Cruise to Colorado Springs GT-47 2022

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By Steve Finch

You have no stories to tell if you never take the Journey. It's about the Journey, not just the Destination.

"It's the Cars that get you there, but it's the People that keep you coming back."

How was the trip to GT-47 in Colorado Springs? In a word –

"Epic!"

Anticipation

We started planning for our MGA cross-country trip to Colorado Springs and NAMGAR's Get Together annual meet over two years ago when it was to be GT-45 in 2020,but then Covid. Finally in June 2022, NAMGAR's GT-47was on and it wasour opportunity to take another cross-country journey like we did in 2011 on the *Rallye to Reno* for GT-36, but that's another story for another day.

Donna and I couldn't wait to get started, preparing and packing for our trip at least a couple weeks in advance, just from the anticipation. Our 1957 MGA 1500 was recently upgraded with a Moss Vitesse 5-speed, and diff gear change from 4.3:1 to 3.9:1. These took 1,000 RPMs off the top side. 70mph was at 4100 rpms, is now 3000 rpms. Too bad my MGB 3-Main 1800 engine was stuck in Windsor, behind the Covid border, and couldn't get rebuilt in time to make the trip. *(It's now in Ann Arbor at Guy's Garage.)* Also, the car has new wheels and tires so the shimmy from the 65-year-old skinny wheels is gone.

The Journey

Steve and Donna Finch (with their English Cocker Spaniel, Bentley) left from Myrtle Beach the day after Memorial Day on a six-day run to Colorado Springs for NAMGAR GT-47. The first three days were mostly interstate and a breeze with the car's upgrades. The last three days were US Highway 50, not interstate, thus the reduced average speeds and a much more relaxed drive.

The Miles shown on the chart are map accurate but Hrs / Min is map software quoted. The average speed calculation therefore was quite optimistic considering our overloaded MGA and its occupants.

Day	Date	To	Hrs	Min	Miles	Speed
From Myrtle Beach, SC						
Tu	5/31	Asheville, NC	4	32	309	68
We	6/1	Nashville, TN	3	56	292	74
Th	6/2	St. Louis, MO	4	6	308	75
Fr	6/3	Olathe, KS	4	55	281	57
Sa	6/4	Dodge City, KS	5	17	323	61
Su	6/5	Colorado Springs, CO	5	21	312	58
		To Colorado Springs GT-47	**28**	**7**	**1,826**	**65**
	6	**Driving Days**	*Ave/Day*		*304*	

In Asheville, we revisited our favorite restaurant in Biltmore Village to kick off the Journey. The next day to Nashville included the great stretch of I-40 from Ashville to Knoxville and the Great Smoky Mountains. By the time we got to Nashville, we got to the hotel, got dinner and went to bed. By the time we got to St. Louis, it was more like waving at the Arch as we sped past, find the hotel, grab dinner and retire for the evening. Yes, we were pushing it, but we had a Destination to get to. The Journey was

great,regardless of the freeways, in our MGA with the Bimini top shading us from the sun. Bentley thought so too.

Rather than interstates, our route from St. Louis to Olathe (Kansas City) was on US 50, our previous *Rallye to Reno* route. The run from St Louis to Olathe was one of our best travel days of the whole trip. Much better than interstates and trucks.

In Olathewe joined up with an old friend from Michigan, Allen Bacheldor. Allen was accompanied by Grant Howlett, who flew over from the UK into Detroit to travel with him across America to Colorado Springs for GT-47. Allen's *"Geraldine"* is his 1958 MG Magnette ZB Varitone with all the trick drivetrain upgrades - MGB 1800, 5spd, 3.9diff, front MGB disk brakes, and air conditioning. We were also joined by John Golanty from the Chicago area in his nicely preserved 1955 ZA Magnette, right-hand drive, box stock and original1500, 4sp.

They all got in late so we met for breakfast the next morning and set off together on US 50 to Dodge City.

Then the Weather Turned

The run to Dodge City started with a forecast of rains to stay to our North, *or Not*. About an hour into the day, the clouds started getting progressively darker and sprinkles getting heavier. We had the Bimini but we could take only so much and it wasn't long before we stopped under an overpass to erect the proper hood and side curtains.

So, we ran in a pretty steady rain for a few hours, headlights, blower motor, frequent wiper use, etc. Bath towels on our laps to catch drips. Tolerable, but not necessarily comfortable. The rain snuck up on us so quickly that we didn't get to putting garbage bags over the suitcase on the luggage rack. *Oops!*

A couple of hours of steady rain began to clear, but then we got a call from Allen that he needed to stop for a jug of antifreeze. He caught back up but we only got a short way down the road before he was sidelined again. This time *Geraldine* would go no further. As we refilled the radiator, water was pouring out between the block and head at the front of the engine. Blown head gasket. Unsure which came first – blowing the head gasket and losing all the coolant, or mostly running it out of coolant on their two-dayrun from Detroit to Olathe *(speeds of 85mph were mentioned at breakfast)* then the head gasket blew.

We were aided by friendly local car guys and were able to stash the car in a nearby driveway for the night. Allen and Grant rode with John the last couple hours into Dodge City. The next day Allen arranged for a U-Haul truck and car trailer, and John drove them back to get the car. We would all catch back up in Colorado Springs. Donna and I would carry on to Colorado Springs alone. But then there's another story.

The Ghost of Joseph Lucas, aka "The Prince of Darkness"

Again, best made plans. Last night, when we got to the hotel in Dodge City and got unloaded, the MGA would not restart (dead battery). I got a push start and parked the car in the back lot pointed downhill. In the morning, we loaded up, push started again and headed down the road. I hoped and expected that once running, the battery would recharge on the drive. *Nada.* Less than a mile down the road the car quit. The generator could not overcome the dead battery. I should have changed out that old battery before we left and maybe snugged up the fan belt too. *But we blame Joe Lucas anyway!*

So, we are off the side of the road, unloaded the luggage rack, set up some chairs with the cooler, unloaded behind the seats to get to the battery shelf, partially erected the hood to get it out of the way, and unloaded most of the boot to pull the spare tire back out of the way from impeding extraction. I got it all disconnected and the battery pulled out. There was an AutoZone one mile back into Dodge so I started humping it. A local couple driving into town, having seen the dead car and now the guy carrying

the dead battery, stopped to offer me a ride. They took me to the AutoZone, waited for me to buy a new battery and then took me back to the car. After a few hours we were swapped out, buttoned up, reloaded and on the road again. We made it to Colorado Springs without further incident.

It's the People you meet on these Journeys that make you want to take more Journeys.

GT-47 in Colorado Springs

We arrived on Sunday to a host hotel parking lot filled with MGAs, MG Z Magnettes, a few Bs and Ts, two pre-war MMM cars and other assorted LBCs. We hung around the lobby bar to get reacquainted with people we met at past events, and meet newfolks. Afterall, MG is the *"Marque of Friendship*". Prominently featured on display just off the lobby was MG EX-186, MG's Abingdon "Skunkworks" LeMans Project Race Car owned by Joe and Cathy Gunderson.

Monday was taken to settle in, rest up, wash the car and the laundry, and get ready for the evening Welcome Orientation. That was followed by a Special Tech Session about EX-186 – the car, its history, discovery and restoration. http://www.britishracecar.com/JoeGunderson-MG-EX186.htm

Tuesday, we passed up the John Twist Rolling Tech Session in favor of a drive to Glen Eyrie Castle for a tour and formal British tea service. The evening featured a shuttle bus to the Flying W Ranch for a Chuckwagon Dinner Show. The food, the entertainment, and the whole experience was great.

Wednesday morning was the Car Show. Our car was looking pretty good, the Bimini top was drawing a lot of attention, and people were impressed that we drove 1,826 miles to the GT and with the dog. Donna and Bentley toured the show field together and Bentley could not pass anyone without introducing himself. We had registered him as an attendee so he had his own event name tag. Afterwards we drove around a bit but the altitude was taking its toll on us. We crashed back at the hotel until dinner and an early retirement.

Thursday, we drove up to the Garden of the Gods, a registered National Natural Landmark featuring dramatic views of the 300' sandstone rock formations against the backdrop of snow-capped Pikes Peak and brilliant blue skies. The evening was the Awards Banquet. To our surprise, we took the 1st Place Trophy for our Class. Donna and I are convinced that we owe the trophy award to Bentley. He's the one that got us the most votes. GT47, Class Winners in Colorado Springs | NAMGAR.

Friday morning everyone said their goodbyes and departed their separate ways home, but we took the day to do laundry again and veg-out. We still had a long way to go to get home.

Continuing the Journey and Return Home

The Plan was to visit the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Bryce Canyon and go to Las Vegas to visit family before we turned towards home. Again, best made plans.

On Saturday we went up to Denver to visit the Shelby American Collection *(well worth it)* in Boulder and to visit some friends in Golden. On Sunday we traveled I-70 West from Denver. It is freeway but through the mountain passes and Colorado's most famous ski areas, Vail, etc. Then, a left turn at Grand Junction onto US 50 towards the south, Montrose, CO and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

By the time we got to Montrose we came to the conclusion that we were not acclimating to the elevation and were getting pretty worn out. If we continued on our planned journey, it would be just too much. It was time to go home. So instead of going on to Bryce Canyon and Las Vegas, we would turn south towards Durango and on to Albuquerque. There, rather than turn right to Las Vegas, we would turn left to Myrtle Beach. We would still be 6-8 days from home at best. Change of best made plans.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison was just up the road some 20 miles. Rather than spend the day at the canyon and another night in Montrose, we decided to do a drive-through and then head south. The MGA had other plans. The car overheated on the road up to the Black Canyon. Back when Allen had his issues, I took to strapping a gallon of antifreeze to the luggage rack and it came in very handy now. Actually, I had probably overfilled it topping off in Montrose. A slight delay and turn around, go back down, had us heading south towards Durango and Albuquerque. At least I didn't blow a head gasket.

The Million Dollar Highway

The good part about the change of plans and heading south to Durango is that it put us on US Highway 550 South towards Ouray and Silverton on "The Million Dollar Highway". Donna and I traveled this stretch 46 years ago in our rental car on our honeymoon camping trip, but that's another story.

Google the Million Dollar Highway and you will learn, "In the state of Colorado of the United States of America there's a special highway built in the late 1880's: the Million Dollar Highway, part of the San Juan Skyway. It's one of the nation's most spectacular drives. You'll be on the "outside" for a while with a hell of a view to your right (let the passenger look. You'll want to watch the road). Forget standard driving safety measures like guardrails and shoulders, there aren't any on this stretch, so swerving off the road is not advised!" I'm so glad we changed our plans and took this route again. What a great sportscar drive.

Understanding Altitude and SU Carburetors

If you do not have a comfortable understanding of SU Carburetors before a trip like this, you will have by the time you get home. I know I learned a lot. SU's are sensitive to extremes of altitude and atmosphere.

- Myrtle Beach is 26' above sea level.
- Asheville is 2,134'.
- Dodge City is 2,493'.
- Colorado Springs is 6,035'.
- Vail Pass on I-70 is 10,666'.
- Black Canyon is 8,775'.
- US 550,aka the *"Million Dollar Highway"*, from Ouray to Silverton to Durango–
    - the Coal Bank Pass is 10,610',
    - the Molas Pass is 10,970' and
    - the Red Mountain Pass is 11,018'.
- Durango is 6,512'.
- Albuquerque is 4,942'.
- Abilene TX is only 1,719'
- and it goes downhill from there.

I sure would have liked to have my 1800 MGB engine instead of the 1500. That last day into Colorado Springs from Dodge City was an altitude climb of 3500' from 2500' to 6000'. The air gets thinner. The car runs richer almost flooding out by the time we got to the host hotel. The recommendation from a Michigan Rowdie friend in the parking lot was two flats right on the jets. Ran much better. Thanks Tom.

You will also learn the proper interpretations from "lift the pin" on SU carbs. According to Barney Gaylord, the *MGA Guru*, if engine speed increases momentarily then it's right. If engine speed stalls, then it's too lean. If engine speed increases permanently then it's too rich. If it's too rich it will run cold and like it's flooding out. If it runs too lean it can get hot and couldoverheat before it blows up.

I lost count of how many times I tweaked the jets on our journey.

Desert, Dust Storm and Wildfire Smoke

We were going to overnight in Durango and go on to Albuquerque the next day but we were so anxious to get home that we did a double stint, continuing straight on to Albuquerque. I suppose I knew that south of Durango in NM was desert but we missed the part in the news and weather reports that told of a wildfire in SW New Mexico. It was generating a climate of its own with wind kicking up a sizeable dust storm with smoke mixed in. The next 215 miles were driving through hell on earth.

We ran through more dust and smoke getting out the next morning to Amarillo TX. Next stop was Shawnee OK. Then it was short day to Fort Smith AR and a day-off there to catch a breath and veg-out again. The last two days were each double stints - first to Pell City AL and then to HOME in Myrtle Beach.

Day	Date	To	Hrs	Min	Miles	Speed
Continuation and Return Home						
Sa	6/11	To Golden, Shelby, Bob Dyer	1	33	91	59
Su	6/12	To Montrose, CO	4	42	284	60
		At Black Canyon of the Gunnison	-	38	20	31
Mo	6/13	To Durango, via Ouray, Silverton	2	27	105	43
		To Albuquerque, NM	3	24	215	63
Tu	6/14	To Amarillo, TX	4	3	287	71
We	6/15	To Shawnee, OK	4	11	295	70
Th	6/16	To Fort Smith, AR	2	11	150	69
Fr	6/17/2	Day off in Fort Smith	-	-	-	-
Sa	6/18	To Pell City, AL	7	23	562	76
Su	**6/19**	**To Myrtle Beach HOME**	6	39	483	73
		Home Again. Safety fast!	**37**	**11**	**2,492**	**67**
	8	**Driving Days**	*Ave/Day*		*311*	

Trip Totals

Day	Date	To	Hrs	Min	Miles	Speed
Total Journey						
	20	***Total Days***	**65**	**18**	**4,589**	**66**
	14	**Driving Days**	*Ave/Day*		*328*	

In Closing

The Destination in Colorado Springs was great and People at these events keep us coming back. Because we took the Journey, we have the stories to always remember – ***the Good, the Bad and the Epic!***

This was the umpteenth MG national or regional event for us that began with MG2008 in Valley Forge, PA. They have all been most memorable, but our anticipation for another long MG Journey may take some time to recover.

Next year's NAMGBR event is in Calgary and we've been talking about taking a drive someday to Washington and Oregon, traveling the Trans-Canada Highway from Sault Ste. Marie to Vancouver.

Better yet and closer to home next year will be NAMGAR GT-48 in Memphis. ***We're going to Graceland!***

Safety fast