

LOOKING FORWARD.....THINKING BACK. By Denny Wegner May 9, 2008

The 2008 touring season is in full swing. It's time to thoroughly check out your old car. Get help if you have any doubts. Keep your priorities straight; safety, reliability, and appearance, in that order.

My first tour with the Minnesota Region was the Around the Region Circle Tour in July, 1977. There may have been other long tours but the first 'Round the Region was in 1974. The general idea of the tour was to spend a week in your old car with your family, visiting the areas represented by all of the Chapters in the Region. It looks like the first tour was about 1000 miles and the '77 tour was about 700.

Registration for the 8 day tour was a whopping \$8 per car and the motels were in the \$15-\$20 range. Many participants camped. There were 44 signed up for the complete tour with many more joining in for the day or two when the tour passed through their area.

I was only part of the tour for 3 days but I would like to share some of my memories.

Viril Layton was Riverbend Chapter President and had been leading the planning for the tour from St Peter to New Ulm to Fort Ridgely. On Saturday, I was busy getting ready to host the first overnight stop in New Ulm. The temperature was in the 90's and warming up. We were using the Brown County Fairgrounds as a headquarters. I was there as the travelers started to arrive. I was surprised to see old cars pulling campers. I think Paul Rempfer was driving a 1912 Overland with fold-out camping trailer. One that really caught my eye was Glenn Thompson's maroon and black 1928 Chevrolet Roadster with a matching camper. We managed to get 60 cars under cover as a little storm came through.

This was the first time I got to meet many members outside of our own chapter. A few of the characters, leaders, legends, and future friends; Region President, Jim Hrebal, sporting a big handlebar mustache, was driving a LaSalle convertible sedan, Al Nelson with his 1923 Buick Roadster with a leaky vacuum tank, Pat Romano in his gangster 1927 Buick, and Paul Dudek clowning around in his 1914 Ford. I remember the Solts, the Phipps, the Lindbergs, the McMonigals and Mildred Forest with her Model A Ford.

I can still picture Frank Dressel's big beautiful 1932 Studebaker with the chrome artillery wheels driving down Broadway. Of course, there was THE Laverne piloted by Gordy Sundgaard. Gordy was a virtual Pied Piper with a Laverne load of kids in every town he visited. One night, the New Ulm Police stopped Gordy for "no tail light." Gordy explained that he was sure that he had "lit it." The young officer was ready to administer a sobriety test until Gordy demonstrated the art of gas light technology.

Sunday was warmer as the tour moved on to Litchfield. My wife and I got a late start and I spent several hours on the road in park working on the fuel pump on my 1941 Nash. After hitching a ride back to New Ulm for parts, my wife decided she would rather follow me in a reliable car with air conditioning. We got to Litchfield and pulled into the Arena. Just as I drove through this large puddle of water by a 1935 Ford, I was welcomed by a large cheer from the crowd. The cheers were for Jim Forest's Ford and his friends as

they finished the repair of a broken valve spring. For many years I thought that it was Speed Davis' Ford but Jim set me straight.

Monday was very warm as we toured toward Little Falls. I remember stopping near St. Cloud at Roy Bernick's Pepsi warehouse, hospitality room, and his home with the quarry swimming pool. We got to see his car collection that included a 1927 White Motorhome. There was a little door on the outside that opened to expose the potty under the driver's seat. Nice!

We headed back to New Ulm on Monday afternoon. I was tired and hot while my wife was cool and comfortable in the car behind me. I kept thinking about my Nash's advanced "Weather-Eye" heating and ventilation system as the sweat ran in my eyes. The Nash had a cowl vent that opened to let in fresh air. There was a screen on the opening and a plenum below with some louvers to divert rain, a drain, and then a filter to trap dust. This fed air to the heater/defroster. There was a sensor on the dash that monitored the temperature and controlled the flow of hot water through the heater core to keep the passengers comfortable. All this great technology wasn't doing me any good as the outside temp was approaching 100 degrees.

I pulled over when we stopped at the stop sign in Kimball. I removed the cowl vent screen, dumped in a cooler full of ice, and headed home. After a few miles, the temperature in the Nash cooled down. After a few more miles, my feet were actually cold. Oh, how refreshing. Then, the ice melted and the hot, moist, air started steaming up the windows. About 8 miles south of Kimball, I found myself driving a 1941 Nash Ambassador 2 door Sauna. If only I had more ice.....

The beauty of this kind of tour is that you have all day to get to the next stop. This encourages the participation of any old but reliable car as speed is not a factor. Another advantage is that everyone in the Region can participate, even if just for a few hours, because the tour comes to them. Around the Region tours were scheduled every 3-5 years. Do you think we should have another? Who knows, gas might get expensive.