

“Spring Shakedown Cruise”**Saturday, May 22, 2021**

by Steve Chambers



I was a little apprehensive about this event, partly because it’s the first one I’ve planned and led for our club. I’ve organized plenty of other events in other contexts, but the personality and collective habits of groups vary greatly from one to the next and I think I’m still learning how all of these kinds of things work within ECSCC. Yes, I’ve belonged to the club for about ten years already, but the leap from occasional casual participant to leader and planner can be daunting!

So, the event was on the calendar way back in April. A write-up was published in the May issue of *The Open Road*. For good measure, an email had gone out to the membership too, a week or so ahead of time. Nothing to do anymore but wait. Would anybody even want to take part? Would those who signed up actually show up? Would the weather be suitable? Would any of the group get lost on the maze of roads I’d planned for us to navigate? Would we encounter any “unplanned social events” at the side of the road (otherwise known as breakdowns)?

Saturday, May 22 dawned clear, sunny, and beautiful. Almost everyone who signed up appeared on time at the gathering place at the former Gateway Park on Highway 2. (Just one last-minute cancellation). And once we actually got going, practically none of my worries came into being!

In fact, a marvellous time was had by all (see below). Well, almost all. Those of us whose vehicles turned out to be serviceable departed a little bit past our goal of 1:30 PM but still managed to wend our way back to towns between 2 and 3 hours later. In between, we drove close to 150 miles of beautiful and occasionally even downright exciting roads, saw neat stuff along the way, and kicked off the 2021 classic-sports-car driving season in fine style.

A grandly international group we were. The classic American interpretation of a sports car was represented by Jonathan and Deborah Smethurst in their 1999 Pontiac Firebird. What is arguably Sweden’s best—or at least best-known—sporting machine was there too, in Dave and Sandra Kraatz’s 1969 Volvo P1800S. Still, as usual



in our club, the Union Jack rallied the dominant crew: Rolly Burton's 1979 Triumph Spitfire, Dave Rolls's 1980 Spitfire, Howard and Debbie Jewell's 1993 Morgan Plus 8, and my 1974 MGB-GT. A six-pack of classics by any standard!

Unfortunately, one car bit the dust before we even got going. Rolly literally coasted into Gateway Park with engine failure. Good thing it wasn't a Spitfire *aircraft* or the stakes would have been much higher. Even so, the pooled knowledge (or is it ignorance? I'm never sure) of the gathered crowd was unable to get him going again. It seemed to be an ignition problem, perhaps distributor cap or ignition module, since there was good spark from the coil but very little if any at the plugs. What a letdown, after Rolly had been busting his butt all week to source and install a new brake master cylinder just so he could come on this run! As we pulled out, he was forlornly calling a tow truck...



Dave Rolls, too, had a bit of worry at our muster-point with a seriously underinflated left rear tire. And then his electric air pump didn't work. Thankfully, a hundred strokes on somebody's old-fashioned hand pump set things straight. Whew!

A little late, then, we set out smartly, initially blasting south on the crowded and fast freeway before relaxing a bit while heading west on Highway 19 to Devon and beyond. The "beyond" part was the best, as traffic tapered down to almost nothing and we had ample opportunity to give our cars some rousing exercise after the long winter. I admit that I thoroughly enjoyed being the leader since I never had to "back off" to avoid rear-ending a less-enthusiastic club member in front of me! The lovely river-valley curve-and-dip on Highway 504 could be taken at full throttle. Likewise, the sharp right-then-left onto the extension of Twp Rd 622, just north of Thorsby. There's nothing like the flat-out roar of an old-school pushrod engine with twin SU's, to get the blood going! And judging by the fact that we hung together very well as a group, I don't think this was my opinion alone. Whether pulling away eagerly from a stop-sign, inducing a gleeful degree of body-roll on a nice sweeper, or simply cruising along at the speed limit with an arm propped up on the window-ledge, this was a wonderfully *fun* drive.

The scenery was terrific too. Very few of our group had driven these roads before, initially zig-zagging our way south and west of Devon and then gradually approaching Wabamun Lake and Seba Beach on a meandering north-westerly bearing. There were miles and miles of farms, periodic hills and valleys, and more electricity plants than some of us even knew existed! Someone remarked, in fact, that this should have been called "The Power-Plant Tour." First, Genesee. Then, Keephills. Finally, Sundance—after also zipping past the Highvale Mine that (still) supplies coal to (most of) them. Conversion to natural gas is an ongoing process, but for the next few years, at least, the older and dirtier fuel is still being burnt as well.

One of the biggest challenges was the lack of formal bathroom facilities along the route. Due to Covid restrictions, there were none. Before leaving Edmonton though we decided to make a “scenic stop” at the Genesee



Viewpoint—which unsurprisingly turned into a “comfort stop” as well. Well, for the men at least. The massive tires on the super-sized



Komatsu electric-drive dump-truck made an excellent aiming-point. The women in the crowd each got 10,000 bonus points for their fortitude and patience!

Turning east again onto Hwy 16 after leaving Seba Beach, our group gradually began to drift. Dave Rolls’s spritely driving (hmmm: can you do that in a Spit?) came close to emptying his gas tank, so he pitted early at the only station we saw on the whole route. Howard & Debbie, and Jonathan & Deborah, opted for a quicker route home by staying on the Yellowhead all the way back into Edmonton. So it was just Dave & Sandra Kraatz and I who took the hard-right exit onto Parkland Drive, just west of Cougar Creek, to enjoy another scenic run that meandered east and south all the way back to the city. There was a lot more traffic than we’d seen on the first half of the run, and the roads were in notably worse condition, so both the speeds and the fun quotient were lower than they had been earlier. But even so, the sun kept shining and our motors kept growling along—and hey, those two factors alone made for a very successful conclusion to a very enjoyable drive.

Note: Feedback from all participants was extremely positive, both on the interesting route we covered and on its longer-than-usual duration (roughly 150 miles / 3 hours). This leads me to think there might be a good “market” for similarly energetic runs in the future too. Anyone got another good route in mind? Let me know what you’re thinking, and let’s do it!

Steve Chambers