

Second AACA Sentimental Tour

By Franklin Gage & Lou Fritz

The AACA Sentimental Tour was conceived and developed by former Chesapeake Region member and 2004 AACA President Earl Beauchamp. This tour is designed for cars made between 1928 to 1958, a period of significant automotive design advances. These were the cars that filled our roads during the mid twentieth century. The Sentimental Tour was run as a divisional tour in 2001 and 2002. The first national Sentimental Tour was held in 2004 and was hosted by the Bull Run Region in northern Virginia.

About 75 cars enjoyed great fall weather during the 2006 Sentimental Tour, its second national running, held October 22nd to 27th in Ocala, FL and hosted by the Florida Region – Gene Roy, Tour Chair and Earl Beauchamp Tour Director. Assisting Gene were his wife Marilyn, Assistant Chairs Dena and Tom Holt, plus many other region members.

Participating on the tour from the Chesapeake Region were Betty and Ed Hainke, who drove a two tone green 1948 Pontiac Stremline sedan; Mary Jane and Lou Fritz, who drove a light blue 1941 Ford sedan; and Franklin Gage, who drove a black 1951 Chevrolet sedan. The Fritz' passengers for the tour were former Marylanders Jean and Gary Keller, who now live in Spring Hill, FL. The Hainkes brought their Pontiac to Florida for the tour on Amtrak's Auto Train, an interesting alternative to trailering for mid Atlantic residents with Florida destinations.

For early tour arrivals on Sunday, Ocala's historic



Chesapeake Region cars from the left: the Fritz' 1941 Ford, Franklin Gage's 1951 Chevrolet, and the Hainke's 1948 Pontiac

downtown square was blocked off for a display of our cars, which also afforded us a chance to look over most of the tour cars and visit with old and new friends.

A survey of the host hotel parking lot revealed that Ford and GM cars were about equally represented. There was only one Mopar, a 1949 Plymouth. Independent brands were Pierce Arrow, Packard, Hupmobile, Studebaker, MG, and a 1958 Royal Enfield motorcycle. In an unfortunate incident on the way to the tour, a 1958 Mercury owned by Gloria and Bruce Henry caught fire and was completely destroyed.

Monday, the 23rd, we traveled through scenic horse country to visit Silver Springs, a 350 acre nature theme park and a tourist attraction since the 1800s. We took a ride on a glass bottom boat and enjoyed the flora and fauna.

Tuesday, the 24th, we visited the Austin Carriage Museum, the largest privately held collection of original and restored carriages and wagons. There were about 200 horse drawn vehicles nicely displayed and quite a bit of memorabilia from the era.

Wednesday, the 25th, we first visited Coach Builders Limited, where we saw a collection of 50s and 60s restored cars. Coach Builders' main business is converting new upscale makes into convertibles. We spent the afternoon looking through antique shops in High Springs. The evening event was an ice cream social and roundtable discussion followed by musical entertainment performed by AACA board members Randy Stone, Hulon McGraw, and Earl Beauchamp.

Continued on the next page >>



From the left: Ed & Betty Hainke, Franklin Gage, and Mary Jane & Lou Fritz

Second AACA Sentimental Tour – continued

Thursday, the 26th, was a long tour day of about 150 miles. We visited Cedar Key on the Gulf coast, which has a similar look and feel to many of the towns on Maryland's eastern shore. It isn't near many of the popular tourist attractions, so we could see what Florida used to be like.

Friday, the 27th, was the final tour day. The first stop was Don Garlits' Museum of Drag Racing in Ocala. There were two buildings, one with great drag racing cars and the other full of antique and classic cars. Garlits, known as Big Daddy, was the king of NHRA drag racing from the 1950s through the 1980s. He won 144 national events and his innovative dragster designs and championship racing earned him a spot in the International Motorsports Hall of Fame. He is the first drag racer to have his vehicle placed in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC.

Then we went on to our lunch stop for the day at the National Parts Depot (NPD), which is owned by Jimmy Schmidt, and is well known for having an excellent selection of parts for popular cars of the 60s and 70s. NPD had a separate building housing about 75 antique and classic cars. Many of the cars had interesting features or histories, such as one car with only 9 miles on the odometer, the 50,000,000 Chevrolet produced, and the 100,000,000 Ford made in North America.

The 100,000,000 Ford was a 1978 Ford Fairmont, which was of particular interest to Franklin Gage, who owns a well-used 1978 Fairmont as his daily driver. The car was bought new by his mother, who apparently didn't like it, although she drove it for ten years and then gave it to Franklin. Fairmonts were not

Ford's finest offering, so Franklin was wondering why Ford PR didn't arrange for a more memorable model to be the milestone production car when he was approached by Jimmy Schmidt's son. Ever the jokester, Franklin started to kid him about the perfect Fairmont displayed, asking if he would like to trade for one with a little patina like his daily driver, which several years ago had an unfortunate meeting with a deer causing some damage to the hood.

Schmidt's son said that the museum's Fairmont had the hood replaced because of a slight kink at the hinge; they were flimsy and prone to damage. They still had the original one and he asked if Franklin would like to have it. Franklin hesitated because he didn't know how much they wanted for the hood or if it was severely damaged. Amazingly, Schmidt was able to quickly find the hood and both he and his dad insisted that Franklin take it as a gift. Is there a moral to this story? Maybe its OK to joke around about pathetic cars like the Fairmont. People will feel sorry for you.

It's noteworthy that the three Chesapeake Region members on this tour regularly attend AACA national tours, which is a part of the hobby that they really enjoy. In 2007 our Club's members will have an unusual opportunity to also enjoy these AACA tours nearby because two of them will be hosted by neighboring regions – the Vintage Tour for cars prior to 1928, in Frederick, MD, July 22nd to 27th; and the AAA Glidden Tour for cars 1942 and earlier, in Gettysburg, PA, September 9th to 14th.

Editor's Note: This article has been adapted from material that appeared in the Bull Run Region November 2006 Clutch Chatter.



*Earl Beauchamp, the Tour Director,
with his 1939 Buick*



*A view of National Parts Depot's collection of
unique and historic cars in Ocala, FL*