



ENJOYING THE RIDE OF LIFE

Here's an inquiry on my part to you, the reader. Every year when the West coast magazines publish what seems to be an entire issue of the ultimate road trip called the 'Power Tour', do you ever wish you could do that? Like me, do you wish you could afford to make that trip, have the time off of work to make it happen, or better yet have a car that wouldn't break down on any of it? I read it every year, know full well, it just isn't going to happen for us. The biggest reason is being on a fixed income, and a more realistic reason is that our infamous 'more door' project is no closer to completion than it was three years ago. There is an alternative for both you & (ultimately) me. That is the BACK TO THE BRICKS Promo Tour that starts June 10th through June 15th. It begins in Flint and ends with a gala in Birch Run. Communities also visited on this year's tour include Ypsilanti, Port Huron, East Tawas, Grayling, and West Branch. There are a variety of reasons why I chose to write about this endeavor. At first many of those reasons were my perceptions on its uniqueness to the hobby. Then I sat down to do an interview with the Tour's co-chairs, Rhonda Rau & Pete Cimballa and found MANY more reasons to get the word out. Additional facts I harvested translated to why every car enthusiast should consider taking part, if not this year, at least in the near future.

Personally, I honestly believe not that many people know about BACK TO THE BRICKS that takes place in Flint, Michigan and usually coincides with the WOODWARD DREAM CRUISE the third weekend in August. The first B.T.T.B. event took place in 2005. Initially, the plan was to have an organized event from Flint to the five Detroit area suburbs on Woodward Ave in, but it never came to fruition. Whereas the Communities hosting the Dream Cruise try to downplay activities prior to the Friday & Saturday, B.T.T.B. builds on additional days & activities. A year doesn't go by that I don't hear positive comments from Flint attendees. However, this article is not really about the 'Bricks', but the promo tour that precedes it by two months. Far more people are unaware of the Tour than the 'Bricks' event itself.

The very first Tour took place in 2010. The Committee at that time realized they had an uphill challenge in promoting the 'Bricks', so they decided to take it 'On the Road', make it the ultimate road trip. The decision was to take the Lincoln Highway through Pennsylvania. Twenty five cars took part that year. "It was a learning experience of epic proportions" was the statement most often heard from organizers, but we never lost sight of what we needed to accomplish. An indicator to the growth is in 2014, we had 135 cars participate. Last year, 187 took part, maybe not the entire Tour, but that was the total participation. We try hard not to think of the future growth of the 'Tour', but it's wonderful to look forward to it."

Rhonda & Pete have been on the 'Tour' committee since 2012 & 2011 respectively. They are truly blessed in that 100% of their committee are gear heads with vehicle ownership covering all genres of cars, modified, original, and restored. THEY ALL COME TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF THE EVENT. "It works and we are all blessed because of it." What makes the 'Tour' so different is that six days of touring (actually a couple hours per day) & showing in the evening. We thought we would not only promote the 'Bricks' but promote the State of Michigan at the same time" Rhonda said. "All too often, each of us take the freeway, the quickest way to get somewhere and forget to take a leisurely trip to somewhere off the beaten path. Our beautiful State has so very, very much to offer and for the most part, we (all) never seem to get around to taking advantage of it. Two or three hours on the road (with the requisite 'pit stops or donut acquisitions), stopping to exhibit our cars in a small town, meeting new people, talking cars, soaking up the small town hospitality, appreciating the beauty of the scenery our State has to offer. The whole week is so laid back and yet it seems to be over in the blink of an eye. While on the tour, we make every effort to accept invitations to visit public & private Museums that have an automotive component, as well as interesting things that would capture the tourist's imagination, simply an abundance of things this wonderful State has to offer.

We try to select small towns that we feel can host 200 vehicles and occupants. We have a list of requirements that if they can be met by that city/village, we put them in the running. Many towns we would love to visit simply cannot meet the basic requirements, so we look further. Logistics, volunteers, permits, accommodations are all on the shoulders of that host town. We do not want to be detrimental to any Community. We also do not want to compete with any planned Community activities." Our biggest requirement is that the vehicle exhibit be on the main street, no parking lots, no malls, but right downtown where the business district truly needs the pedestrian traffic".

For a while, finding cities that would be interested seemed a monumental challenge, but with each additional year, the word got out. We would use the Administration of a previous year's host as a reference to a prospective host city" Pete stated. "Many people who think it's easy to pull off a car show on a Community's Main Street simply do not have a clue what is involved. Not a clue. We do, because we've been there. Those tasks rest on the local hosts & City administration as they should. They also cover the liability. We also require the street be closed to vehicular traffic to insure that pedestrian traffic can leisurely browse either down the middle of the street or sidewalks if they so choose. Closing down a main street is problematic for some communities if that main street is a State Trunk line (Highway), for which an alternative route must be selected and a permit required. That is something the host City is to address.

"What we do ourselves is bring our own DJ, and set up. The really smart, objective City Administrations see this for what it is, economic impact in a downtown business district that needs it (and many of them do), and will find a way to make things work".

"We also make every effort to encourage local car clubs within the host City to get involved as Hosts for parking and any human resource assistance. It's a double application of 'Community', the Community of our hobby and the 'Community' in which our hosts reside. During the main street show, there stories to share, friends to make, laughter to exchange, & memories to be made. Hopefully, our participants will discover places worthy of revisiting."

Those who choose to take part, even if it is only one or two towns can register at www.backtothebricks.org. There is a \$40 fee up to the cutoff date of May 20th. After that the fee goes up to \$45. For your registration, you receive two personalized lanyards, two tee shirts & the requisite goodie bag full of interesting items. It goes without saying that the earlier you register the better. Late registrations may not receive tee shirts. Early registration is also important for 'Tour' organizers to provide adequate visitor information to each Community. It also goes without saying that daily meals, lodging, and fuel costs are the responsibility of the participants. New this year are spiral bound keepsake booklets with directions, turns, Hotel locations, and participant cars and contact info (if they so choose). 98% of our participants drive special interest or collectable vehicles, resulting in a 6 day atmosphere that remains unforgettable. Our last stop this year is Birch Run where there will be a catered luncheon (End of the Road Party) for anyone registered in the Tour, whether you make all 7 stops or just a couple".

Rhonda pointed out "One of the most unexpected aspects of the Tour came from a stop last year. West Branch remains one of many model Cities we have visited over the years. Last year they had people lined up with flags and signs waving a greeting to everyone entering their town. Ron Hodges dealership got involved, moved his cars to the back, had all of the Tour participants' park in his front lot and provided a catered luncheon at no cost to us. He had drawings, great prizes. This year, with the water issues Flint has had, Ron Hodges sent shipments of bottled water to our Community as a thank you to what the Tour did for his Community. You simply cannot buy friendship like that".

All of which brings me to a concept this Committee does that is highly unusual. Last year, one of the Committee members decided to do a follow-up survey of participant opinions (imagine that). One of the most common suggestions that came back to Committee was "Why don't you call the next (2016) Tour the 'Friendship Tour' because that's what we found plenty of during our time with you". Thus the name of this year's 'Tour'.

To be honest, I have been contemplating this topic for a couple of years, but something always seemed a better column at the time. This year is different. For almost 7 decades of life, I have been passionate about the State I live in. Although not a resident of the 'D', I suffered during the legal trials and bankruptcy. I cringed every time some last night talk show host spewed garbage about my State in the name of humor. A City that provided the Arsenal of Democracy that ultimately preserved our way of life now became fodder for (so-called) humor. How quickly they forget. I ache for what the City of Flint is going through. Then I look at what this beleaguered Community has accomplished in the name of tourism. The steadfast growth of B.T.T.B. has become known as a City of pure hospitality. No multi Community bickering over turf & events and who pays for what, just pure hospitality. The former home of Buick & Chevrolet is clawing its way back into the hearts of gear heads everywhere, and the Promo Tour is so simple in its execution, so enjoyable in its mission, so different than anything else out there, and so worthwhile in participation that it warrants serious consideration. SERIOUS CONSIDERATION. Don't just check out their website, register and enjoy. One City or two, better yet all seven. The downtown car shows are strictly exhibition, no judging, no classes, no trophies, just a laid-back atmosphere in a different environment in the State we all call home. This is NOT just another hot day in the same old parking lot, but a moving machine of good intentions, friendships, and as always, memories. To think that this event is a precursor to a much bigger event of hospitality is a huge understatement. 'Showin' is better than tellin'.

If you're working on the car, wear those safety glasses. Take time for a younger person & encourage him or her to enter our hobby. If you have a business that deals in the automotive hobby, take a long look to see if there is a 'Job Shadowing' or 'Mentoring' possibility for young people. If so, consider approaching a school counselor for the guidance required to navigate this to reality. It is well past time for each of us to get involved in mentoring, one young person at a time. Leaving this to someone else is another 'nail in the coffin of our hobby.' If you're sitting around for winter to get over, then why not contribute some of that extra time to someone whose project car has stalled and help them out? If you have a stack of car magazines & you want to get rid of them, consider donating them to Juvenile Offender facilities. If you don't know of any, drop me an email & I'll put you in contact with facilities that are close to you. Agree or disagree with me, drop me an email. Drive safely out there & we'll see you on the streets.

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I do give you, the promo Tour committee and the entire Back to the Bricks organization permission to use the article penned by 1/2 fast Eddie and printed in cruiss'news magazine.
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