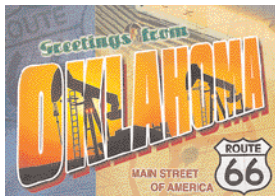




Day 3 - Tulsa, OK
to Tucumcari, NM



THE third dayout gave me a couple of options. With Tucumcari, a traditional Route 66 stopover over 400 miles away, and with more than 3000 rooms beckoning, it's the logical destination. The next lodging opportunity would be Albuquerque, home to some of Route 66's best neon signage and architectural diversity more than 175 miles further west.

One of the big disappointments of this segment of the trip was to see that the Big 8 Motel in El Reno, Oklahoma, famous in the Tom Cruise/Dustin Hoffman movie *Rain Man*, has fallen into a state of total disrepair and appears abandoned. While never what one would have called luxury accommodation, its notoriety from the film drew countless visitors over the years.

Another casualty of time since my last Route 66 trip is the passing of Lucille Hamons in 2000, who for 59 years was known as the Mother of the Mother Road. Her gas station in Hydro, Oklahoma, like the El Reno, has fallen into a decrepit state but across the road between the frontage road and the Interstate lies a cross with her name. Her legion of fans makes sure that there are almost always fresh flowers at her memorial. An attempt to sell the site on eBay fell through just a little over a year after her passing. *Petroliana*, the study and collection of gas station memorabilia, plays an important part of many Route 66 enthusiasts. And after crossing the

Richard Truesdell continues his trip along the original Mother Road. We catch up with him on the Oklahoma to California section



Oklahoma/Texas border, make sure you drive through McLean. Although the town has seen better days, the vintage Phillips 66 station, the first in Texas and dating back to 1929, remains, a time capsule of better days when oil fuelled this region's vibrant economy.

This is the day that you should skip breakfast and lunch as you'll come upon the Big Texan Steak Ranch, home of the free 72-ounce steak. Free that is if you can eat it, along with all the trimmings in an hour or less. I tried the stunt back in 1997 and fell 12 ounces short of finishing the steak and needless to say, the steer got its revenge, all the way to Albuquerque. If you stop by, check out



the wall of fame as the cover of the August 1997 issue of Car Audio and Electronics, my first Route 66 sojourn, is displayed on the way to the restrooms.

Having lived in Albuquerque for over five years, about a mile from Route 66, I can say that few places possess the natural beauty of New Mexico. The sunsets are spectacular and can be found nowhere else in the world. As you approach Tucumcari, you'll know what I mean. Tucumcari is famous for the signs that proclaim 'It's Tucumcari Tonight' throughout the south-west, boasting of more than 2000 rooms. The best known and one of Route 66's



Day 4 - Tucumcari, NM to Williams, NM



best preserved examples of neon signage is found at the Blue Swallow Motel (815 E. Tucumcari Blvd., Tel. 001 505 461 9849). If you stay in just one classic Route 66 motor court, this would be one of my top choices.

DEPARTING from Tucumcari at dawn gave me the opportunity to appreciate a New Mexican sunrise in my rear view mirror. Several alignments of Route 66 still remain in eastern New Mexico. At one time the road went almost due north from Santa Rosa to Las Vegas, New Mexico, then on to Santa Fe and back south to Albuquerque. But most people recognise the straight shot from Tucumcari to Albuquerque.

Not long after leaving Tucumcari you'll start to notice signs for Clines Corners, which over the years has developed its location, about 80 miles east of Albuquerque, as a motorist's oasis in the desert, serving an estimated 15 million travellers each year. It's such a huge complex that it has its own postal code.

In the days before serviceless service stations became the norm, Whiting Brothers gas stations dotted the south-west, offering gas at a discount (what a novel concept). But by 1990 the chain with its familiar yellow and red logo had virtually disappeared, except for Moriarty. In this hamlet east of Albuquerque stands the last operational Whiting Brothers gas station. Operated by long-time employee Sal Lucero, it stands as a reminder of how the commercial landscape has changed from the Forties to the present day.

Approaching Albuquerque through the Tijeras Pass, one is reminded of how the migrants in the Thirties felt as the lights of the city served as a beacon when coming up on the city, especially on a moonless night after a week or so in the desert. For many, the trip ended here as many simply ran out of money or couldn't push their dilapidated cars any further.

Central Avenue, which runs through the city of 600,000 current inhabitants, is the caretaker of some of the finest remaining early mid-century architecture and neon still to be found along Route 66. On the left will be the Hiland Theater with its almost art deco detailing. Further west, in the University District stand two more noteworthy examples, the Nob Hill Shopping Center and the Jones Motor Car Company which after its recent



WEB LINKS:

Swa Frantzen's site to start your Route 66 online research
<http://www.historic66.com/>
Cross-country in a Citroën 2CV
<http://french.cars.free.fr/route66/day05.htm>
Road Trip USA's awesome Route 66 site
http://www.roadtripusa.com/route_66/
General Route 66 reference site with links
<http://route66clicks.com/8states.html>
Route 66 Caravan sponsored by Hampton Inns
<http://www.cart66pf.org/66caravan/index.htm>
Route 66 photo essay 1
<http://www.roadtripmemories.com/roadmaven/route66.htm>
Route 66 photo essay 2
<http://dianaandstan0.tripod.com/illinois.htm>
It's Tucumcari Tonight!
<http://www.theroadwanderer.net/66NMex/tucumcari.htm>
Classic Route 66 Neon
http://www.bygonebyways.com/Historic_66_neon.htm
Road Trips site, many Route 66 links
<http://www.roadtripmemories.com/roadtrips.htm>
Postcards From The Road, Then and Now
<http://postcardsfromtheroad.net/thenandnow.shtml>
Roadtrip America's Route 66 web site
<http://www.roadtripamerica.com/links/route66.htm>
Route 66 web ring
<http://l.webring.com/hub?ring=usroute66>

renovation, houses Kelly's Restaurant and Brew Pub. If you want to check out the Duke City's finest looking ladies, this will be a great place to start.

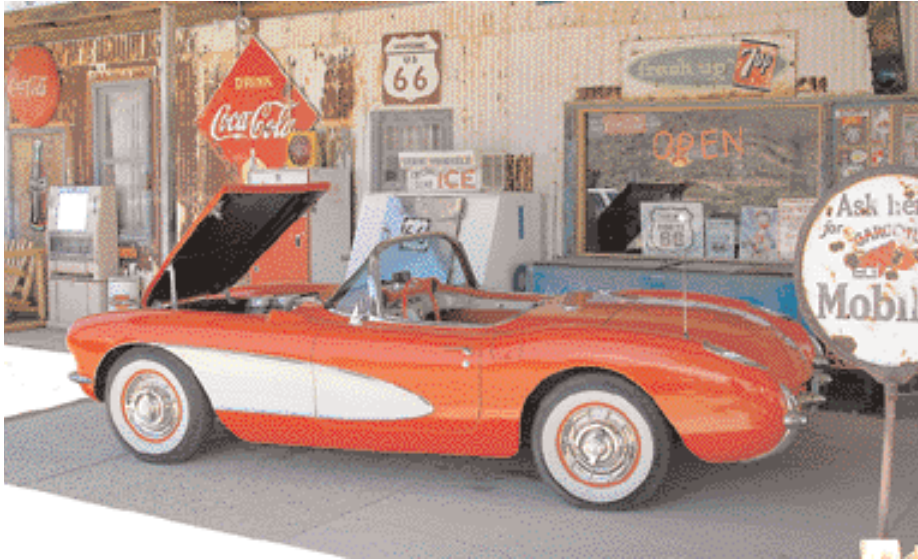
If you opted to bypass Tucumcari as your overnight, continue through Albuquerque's compact downtown district and keep your eyes open for the rather restrained sign for the Monterey Non-Smoker's Hotel (2402 Central Avenue SW, tel 001 505 243 3554), also on your left going west, just past Old Town. It has been lovingly restored over the last six years by Henry Elencwajg, a Polish immigrant who brings a certain European sensibility to south-western hospitality.

Just before the Continental Divide, on your right will be the remains of one of the Whiting Brothers' gas stations. While mostly intact, it is past its prime and likely never to serve motorists again. Gallop is home to the El Rancho Hotel where Hollywood royalty once stayed as many movies, especially westerns, were filmed nearby.

Across the border in Arizona, the railroad town of Winslow has been immortalised in the Eagles' 1972 hit 'Take It Easy' as there is now a designated 'corner in Winslow, Arizona' and all you'll need is the girl in the flatbed Ford to drive by to make your trip complete. Flagstaff, another railroad town along old Route 66, has much to offer the weary traveller but I suggest soldiering on another 45 minutes west to Williams. In 1984, it was the last Route 66 town bypassed by the Interstates, the last remaining stoplight between Chicago and Los Angeles faded into history.

Where the stoplight once stood is a four-way stop; going west, just before the stop sign you'll find the Red Garter Bed and Breakfast (137 Railroad Avenue, 001 928 635 1484) where owner John Holst will leave the red light on for you. Note the hooker leaning out of the right-hand side second-floor window. If trains rather than hookers are more your style double back to the eastern side of town and





check out The Canyon Motel (1900 East Rodeo Road/Route 66, 001 928 635 9371) where you can overnight in one of 18 flagstone cottage rooms, two red cabooses or one of three former Grand Canyon railcar suites.



Day 5 - Williams, NM to Santa Monica, CA



quakes – when the big one finally hits, this may very well become beachfront property.

In Amboy is a Route 66 landmark: Roy's Motel. Because the site is used in so many commercials and movies, the owners can get a bit nasty when you take out your camera. If you're going to photograph the site, it's best to do it from the far side of the road. One time, in a Dodge Viper GTS coupe, one of the owner's minions practically yanked my camera right out of my hands ... the result, a fat lip on his part. This lack of hospitality is in stark contrast to late Buster Burris, along with his father-in-law Roy Crowle, who built and

maintained this town for over 50 years. They are true Route 66 legends.

Barstow, one of the railroad towns mentioned in the late Bobby Troup's ode 'Get Your Kicks on Route 66' remains as dusty and hot as ever, especially in the summertime. Through several different alignments, Route 66 winds its way into the Los Angeles basin on its way to its conclusion on the Pacific Ocean. Foothill Blvd, which traverses the north side of the Los Angeles metropolitan area into Pasadena was once the home to an eclectic collection of Forties and Fifties roadside architecture, sadly most of it is gone in the name of progress. Colorado Blvd, immortalized in Jan and Dean's 'Little Old Lady from Pasadena' has you looking for a one-owner Super Stock Dodge hiding in some long forgotten garage. This is car culture central, as documented in our Muscle Car Tour (see February 2004 issue).

It would take a book ... actually there are several that can help you document all of the various Route 66 alignments that at one time traversed the greater Los Angeles region. In looking back I can't believe how many great sites I failed to even mention but that's the great thing about Route 66 - its rich diversity of sites that are worth exploring. The links listed below should be a great help in planning your own Route 66 odyssey. Suffice to say, after 2500 miles, it's great to reach the end of the road; in Santa Monica, at the famous pier, the road ends, with the Pacific Ocean all that stops you from driving further. ✦

WITH 2000 miles in the rear view mirror, it's now the home stretch and one of the purest sections of Route 66 pavement, Seligman to Kingman. Seligman is the long-time home of the Delgadillos. Juan, one of the true Route 66 saviours and preservationists passed away in 2004 but his brother Angel keeps his memory alive as do Juan's sons who continue to operate the Snow Cap Drive-In (the sign says 'Sorry, we're open', a continuing tribute to Juan's warped sense of humour).

Seligman to Kingman, is 158 miles of pure, unadulterated Route 66 driving pleasure through the high desert. On a previous trip on this stretch I got a Corvette over 150mph, and slowed down just in time to avoid being ticketed by a Native American patrolman (caution, this is reservation territory so it's especially important to obey the posted speed limits). Near the end of the segment, be sure to drop in on John and Kerry Pritchard who run the Old Route 66 Visitor Center and General Store. You'll know the place, the red Corvette and vintage gas pumps out front are a dead giveaway.

The road drops down in elevation as you approach Kingman, the last town of consequence in Arizona, another relic of when railroads were a primary means of passenger transport. Like so many towns along Route 66, the Interstates, in this case I-40, impacted on the town and many hotels have long closed, replaced by cookie-cutter chain motels at each end of the I-40 business loop.

Crossing the Colorado River over into California, there's one more classic stretch of Route 66 that shouldn't be missed. Depart I-40 and head towards Essex. The road remains in great condition even though this section of California is subject to regular small earth-

