that the Motorloway tour distributes programs for our daily car shows, and there are probably a number of confused Wisconsinites (is that redundant?) wondering if Jaguar ever really manufactured fire trucks.

One evening, we piled 16 people into the fire engine and drove a zigzag 8 blocks from our motel to Famous Dave's for dinner, at what seemed like an insane speed to those of us in the back being bounced around like lottery balls. Fortunately, traffic was not a problem because our rooftop light was

flashing and the siren was blaring. Even more fortunately, we didn't encounter any local cars with their own flashing lights and sirens.

It was a great week. I highly recommend Motorloway for people who don't take themselves too seriously, own a classic car and don't mind driving it 1000 miles. There's also a 500-mile tour in the spring – check out www.motormemories.com.