

North to Alaska by Dennis Gage

My Classic Car with Dennis Gage - Waxing Philosophical Blog Post

<http://www.myclassiccar.com/blog/>

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Last week we went up to the land of float planes and moose for the Midnight Sun Cruise-In which was held in Fairbanks, Alaska. And let me tell ya, that's a long haul from E'ville, Indiana.

It was three airplanes and about 16 hours total travel time before we finally got to the Bear Lodge; our base of operations for the next few days.

I had built an extra day into the schedule for a change to recover from the inevitable jet lag. The car show itself wasn't till Saturday, and although there was an organized cruise to a salmon bake Friday evening, we basically had Friday to kill. Since this event was being hosted by the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum, I figured walk-thru would be a good way to spend the morning.

Fairbanks really isn't a very big town, about 40,000 people, and to be honest, I wasn't expecting much from the museum, but I could not have been more wrong. This place absolutely blew me away. The museum was the vision of owner Tim Cerny and his wife Barb. The collection has several one-of-one and only-one-left cars as well as several Alaska-specific vehicles (which were extremely weird).

It is also probably the best lit and laid-out museum I have ever seen. I wasn't there long before I started thinking that there might be an episode here too.

The weather on Friday was a bit iffy, but it cleared off by late afternoon in time for the cruise over to a salmon bake across town. It was held in Fairbank's Pioneer Park and although somewhat touristy, it was extremely tasty. I got to lead the group of about 20 rods and classics in a 1910 Stanley Steamer. All that time I've spent with Leno and his steamers paid off, and I was able to get us there without incident.

The cruise-in the following day was held on the grounds of the Wedgewood Resort and the day

was perfect. I should also mention that there was a lot of it. This time of year the sun really doesn't set up there. The closest thing you get to night is a sort of twilight period that lasts for about an hour between 2:00 and 3:00 am and otherwise, it's just day. I was pretty disoriented (even more so than usual) the whole time I was up there.

All totaled, about 180 cars made it to the cruise-in on Saturday. Most were from Fairbanks and the surrounding area, but several had come up from Anchorage. There was also a couple that happened by the show who had driven their Argentine-built 1965 Kaiser Estancia (basically a Willys Jeep) all the way from Argentina over a period of three years and were just beginning their trip back home. And here I thought I was going to get the "long haul" award.

The cruise-in officially wrapped about 3:00 pm at which time about 40 cars queued up to head out on a 35 mile cruise around the area with stops to view the pipeline and at the University of Alaska. I was out front on most of this one too driving a '27 boat-tail Stutz Blackhawk from the museum. Man, what a car!

The evening culminated with a dinner at the museum for the show participants. There was a surprise visit from the governor of Alaska, Sean Parnell (not the one that quit), who warmly welcomed me to the state. I presented the show's awards, but the real entertainment for the evening was provided by Alaska legend, Mr. Whitekeys. This guy is absolutely hilarious and he put on a manic, hour-long one-man show. Now that James Brown is gone, I think Mr. Whitekeys has gotta be the hardest workin' man in show business.

The next day was Sunday and it poured rain most of the day so we figured we may as well shoot the museum. As it turns out, we shot all day and came back for a good part of the following day to get it all done. It had stopped raining so we also got a chance to take a few more of the museum cars out and get some driving footage on Monday. What a blast!

Monday was also the summer solstice and at 11:00 pm we went up in the 1953 Cessna 180 float plane pictured above to get some aerial shots of the area and to fly over the Midnight Sun baseball game. This was the 105th annual game and it is touted as being the only baseball game played at midnight without lights. It was a strange feeling when I realized that it was 1:00 am

and I was still wearing shades!

We weren't scheduled to fly out till 5:15 pm on Tuesday so Ben & I took off on a road trip headed in the direction of Denali. We only got about halfway there before we ran short on time and had to turn back toward Fairbanks, but the scenery alone was worth the price of admission. We also had time to stop in for a regional brew at an Alaskan institution, Skinny Dick's Half Way Inn. I mean really, with a name like that, how could you pass it up?

Another three planes and about 17 hours this time and we were back in E'ville. For all of 36 hours, that is. We leave on Friday morning for Roanoke, VA to shoot the Star City Motor Madness. I look forward to it being dark at night.

Happy Motoring, Dennis Gage