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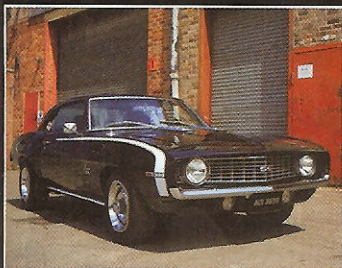
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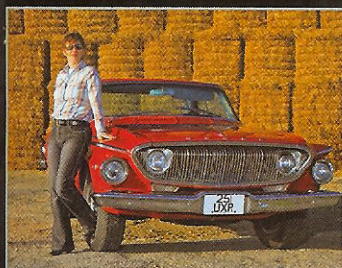
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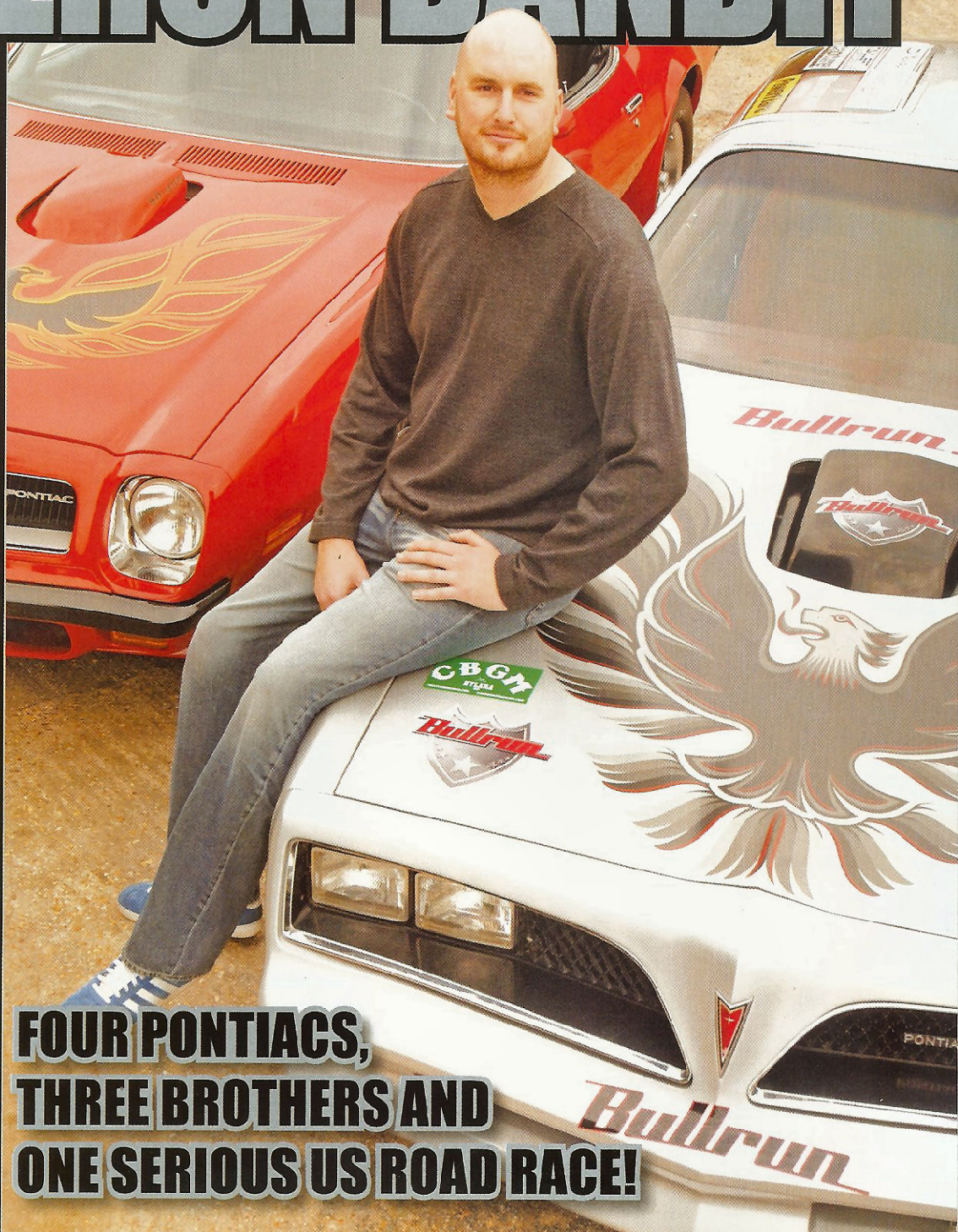
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**FOUR PONTIACS,
THREE BROTHERS AND
ONE SERIOUS US ROAD RACE!**



Whilst it was my intention to drive from New Jersey to Florida along a pre-Interstate route made up of older US highways, from Little Rock to New York City, I would be sticking to the Interstates for two reasons. First I needed to be in New York City by Tuesday at noon to attend an awards ceremony (my online magazine, *Automotive Traveler* - automotive-traveler.com - had won an industry award that I needed to accept) as well as to be on well-traveled roads should I run into any unexpected mechanical difficulties.

Before leaving, I had packed my collection of Ford Times cookbooks as well as a pair of Sixties-era Rand McNally road atlases picked up on eBay, as well as my Rand McNally portable GPS navigation system. After flying into Little Rock late on Friday evening, Shelly and I conducted our financial arrangements, she bid me good luck (not before saying that my plan was daft) and I headed east, staying the first night in Brinkley, Arkansas, halfway between Little Rock and Memphis, Tennessee.

The following morning I took a quick tour of Memphis, checking out Graceland, but not having enough time to check out the Lorraine Motel where Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968. Driving through Memphis I found Flashback, a retro Fifties and Sixties clothing store which I felt would make a great photo op, and inside I was able to buy a collection of vintage road maps, along with many old travel brochures, including several from the Sixties from someone's family vacation to Florida. I considered the find a good omen.

On the outskirts of Memphis a stop was made at an Auto Zone parts store to pick up essentials like a tool kit, replacement wiper blades, a case of Mobil 1 oil (Shelly had the oil changed with Mobil 1 prior to my arrival as well as having the A/C system recharged with R-12, a \$250 cost that we split equally), a case of automatic transmission fluid (older, pre-1980 Fords use an older style of ATF not always available at stops along the Interstate), and because the Colony Park was equipped with a 429 2V engine (an odd combination that is combined with a 10.5 to 1 compression ratio) it required a steady diet of lead substitute combined with 91 octane premium fuel at each fill-up. (In 1969 a gallon of high test leaded cost about 35 cents.

Applying the rate of inflation over the years, that same gallon of petrol should cost about \$2.04 cents today, quite a bit less than the average \$3.30/gallon I paid for fuel on this trip. Covering 2,600 miles and averaging 13 miles per gallon, fuel for the trip would eat up almost \$700 - quite a bite!) As Shelly had warned me that the Colony Park's high fidelity AM radio was non-operational, I brought along my Sirius portable satellite radio. But



Road trips tend to uncover these cool faded adverts

as I didn't want to drive with headphones on, shortly after the Auto Zone detour I stopped at a Best Buy along Interstate 40 and purchased a powerful boom box with an iPod-compatible audio input, perfect for use with my Sirius portable.

Now I had tunes, but decided to confine my listening to the channels that played the hits from the Sixties and Seventies. The second night on the road (Saturday) was spent at a classic, yet non-descript cinderblock motel somewhere along Interstate 40 west of Knoxville, Tennessee. The best I could say about it was that it was clean, warm, and the TV worked.

The rest of the trip to New Jersey was uneventful, except for one small mishap in Tennessee when I attempted to top off the ATF with the car running

and the engine hot. An overspill caused an under hood fire, which required a mad dash back into the Auto Zone to grab a fire extinguisher to put out the blaze. Thankfully there was no apparent damage but it encouraged me to buy a small extinguisher to add to my collection of tools and spare parts in the rear seat well.

Night three on the road (Sunday) was spent in Hagerstown, Maryland, along Interstate 81 which required a very early start, so that I could make my awards ceremony at New York's famous Tavern on the Green, in Central Park. Because of the size of the Colony Park, I was charged the parking rate for oversized SUVs, which was basically twice the price for a car. The bill? About \$70 for three hour's parking, something of a rip-off!

Looks right at home doesn't it?

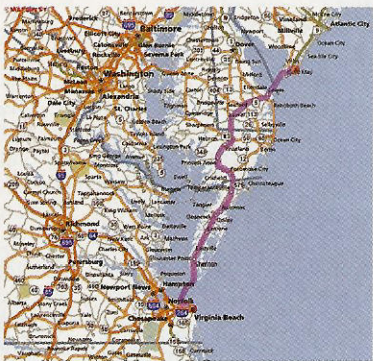


Now the Fun Begins

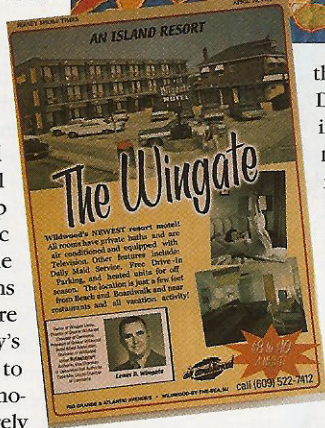
With the awards ceremony in my rear view mirror I crossed back into New Jersey just ahead of rush hour traffic and headed south on the Garden State Parkway, a road very familiar from countless trips to the New Jersey shore in my youth. Along the way I made a short side trip for dinner to The Smithville Inn in Absecon, near the gambling Mecca that is Atlantic City. The reason for selecting The Smithville Inn was that it was featured in The Ford Times Cookbook. While the menu had changed from the time it was featured in the 1969 edition of The Ford Times Cookbook, The Smithville Inn maintained its reputation for culinary excellence. Order the seafood entries if you visit.

My destination was the Starlux Motel (thestarlux.com) in Wildwood. The Starlux, originally built in 1953 as The Wingate, was extensively renovated several years ago as a boutique hotel and convention center, is the hip place to stay in Wildwood, a classic Jersey shore resort town. When The Wingate opened in 1953, rooms cost from \$8 to \$10. Applying more than 50 years of inflation, today's prices of \$69 (standard room) to \$229 (two-room suite) for accommodations (off-season) seemed entirely reasonable. (Using the trusty inflation calculator westegg.com/inflation/) the rate of inflation, \$8 in 1953 translates to \$65.38 in 2008.)

Ocean Drive Day 1 - Wildwood, NJ to Virginia Beach, VA



Today, if one makes the trip from New York to Florida, one is most likely to choose the New Jersey Turnpike (Interstate 95) all the way to the tip of southern Florida. Without pushing, it's possible to make the trip with two full days of driving. But in keeping with my trip's retro theme, I would be taking the route better known as The Ocean HiWay. Using primarily US Routes 13 and 17, the Ocean HiWay hugs the coast and if making the trip in winter back in its Fifties and Sixties, would most likely offer better weather with less chance of encountering snow. An integral part of the coastal route is



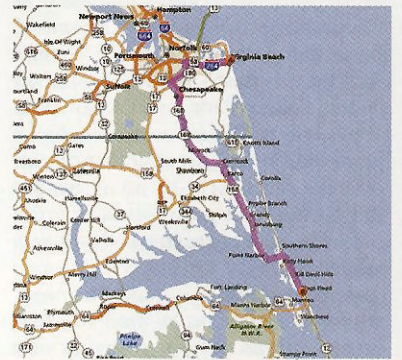
Hospitality like it used to be!

the Cape May, New Jersey-Lewes, Delaware Ferry. Starting operation in 1964, the ferry spans the 17 miles of Delaware Bay, with a relaxing 80-minute ride from Cape May to Lewes, Delaware. In the off-season the ferry runs four times daily each way (up to eight times each way in the summer) and costs \$23 one-way in off-season (\$29 each way in the summer). You can make reservations and pay using a credit card online (capemaylewesferry.com).

Once on the other side of the bay, Lewes and the rest of Delaware was not as I remembered it; rural and dotted with chicken farms. In the forty years since my last visit, it has become built up, with the landscape covered in outlet and strip malls, big box stores, along with fast food and Starbucks. (In the course of my search for a suitable car for the trip, in Jacksonville, Florida I located a 1970 Ford Torino Squire that was used by UK comedian Dave Gorman for his book *Unchained America*. His Torino Squire was equipped with a high compression 351 cubic inch V8, a very rare option in a Torino station wagon. Dave's idea was to traverse the US, west to east, then north to south, totally avoiding chain-style establishments. While I attempted to do the same, I simply couldn't wean myself of my addiction to cheeseburgers or WiFi along the way.)

Because of a late start from Wildwood, I traversed the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, one of the seven greatest engineering feats in the world; it was already after dark, thus no photos. First opened in 1964, the same year as my first trip to Florida, Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel is a 23-mile long combination of 4-lane bridges and 2-lane tunnels over the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay that links the southern tip of the Delmarva (Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) Peninsula with the cities of the Virginia Tidewater region.

Ocean Drive Day 2 - Virginia Beach, VA to Nags Head, NC



Day two would turn out to be both frustrating and a short day's drive. First, the day was miserable, weather-



The quickest way to get from NY to Virginia beach

wise. Second, I needed to conclude the purchase of another car on the Internet, that being a mint, four-cylinder 1988 Pontiac Fiero. At the time a barrel of oil was flirting with the magic \$100/barrel barrier so I thought that would be a good idea to have a car that would get 30 miles per gallon or more. But the seller wanted payment in three days, so I needed to facilitate a wire transfer, requiring a trip to a local branch of the Bank of America.

It took me almost before noon before I gassed up the Merc and headed south having made the decision to stop at sundown. A quick look at the maps showed that somewhere on Cape Hatteras was the logical place to stop that evening. This required a slight detour from the US 13/US 17 Ocean HiWay route, instead heading southeast out of Virginia Beach on US 158 towards the coast, along the way passing a retro-style diner and a long-closed Esso station along the western side of the highway just as the sun was setting, affording me two great photo opportunities.

It was dark as I passed Kitty Hawk, site of the Wright Brother's first flight and after making another \$60 stop for fuel I spotted the vintage-looking Sea Foam Motel (seafoam.com/) in Nags Head and decided to call it a night and have dinner at a reasonable hour. The Sea Foam turned out to be a masterful stroke of luck, a charming place right on the ocean that unlike many other area motels wasn't closed for the season.

The Sea Foam, built in 1947 and listed in the National Register of Historical Places, is a bit of perfectly preserved postwar Americana, where it seemed that time had stood still. Pulling up in the Colony Park I realized that in 1969, The Sea Foam was already 22 years old. The rooms, slightly updated over the years, were by no means the Ritz-Carlton, but as my head hit the pillow, it was easy to image that it was again 1969.

Speaking with the night manager whilst checking in, he told me that many patrons return year-after-year to The Sea Foam Inn. He proved his point by showing me a hand-written ledger almost completely filled for the summer of 2008. But he also explained that The Sea Foam was under siege,



'you got a cash machine here, mate?'

from both Mother Nature whose wrath was eroding the very beach the motel was perched on, as well as by greedy developers who eyed the same ground as a potential site for more faceless and characterless condo development. If you want to experience a real slice of mid-century American life, before it's too late, book yourself a room in The Sea Foam Inn.

Ocean Drive Day 3 - Nags Head, NC to Savannah, GA



The third day on the road proved to be the longest, covering more than 550 miles. Thankfully I was up early and was able to take advantage of a spectacular sunrise to get some shots of the sand bags along the beach that was protecting The Sea Foam from the advance of the Atlantic Ocean.

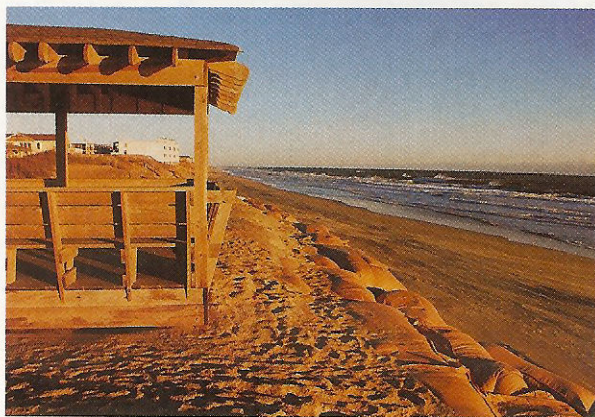
Grabbing breakfast in Columbia, a charming town on US 64, I continued west. Driving through the lowlands of the Albemarle-Pamlico peninsula, I was struck by its natural beauty as well as

the fact that little had probably changed over the last 40 years; no overpowering influx of development, just the rural south almost perfectly preserved. If I hadn't a schedule to maintain, I would have detoured to Cape Fear, the site of the landmark 1962 film of the same name starring Gregory Peck, and its equally inspired 1991 remake featuring Robert Di Nero and a then 18-year-old Juliette Lewis.

US 64 was the direct shot west to the official Ocean HiWay route, US 17 but not for long, as another detour was required, this one US 70 to Morehead City, North Carolina for lunch at The Sanitary Fish Market www.sanitary-fishmarket.com, another restaurant featured in the Ford Times cookbooks. In 1968 it was known as Tony's Sanitary Fish Market & Restaurant, and has a long history dating back to the Thirties, it started with 12 stools as an adjunct to the thriving seafood market; today, after several expansions over the years and a change in ownership, it now can seat more than 600. Sitting at a table with a view of the bay, I was able to enjoy a relaxed lunch of broiled trout.

The rest of the day had me continuing south, again picking up US 17 in Jacksonville, North Carolina and continuing south through Wilmington and crossing the border into South Carolina where I drove through Myrtle Beach just before sundown. Wolfing down some fast food in the car for the first time on the trip, I filled up for the third time that day (due to a leak in the top of the tank, I was only able to fill it three quarters of the way, thus cutting down my range to about 200 miles between fill-ups) and the Merc headed south in the darkness, finally picking up Interstate 95 in Florence, South Carolina. A town of wall-to-wall motels, I recalled that using the then newly completed I-95, we were able to make Florence non-stop from New Jersey back on our 1967 family vacation, illustrating how much time could be saved by taking the super slab as opposed to the more leisurely coastal route.

It was after 11 PM when I finally pulled into Savannah, Georgia and the vintage-retro Thunderbird Inn www.thunderbirdinn.com.



blue sky and an empty beach - Blackpool it ain't!

thethunderbirdinn.com, a hotel that I had stayed at over 40 years ago. It seemed that besides the colour TV replacing the original black and white set, little had changed. Exhausted from 15 hours on the road, I hit the bed immediately, waking up the following morning with my clothes still on. Centrally located near the Savannah city center, with an off-season rate of around \$100, The Thunderbird Inn is a great alternative to far more expensive downtown hotels, especially when you pull in with a period-correct Colony Park woody.

Day 4 - Savannah, GA to St Augustine, FL



After doing some sightseeing in downtown Savannah, I again headed south but not before stopping on the outskirts of Savannah at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum www.mightyeighth.org. Dedicated to the memory of those who served in the Army Air Corps whose B-17s and B-24s helped to pound Nazi Germany into submission,



You can find buildings like this off the beaten track



Georgia climate will preserve this bird for some time

Ocean HiWay Association "Pines to Palms"

Winter snowbirds and summer vacationers have migrated from the northeast to Florida almost from the era of the Ford Model T in the Twenties. And as the US highway system evolved, especially in the period following the Great Depression, tourism gained importance. This was not lost on the founding fathers of the Ocean HiWay Association, a trade organisation of states and tourism interests running from New Jersey to Florida, who looked to promote tourism along the route. Dubbed the 'Pines to Palms' highway, the Ocean HiWay ran from New York City, New York to Miami Beach, Florida.

Starting in the late Thirties, the association published a series of map/travel guides that promoted the route as being warmer in winter and cooler in summer than the more inland route, US 1, which to this day runs from Maine to Florida along the US east coast.

The travel guides included ferry schedules, tourist attractions, as well as listing dozens of motels along the route. Replaced in the Sixties and

Seventies by the completion of the Interstates, especially I-95 which made it possible to drive from New York to Miami Beach without encountering a single traffic light, cutting days off of a drive between the two cities, from four or five days to as little as two.

The guides often came up for sale on eBay, typically priced from \$2 to \$10, and provide a looking glass view of the US east coast from the immediate pre World War Two period right up through the second OPEC Oil Embargo in 1980. Colorful in a way that a modern portable GPS navigation systems are not, these map/guides are a great way to add a period-correct touch to the glove box of your Yank.



The cookbook has something for everyone



the museum is well worth the time to stop, even if you aren't a World War Two buff.

While the museum and its displays are outstanding, so are some of the later planes on display outside, including a swept-wing B-47, a MIG-17 and a Viet Nam War-era F4E Phantom, which coincidentally was in service the same year the Colony Park was built. Because of the time well spent at the museum, day four would be a short day, driving only 200 miles to St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest city in the United States.

Day 5 - St Augustine, FL to Fort Lauderdale, FL



Coming down the home stretch, I was eager to get on the road as early

as possible. Unfortunately the cool evening had an adverse effect on the Merc. When I started it up it made a horrendous racket, surely waking up many of the hotels sleeping guests. I suspected an exhaust leak, possibly at the donut, but ultimately that turned out not to be the case. I would later learn that the driver's side exhaust manifold was cracked, apparently a common malady for big-block Fords. Thankfully, as things heated up once underway, the noise became tolerable, making the trip to Daytona, where I photographed the car at a period-correct Lincoln-Mercury dealership and Titusville, near the Kennedy Space Center.

Titusville turned out to be the home of a well-preserved Howard Johnson's motor lodge and restaurant. With its distinctive orange-roofed restaurant structures, Howard Johnson's, also know as HoJos, once dominated the US landscape. Now it is a shell of its former self, with just a few locations remaining. For more information on Howard Johnson's and its role in the life of mid-century America, visit an excellent tribute sit at www.slamtrak.com/hojo2003.

Visible from the HoJo, across the bay, is the Vehicle (originally Vertical) Assembly Building www.kennedyspace-center.com, where the mighty Saturn



Ebay & Craigslist

ARE you considering an extended vacation in the United States? If you are, and you have a yen for doing it in a vintage car, you have an alternative to high priced rental cars; buying one.

With eBay www.ebay.com and Craigslist www.craigslist.org the process is possible for overseas buyers. Using their powerful search capabilities, it's possible to locate the right car, just as I did. The biggest problem will be getting the car registered, properly tagged, and insured.

Here are some online resources to help guide you through the process:

www.newcomersguideusa.com/firstcar
www.hm-usa.com/carrent04
www.usatourist.com/english/tips/carbuying
www.bug.co.uk/forums/archive/index.php/t-5866

My example shows that it is possible to buy a sound and reliable car in the US for \$5,000 if you take your time and use good judgment. In my case, even though I had to spend \$2,000 on the car after it arrived in California (to repair the fan clutch, rebuild the vacuum reservoir, and to replace the exhaust manifold), I can certainly resell the car and get most if not all of my investment back. (A mint condition 1969 Mercury Colony Park, very similar to mine recently sold on eBay for \$13,000.)

If you are going to be in the US for an extended period of time, and know your final destination, you can place a for sale ad on both eBay and Craigslist while you're still on the road; you may be able to make arrangements with a buyer to deliver the car. It will take a degree of creativity to make it all work, but no obstacle is insurmountable.

Of course you might find that you like your purchase so much that you'll end up wanting to ship it back to the UK. If this is your choice, there are several companies specializing in shipping vehicles from the US. For assistance in this area, consult www.import-car.info/shipping.shtml. You will find that it can cost as little as \$1,000 to ship a car from an east coast port to over \$6,000 if you opt for shipping your new prize in an enclosed container.



A Ron Jon board would look good on the roof of the C-P



More quality eating places and empty beaches!



Kennedy Space Centre, Florida



V rocket booster were assembled for the Apollo trips that landed on the moon, the first of which occurred in 1969. On a previous trip to the area in the Eighties, it was possible to drive much closer to the VAB, but in the post 9-11 world, this is no longer possible even though road maps show roads bisecting the area. For me, I had to be satisfied photographing the Merc with the VAB in the background, miles away. Thankfully, with a 200mm lens, it was possible to pull the two together for a wonderful 1969 portrait.

Thanks to Kevin Marti www.martiauto.com. I was able to learn that my Colony Park was an early build car, assembled on September 23, 1968, 10 months before Neil Armstrong first set foot on the moon. After packing the gear, and with time of the essence, I made my way back to I-95 so that I could make my 4:30 dinner reservation at Vero Beach's famous Ocean Grill www.ocean-grill.com, another restaurant featured in *The Ford Times* cookbooks. Vero Beach, about 80 miles south of the Kennedy Space Center, is an excellent location to view Space Shuttle launches.

Because of all my unplanned detours, I wasn't able to drive all the way to The Colonial Inn in Miami Beach, where I had vacationed four decades ago, I had to be satisfied to make it as far as Fort Lauderdale, about 30 miles north. That's because I would be shipping the Colony Park home to California from a shipper (Dependable Auto Shippers - www.dasautoshippers.com - at a cost of \$590 terminal-to-terminal) located in Fort Lauderdale. And five miles from my final destination, the power brakes went out and the car started to shift erratically. I suspected a vacuum problem and I was correct.

Upon its arrival in Los Angeles two weeks later, I was able to determine that a \$2 rubber seal had failed on the vacuum tank, leaving me the task to drive the 5,000-pound Colony Park its final 80 miles to my home in Sun City, California with marginal manual brakes. But other than that, the trip, of almost 3,000 miles, went along almost without incident. Quite a testimony to the condition and toughness of the Colony Park; Mercury certainly doesn't build them like they used to. ☒