

AACASPONSORED EXCURSION APRIL 2015

C. R. Member Phil Hack Provides Insightful Narrative Of Cuba Trip, And Life On The Island

EDITOR'S NOTE: At the August 30, 2015 membership meeting, member Phil Hack gave an informative and entertaining presentation of his recent trip to the Communist island country of Cuba. The trip was sponsored in part by AACAA. The following is Phil's unedited account of his once-in-a-lifetime odyssey.

By Philip Hack

In April of this year the 161 Society of the AACAA Museum arranged a trip to Cuba offering members the opportunity to learn about the people, the culture and the classic cars of this isolated island. I was one of forty AACAA members who was fortunate enough to indulge in this exciting eight day endeavor. This trip was planned and scheduled even before President Obama announced a loosening of the restrictions imposed by the decades long embargo. The trip was arranged, planned and operated by the company International Expeditions utilizing a People-to-People travel license. People-to-People travel affords Americans an opportunity to connect directly with the Cuban people, learning more about each other through direct contact and cultural exchange. Presently it is still one of the few ways for Americans to visit this country. We participated in a daily itinerary of engaging activities, focusing on education and cultural exchange. This AACAA trip was the first of any automobile clubs to participate in this adventure. The itinerary was customized with special events honoring the car culture of Cuba.

Orientation in Miami...

We began with an orientation meeting at a hotel near the Miami Airport the evening before our trip was to begin. Our guides went over details of the trip, including money exchange, bus arrangements, what we could and couldn't do. The following morning we boarded an American Airlines charter jet for the one hour flight to Havana. The Customs process was not unlike traveling to any foreign country and went smoothly. Happily, it turned out we could pretty much come and go and do most anything we wanted with

no restrictions including taking photographs, what a pleasant surprise!

Upon leaving the airport terminal we feasted upon a parking lot full of a mixture of '40s and '50s American cars along with several newer vehicles from the far east and Russia. This was unlike anything any of us had ever seen. On the way to the hotel (which by the way was first class by any standard) we stopped at the famous Revolution Square where we saw lines of brightly colored American convertibles from the '50s lined up to take visitors for taxi rides around Havana. After checking in at the Hotel, we were given a couple hours to relax before going to dinner. I chose to take this time and go for a walk.

Old Spanish Influence...

The surrounding neighborhood was a mixture of old and older buildings of Spanish architecture most of which were decaying from years of neglect. The community itself was vibrant! There were people smiling, laughing, hailing old beat up Chevy's and Dodges for taxi rides and kids playing soccer or baseball in the parks. All were excited to see the American tourist wandering around aimlessly with his camera, many giving me the thumbs up and posing for a picture. That evening we went to the exclusive Club Havana for a delicious dinner and greetings with some of the car folks we would be seeing later in the week including the Director of 'Deposito del Automovil' a museum of classic and historic cars and members of the local classic car club *Amigos de Fango*.

Saturday, our first full day was spent with an experienced guide strolling through the streets of Old Havana learning about Cuban history and the significance of the many squares and ancient buildings of the city. Music filled the air and the streets were full of vendors selling books, art, cigars and Cuban knick knacks. We also visited the *Hotel Ambos Mundos* where Ernest Hemingway wrote many of his famous

works. Later we visited the *Deposito del Automovil* and eclectic repository of interesting and significant vehicles. That evening we had dinner at a paladar (privately owned restaurant) and were treated to a local car club cruise-in populated primarily by American iron and several British sports cars. Just like here in the states, the owners were thrilled to show off and chat about their cars.

Visiting the countryside...

Sunday was spent traveling to areas outside Havana including visits to an Orchid Garden and a tobacco farm where we learned about the art of hand rolling the famous Cuban cigars. This evening dinner was on our own. Three of us decided to hail a cab and travel into Old Havana and explore on our own. What a thrill! Our cab ride in was a 1952 Chevy, blowing oily smoke and totally beat, but running strong. Pounding through the potholed streets of Havana yakking it up with the driver in broken Spanish and English was probably the greatest part of my trip. Our 20 minute ride cost about \$10 for all three of us. We found a little tavern (with live music of course) and paid less than \$10 for dinner and a couple beers. Then we wandered the streets and alleys taking in all the action. The streets are crowded late into the night and perfectly safe. There is virtually no crime. Our trip back to the hotel was also exciting. This time we rode in a '51 Studebaker with suicide doors and 'upgraded' with a Russian engine and a Fiat dashboard. The Cubans use anything and everything to keep their cars running. The Revolution and American embargo began in January 1959. There are virtually no American cars in existence newer than '59. They are very innovative people keeping their beloved autos running years beyond their expected demise.

Monday was a particularly special day for us. After a scrumptious breakfast, we were picked up by several restored cars and taken to *NostalgiaCar*, a

Continue to page 6...

Technical Director Gary Ruby Talks About 'Steering Wheels' from the past to modern times...

Hi Guys and Gals!

Hope all is well. This month I would like to discuss how we guide our vehicles around. In the beginning cars were nothing more than a carriage without the horse. One problem was how do we make it go where we want it to go. The first steering was a tiller, which worked pretty well until the vehicle started getting bigger and heavier and going faster. It took a lot of muscle to guide a car or truck. The ladies had a hard time trying to drive those machines and at that time a lot of women were being encouraged to learn the 'art of motoring.'

The 'think tank' guys at Packard came up with the steering wheel as we know it today. It was hooked to a gear system which today we call a steering box. Once Packard came up with it, all the other car companies followed and made their versions. The first steering wheels were large, mostly made of wood with the center spiders being cast in brass or iron. About this time, the driver's seat was moved from the center to the right side of the vehicle, some say it was done to help the driver from being splashed with mud from passing vehicles. Around 1914 the trend was for auto makers to move the driver's seat

to the left side of the vehicle. By the end of WW I all cars drove from the left. The first molded steering wheels began to appear around 1927, they were a hard rubber compound around a steel core. They worked great, but people wanted pretty steering wheels, so they came up with spoke type wheels that we know as a 'banjo steering wheel.' Common thinking is, Cadillac was the first to offer it as an option in 1934. It became standard equipment on Cadillac's and LaSalle's in 1936 to 1940. All GM cars followed; Buick continued the banjo wheel until 1954. Ford was late getting into the wheel game. On February 28, 1936 a dealer directive was issued to inform dealers a 'deluxe' steering wheel would be available for the extra cost of \$8.25. How many can I get now? Banjo wheels ended for Ford around 1940 in favor of newer stylized wheels. There were many different size wheels, Trucks had very large wheels to make them easier to steer. Chrysler even tried square steering wheels, which had to be fun trying to let it slide though your hands after a turn. They only used it for a short time. I hope you enjoyed this little note from history and maybe learned something, see ya!

Gary

Continued from page 5...

local firm specializing in the restoration of American Cars. I rode in a beautifully restored 1955 Ford four-door sedan. This particular car had a column shifted manual transmission but the gear placement was obviously not a normal 'three-on-the-tree' setup. Turns out the old Ford was powered by a Toyota engine coupled to a 5 speed transmission. We spent most of the morning touring the shop, conversing with the workers gaining insight on what they do and how they do it. Since engines and parts are scarce, many of the cars have drivetrains taken from Japanese or European cars. Most of the early automatic transmissions were swapped out with manuals utilizing what appeared to be an aftermarket shifter attached below the dash. Wear parts such as steering mechanisms, gauges and switches are often swapped out. Cubans love convertibles and many we saw started life as hardtops. One project underway was the complete restoration of a '59 Chevrolet repowered by a Mercedes-Benz Diesel. The day was capped off in the evening when we were picked up by a convoy of brightly colored convertibles and treated to a tour of Havana before disembarking at the historic 'Hotel Nacional' for dinner. After dinner we enjoyed a spectacular performance by the famous musical and dance group 'Buena Vista Social Club' at a local cafe. They even had three original members who were well into their eighties still dancing and singing! By the end of the night they had nearly everyone in our group up on stage dancing and singing with them!

'Papa's' former home...

Tuesday morning we left Havana and headed south to visit the former home of Ernest Hemingway and then on to the Bay of Pigs which included a stop at the Playa Giron Museum which provided details of the invasion of the men who fought on both sides. Dinner was held at Paladar Ennque, a private home set up for entertaining large groups of tourists. The accommodations this evening were definitely not up to standards average Americans are accustomed to. The Hotel Playa Larga was a Russian built complex of brightly colored concrete barracks. The units had nonworking showers, bugs, spotty electrical service and mediocre air-conditioning if you were lucky. However, this facility played a very important role in our journey. This is where the typical Cuban vacations and enjoys. Except for this night, we stayed in hotels that were well out of reach of the average Gtban.

This was a night where we vacationed like the locals. It was an important and

necessary part of our trip. Personally, I would have been happy to spend a few more nights in similar accommodations.

Wednesday and Thursday were spent visiting small towns in the countryside and two schools for exceptionally talented students. The first was the Konmako Project which houses some of Cuba's finest musicians and artists, allowing them to refine their skills before continuing on to teach and perform professionally throughout the country. We were treated to an hour long performance by an eight piece jazz ensemble. Several members of our group even joined in the singing and dancing. The other school we visited was the 'Las Munequitos de Matanzas' School of Arts. This school is for younger children who aspire to be musicians and dancers. Here we were welcomed by the students and treated to several dancing and singing performances. I should note here, that in Cuba, all education is free. As long as you show talent and interest and can make the grades, you may continue your higher education into any field you desire including the arts, engineering and medicine or any other field.

Our final night was spent at a beach resort. A spectacular farewell dinner was served at the Xanadu Mansion once owned by the Dupont family before they were forced to abandon it at the beginning of the revolution. This opulent estate has been wonderfully preserved in all its majesty.

Education, medical care & crime...

Cuba is a country of sharp contrasts. They have a superb education system that is free. All health care is free and is up to modern standards supported by fine medical schools. Violent crime is nearly nonexistent. Illicit drug use is very low. Everyone has food and shelter. However, the buildings and infrastructure are seriously deteriorating from years of neglect. Many people are poor and most of all, the people are not free. The communist government controls everything and speaking out against it is strictly forbidden.

A common joke is that Cuba is not a single party system. They have hundreds of parties every night. People gather on the streets, sharing rum with singing and dancing everywhere. Despite the repressive political policies, Cuban culture thrives. Hopefully, loosening the embargo will bring us together for the benefit of both countries. For more information on AACAA's 161 Society, visit: www.aacamuseum.org/get-involved/membership/161-society/

What's Going On At The AACAA Museum in Hershey?

CORVAIR DAYS--CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

Corvaair Club Show

Date: Saturday, September 12, 2015 Time:

8:00 am. - 3:30 p.m.



View a unique part of American history at the Corvaair Days Event. This Corvaair-only show is hosted by the Central Pa., Corvaair Club on the AACAA Museum grounds. Attendees can enjoy an assortment of outdoor vendors, a Road Rally, Model Car Display, and a Scavenger Hunt

PAWS FAST AND FURRIEST CAR SHOW

Date: September 20, 2015 Time: 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM; registration from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. The Society for Preservation of Animal Welfare & Safety (PAWS) is pleased to announce a Car and Motorcycle show for the direct benefit of its animals. PAWS is a 100% volunteer organization. This event will be held on the beautiful grounds of the AACAA Museum in Hershey, PA. This is an open car, truck, and motorcycle show. The event will feature 35 different classes for cars, trucks, and motorcycles, trophies, and dash plaques to the first 200 cars registered. Preregistration and day-of registration is \$20.00 per vehicle entered. The show hosts numerous custom, classic, and exhibition vehicles. For more information visit: www.aacamuseum.org/



Chesapeake Region
An 11th Automobile Club of America



AUTUMN HARVEST

Collector Car Show

At The

Manchester Carnival Grounds

York Street - Manchester, Maryland 21102-0416




Saturday, September 12, 2015
10 AM to 2 PM
Awards - Food - Fun

All types of vehicles welcome. Gate registration only \$1.00
Concession proceeds to benefit the Manchester Volunteer Fire Company
Pit Beef • Pit Ham • Pit Turkey • Hamburgers • Hot Dogs • Fries • Drinks
NO ALCOHOL & NO LOUD MUSIC ALLOWED

Event Information: 443-537-1632 www.chesapeakeaaca.org/

Welcome New Members!

John and Neila Clulow of Pasadena, MD joined the club. They own a 1936 Dodge LC pickup and a 1936 Chrysler C10 Airflow

