

Al and Jake's Trip West in 2015

Jake and I spent a year together building a collector car like the Chevy Monza that I owned as a teenager. While working on it, we planned to use his first-ever week of paid vacation to take it on a road trip across the country. On June 5th of 2015, I put some of the last pieces back onto the car while Jake finished his last day of work before vacation. By mid-afternoon, I packed up and headed to Buhl to pick him up.



I made it twelve miles out of Ely before the fuel pump failed. My wife picked up a new fuel pump and brought it out to me. Jake came by to help me finish repairing it on the side of the road. We headed to Buhl to drop off the truck and load his bags. Following me, he noticed the rear wheels were bent, so we changed them at his house. Finally, we were together on the road heading west with a few hours of daylight left. It felt so good to be finally making our dream come true!



Our plan was to drive through the first night and get a place to stay near Glacier National Park on the next night. About 3:00 AM, as I was driving across North Dakota, I saw what at first looked like a firefly flash near the right side of the car... And then another... And another... I realized it was sparks coming from the engine compartment. A bearing was going out on the alternator. We stopped on the side of the road and removed the alternator belt. Since we could not charge the battery, we decided to wait until daylight so we could drive to the next town without needing headlights. After a two or three hour nap, we awoke to pouring rain. Jake's phone showed a town eleven miles away. We

decided to go for it. Tiny town, no auto parts store. Keep going. There were a few small towns along the way with no auto parts stores. We ended up driving 47 miles to Minot in the rain without an alternator. Our only electrical power came from a battery that my brother had taken out of his car because he felt it was too old to use driving across the country.



As I went inside the Napa store to see if they had an alternator, Jake removed the bad one. Because he got it out so quickly, I was able to exchange the core as they handed me the new one. Only a few minutes to install it and a new washer fluid pump while we were there. Put the tools away and we were on the road again. We made it to Cut Bank, Montana that evening. Ate a good meal, swam a few laps in the motel pool and got a good night's sleep.



We headed to Glacier National Park in the morning. We stopped at the St. Mary's visitor center to learn that the Going to the Sun Road was closed to automobiles due to repaving. No worries, we hiked some trails around there to view the water falls. Dipped into the chilly creek up to our necks so we could say we did it. Back into the Monza, there is more of America to see.

Later that day we were filling the car at a gas station in Libby, Montana. Jake saw another Monza drive by. Jake watched the parking lots and side streets as I drove through town. There! In the Ace Hardware parking lot we saw it parked. I circled back, parked beside it, and waited. Not more than five minutes later we heard a loud and happy voice calling out "No way!" We spent half an hour visiting with a man we had never met before. We shared stories of how we built our cars, the places we took them, and more.



This is where we learned about the "Ignite the Nites" car show and burnout competition in Libby. The event has been held annually on the third Saturday in August since 1981. Modest in its beginnings, the now international event attracts more than 400 participants each year. As Jake and I continued toward Bonner's Ferry, Idaho we mused about being able to make the trip to Libby in the future. We also dreamed that one day Ely could host an event like that.

Planning a visit with a close friend and relative in Loma, Colorado during our short vacation, we decided we did not have enough time to see the Pacific Ocean. Instead, Yellowstone was our next destination before we would go to see Cody. We headed south on 200 along the Clark Fork River. We got about half a mile out of Plains Montana at dusk. After an oncoming car passed, Jake switched on the high beams. All electrical

power to the car was lost and the engine died. We coasted to the next driveway and pulled out the toolbox.



It didn't take long to conclude that we had an open circuit on the main power wire coming from the starter to the fuse block. We had to remove a few extra parts to access the wire harness and fuse block as they passed through the fire wall. One of the previous owners of the car had trouble here before and had spliced in an undersized wire to repair it. The

undersized wire overheated with high electrical use and finally failed when the high beams were turned on that night. We "borrowed" a properly sized wire from elsewhere in the car and spliced it between the engine compartment and the fuse block. It couldn't have taken much more than an hour for us to make the repair. As we drove into the night, I couldn't help but smile with pride at Jake's skills and his ability to stay focused on the task at hand.

We arrived in Yellowstone the next day. It was a nice chance to relax, wash and wax the car, see "Old Faithful", the petrified tree, bison, elk and more. We cruised the Yellowstone roads and hiked the trails. Just admiring what an awesome world we live in.



We spent a night and two days in enjoying the wonders of Yellowstone. On the way out we headed south through Grand Teton National Park. After a quick stop at the visitor center, we pushed on to Pinedale Wyoming to spend the night. The locals

were gathered watching the Golden State Warriors playing in the NBA finals at the local brew-pub where we had dinner. After a good night sleep, we picked up a set of sparkplugs at the local auto parts store and put them in before heading south to Cody's.

The view on 191 near the Flaming Gorge Dam was spectacular. Shortly after that, there was a portion of the road where we were literally up in the clouds on a worn out two lane road. Jake stopped at an overlook just past the crest of a mountain pass and found it quite funny that I was uncomfortable with the heights. Eventually he quit mocking me from outside the car and got in to continue our journey. That afternoon we finally made it to Cody's. Like normal men who hadn't seen each other for months, we headed to the mall to go shoe shopping and get a burger at Wendy's. There was an area only a few miles away where we were able to take turns riding Cody's dirt bike. Back in the garage, we changed the oil in the Monza and visited for hours. I don't think I was able to even make it until 10:00 PM. Pretty sure those boys stayed up most of the night... Even though Cody had to work the next day. After enjoying an excellent breakfast made by Stef, we hit the road again.



As we headed east, I70 was closed ahead due to flooding so Jake turned up Highway 13 and drove towards Baggs, Wyoming. The two-lane road was smooth and straight. There was a little blue rice grinder that stayed right with Jake no matter how fast he drove. I know he was up over 90 for many miles on end. When we stopped in Baggs for gas, the man driving the little blue car just said "Nice pace". We neared the Black Hills area as it was getting close to dusk so we decided not to stop. By this time we were ready to be home again. Just keep driving. We drove through the night and pulled into Buhl around 11:00 AM. I loaded my stuff into my pickup and let Jake keep the Monza for the week.

I wouldn't trade these memories for the world.