

Bonjour, Santa Fe!

**5,500 miles
in a 356 A
through
America,
Quebec to
Santa Fe to
Quebec.**

**By
Cedric Chirat**

The Registry organizes every year in late summer two national Holidays, in the east and west. With our small group of Registry members from Quebec, we have participated at East Coast Holidays for several years on the East Coast, which is easily accessible: Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, Ohio, Indiana.

As the East Coast Holiday 2013 had been canceled, the crazy idea came to us to participate in the West Coast Holiday in Santa Fe, New Mexico in October. Santa Fe is about 2,750 miles from Quebec, a long trip but for two Porsche enthusiasts 5,500 miles is almost nothing! I needed a partner who was available, reliable and motivated: that would be my friend Pierre Doyle, who enthusiastically agreed to join me on the trip.

Going many miles, our plan was to do some sightseeing. We would try to avoid freeways as much as possible using the “scenic roads”. Our main objective was to travel through the Blue Ridge Parkway, that is to say, crossing the Appalachian highlands in their entire length. We would stop in Nashville to take a country back road and visit some “Route 66” sections, the “Mother Road” to California.

Arriving in Santa Fe, we would participate at the meeting for four days, then return to Quebec by another route instead of agricultural Midwestern states. A total of 18 states and provinces would be crossed as we closed our looping route.

The preparation

Without any assistance—except for the phone list of the members of the Registry’s Travel Assistance Network—it is obvious that we would focus our efforts on the preparation of the car and on the selection of tools and spare parts to carry.

The car is an “A” Super 1600, delivered new in British Columbia in July 1958, remaining in Canada since then. The original engine was removed early in the year to be rebuilt and replaced by a spare engine 1600 Super rebuilt by Pierre. Zenith carburetors are original and the car runs on 6 volts. Generator, distributor, fuel pump, carburetors, ignition harness and brakes were checked and rebuilt if necessary.

The tires were changed just before our departure; four Michelin 165x15 XZX were bought and parallelism was checked. 6 volt iodine bulbs had replaced the conventional bulbs, but the result was very disappointing. So we decided to stop early at night for safety, before nightfall (7:30 p.m. maximum).

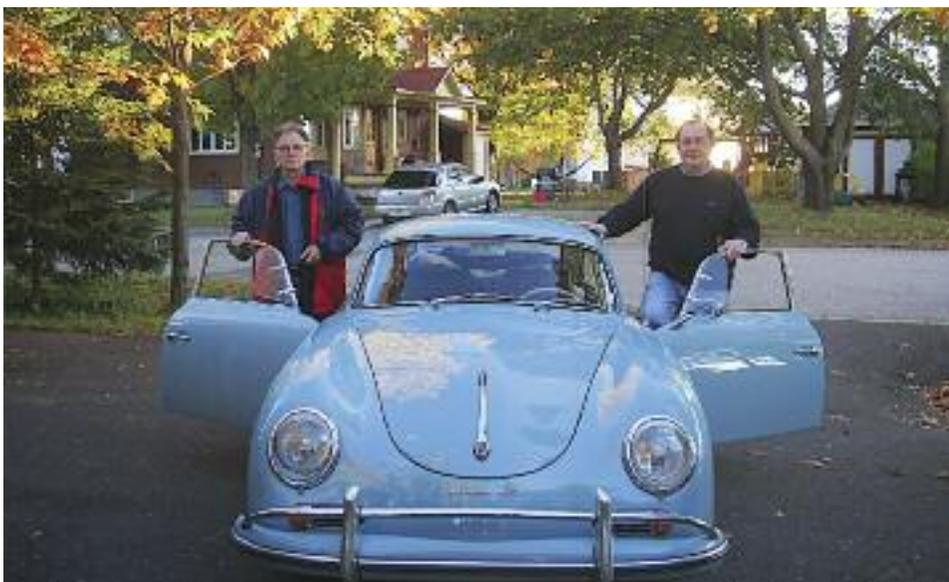
The heat boxes were adjusted, defrosting is rather correct, and Rain-X was applied to all glass surfaces mainly on the windscreen to compensate for the relative inefficiency of small wipers.

The only concession to modernity is a dual braking system, electric tachometer instead of mechanical, and a Garmin Nuvi GPS Canada / USA working fine on cigarette lighter socket 6 volt, which made possible monitoring the actual speed in miles, to check distance and help to find accommodations for the journey.

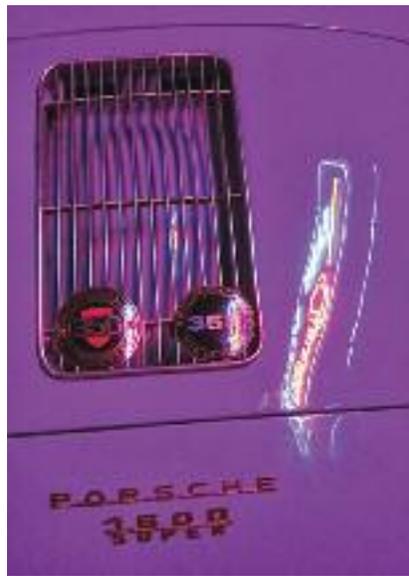
Tools and spare parts

The challenge was to bring everything we would need for repairs without overloading the car. We decided to limit tools to the front compartment.

Gas tank, spare wheel, jack and battery need space that we completed with spare Optima, 4 liters of engine oil, two part bags (small and large) and a bag of tools in addition to the original spare tool pouch.



Cedric (right) and Pierre about to board the already-packed 356 as the journey begins on October 3rd. The trunk was filled with ultimately unneeded parts and tools



Left: Bright lights, little city: A steakhouse in Roanoke was a welcome evening stop and the proprietor turned out to be a Porsche enthusiast.

Small bag contents:

1 set front and rear wheel bearings, 1 rear wheel repair kit, 1 crankshaft oil seal and trans. seal, 1 distributor cap, 1 gen/reg harness, 1 crankshaft pulley, 2 generator pulleys, 1 generator bolt, 1 clutch cable, 10 wheel nuts, 2.20 meters of gas hose, 1 electric fuel pump, 4 exhaust seals, 1 rocker cover gasket set, 1 rotor, 1 condenser, 2 sets of switches, 1 wire coil, 8 spark plugs,

The big bag (larger) parts and tools: 1 coil 6V, 1 BR 18 distributor, 1 generator 6V, 1 mechanical fuel pump, 1 pump repair kit, 1 jack, 1 large wrench, nitrile gloves.

The tool bag :

1 set of ratchet wrenches, spanners, wrenches and extensions, 1 Electrical Tester, 2 dynamo belts, 2 bungees, 2 tubes of glue (epoxy and contact), 1 funnel for all uses, 1 assortment of hold-ers, 1 roll of wire, 1 knife, 1 set of shims, 1 assortment of adhesive, tapes and Teflon, 1 roll of wire and trash bags.

With a full front trunk, the glove box received a box of bulbs and spare fuses, a flashlight, a tire pressure tester and a small screwdriver to adjust carburetors. One extinguisher was under the passenger seat, the rear seats received our personal bags, helmet for the autocross and covers with our clothes for the Saturday Gala. These covers gave us the most trouble, as we had to take them out every night (15 times), and back each morning. That was our biggest mistake, as most of our hosts were wearing shirts for that Gala evening.

The itinerary

Having decided to do some sightseeing, at least on our way to Santa Fe, we had taken the freeway only to reach small beautiful roads. On Thursday, October 3rd we left Quebec City and crossed the U.S. border at Champlain, New York. We spent the first night in Scranton, Pennsylvania after 600 miles. Our main goal for the next afternoon was to reach the Shenandoah National Park in Front Royal, West Virginia. Front Royal is the beginning of the Blue Ridge Parkway, crossing the Appalachians for 460 miles. Unfortunately, this very day the park was closed due to the budgetary deadlock.

On the advice of friendly staff, we took a small side road in the countryside of Virginia and drove near the mountain road, the "Skyline drive" a hundred miles away. This is where the fun was at its best. Landscapes are breathtaking, a very nice mountain road going through forests, plateaus, meadows. Nobody but us on the road, the flat four screaming with pleasure on the hill climbs, and backfiring a bit downhill.

Saturday the 5th was our best day. The same beautiful mountain road with its wide turns, fabulous scenery, magical forests, splendid weather and deer everywhere; some happiness for 280 miles on a road tailored for the 356. In Tennessee, we took the famous "Tail of the Dragon" which we could not really enjoy because of heavy traffic, a speed limit of 35 mph and four radar traps !

In Nashville on Sunday night, we were in a hurry to tour Country and Rock City on Broadway, special shops and cowboy jackets and boots stores, record stores and record-

ing studios, to finish at "Merchant" a trendy brasserie and bistro where we twice ordered the shrimp chowder.

On Monday we took Interstate 40 in Tennessee until Arkansas (there is a Stuttgart south of Little Rock!) to join Henryetta in Oklahoma. On Tuesday we tracked the remnants of Route 66 from Oklahoma City. Clinton is one of the most important museums devoted to the "Mother Road", where we did a photo shoot at abandoned motels and gas stations in Mclean, Texas. We enjoyed our best steak of the trip at the "Red River Steakhouse". We met on these sections of the road a lot of Harley Tourers.

Before entering New Mexico, we stopped at "Cadillac Ranch" in Amarillo, the famous Cadillac alignment 1954 to 1963, nose first in the ground. From Tucumcari, New Mexico on Route 9, we arrived at Santa Fe at 11 am, with the same great weather that accompanied us since our departure from Quebec City. We had done 2,933 miles.

Santa Fe: the 356 Meeting

Capital of New Mexico, Santa Fe is a charming little town of human scale, backed by the Rockies on a plateau



Ghost buildings abound on the Mother Road, providing many photo ops.

over 2,100 meters. We were quickly reaching out of air, and loosened the air screws a little to help 356 carburetion. The place is great - ski resorts are within a few kilometers. You can have 25 Celsius degrees during the day and freezing some in the morning. The architecture of the city is very Mexican, houses with yellow ochre mud tones often have only one floor.

Thursday we experienced itineraries offered by the 356 organization and we visited the oldest U.S. church, the Chapel San Miguel (1610) up in the mountains.

On Friday the autocross was held but just before the start we found an oil leak under the car. On one of the back roads in the mountains the day before some debris hit one of the transmission boots. Pierre then turned the boot in order to stop the leak. I was able to do the gymkhana in extremis but with a correct time.

The boot was the only part we did not carry, but a boot was immediately offered to us by a local participant. We changed it before leaving, after checking the oil level.

The city revolves around the Plaza, which on Saturday exposed 250 Porsche 356 for the Concours. In the crowd, under a wonderful sun, we found



Top: A curbside temporary repair allowed Cedric to compete in the gymkhana.

Above: The A coupe among its brethren on the square in Santa Fe

there our friends from Quebec City, Jacques Bouchard, Keaven Melanson and Guy Mercier who flew to Santa Fe to join us, as well as some other American friends and one French, our friend Pascal Giaï. The meeting traditionally ends with the banquet on Saturday evening, in which we finally got our formal clothes for the awards and the various speeches; the most interesting one was the story of Stanley Gold's raid on his Beijing - Paris journey in a 1965 911.

The return journey

We left Sunday morning after the swap-meet, where we made some interesting buys. We decided to short cut diagonally to Quebec City via highways.

It rained cats and dogs during the two days of crossing the great plains of Kansas and Missouri. I did not see a lot in front and I tried to follow those who drove well before me. Thus I followed County Sheriff's car for more than 100 kilometers. Having joined Highway 70 east to cross the Missouri and Illinois, we bifurcated at Indianapolis on 69 north to avoid large cities like Chicago and Detroit with a lot of traffic. After the great plains of the Midwest, we enjoyed Indiana and Michigan, a more pleasant scenery with its countryside, and the sun.

We crossed the Canadian border at Port Huron, a passage between Lake Huron to the north and Lake Erie to the south. We stopped in Guelph, near Toronto, to pay a visit to Restoration Design, where they manufacture body parts to restore the Classic 356 and 911.

On Thursday, October 16th, we arrived in Quebec with 8,791 km recorded on the speedometer (ie 5,462 miles) with a car at its best form, suffering not a single mechanical failure. The carburetors performed at their best ranging from 0° degrees to 40°, rain or sun, ethanol in the gasoline, without adding any product whatsoever, just checking oil at the gas station. We never had to open any of our parts bags.

Driving conditions

Traffic conditions on U.S. roads were excellent, interstates were very nice, wide and separated, so we seemed to run on large one-way roads. Tolls were non-existent, all highways we took were free, well maintained, potholes non-existent, and road signs easily legible.

Trucks were everywhere on these roads, but they were never a nuisance to other users. The drivers were very professional; changes of pace and direction were reported, and made with care and authority. We always moved to the permitted speed limit. Sometimes a little faster in dry weather, and a little less during the two days of intense rain. Even in those difficult conditions, we managed to keep pace with the trucks.

During that the 5,500 miles of our trip, we hardly met police cars in the US but we met a lot in Ontario. Speed limits ranged from 60 to 75 mph. This is real pleasure for a 356, the ratio of the long BBBC box gives a fourth engine speed of 2,800 rev/min to 100 km/h and 3,500 rev/min to 120 km/h. The engine is not noisy at these rpms, the exhaust (the 1958 original) is still discrete and our luggage in the back seat forms a partition to reduce noise.

There are gas stations everywhere, and with a 52 liter tank of which 6 liters are reserve and an average consumption of 33,6 mpg, we did not have to use the reserve. The price of gasoline is less than half the French price, and a third less than the Canadian price. Where possible, we preferred gasoline without ethanol, 91 or 93 octane and we never saw any knocking or pinking.

Lodging and food

The lodging was very easy; we always stopped at chain motels, preferably where we could park the car in front of the room. It is usually not necessary to book in advance. We were only trapped once, in Roanoke, Virginia where there was a symposium of 2,500 women, with whom nevertheless the car had a great success. The Days Inn man-



ager explained that all the hotels in town were booked by members of the "Extraordinary Women Ministries". While the manager was telling us where to go next, two strange looking (not extraordinary) women decided to quit their room. We took it right away.

A few minutes after, I went to the vending machines to get a coke. The police were arresting a man, face down on the floor and handcuffed. Later, we were told that this guy was heading to our now room. Drug dealer, pimp, or plain guy? We will never know the complete story.

Comfort on board

The comfort of the 356 is not an empty word. The seats are comfortable, the shock absorbers effective, and ample space for long legs. We have never suffered from back pain or cramping, even after 650 miles of riding. The heater worked well, the ventilation was excellent, well as-

sisted by AMCO deflectors, a period accessory for the 356 A. Life on board is nice, and soundproofing enough for easy conversation.

Conclusion

We enjoy this long trip into a 356, as certainly did a lot of people in the late '50s. Now in 2014, you can enjoy with outstanding comfort and pleasure, and all this in a car that is 55 years old : There is no need for driving assistance, no management PASM suspension, which is smooth and precise for braking, which is effective despite the relative small brake drums. The car is light and the weight evenly distributed between the front and rear. No need of PDK, the 644 transmission is smooth and practicing double-clutching is also much more fun. No need to disconnect the ESP, the PDCC, PASM, or press the Sport button, everything is already there.

There is no need for blue-tooth, no air conditioning, but a good Blaupunkt radio with tubes and especially the music of the Flat four in the back.

Finally, we had enormous capital of sympathy from other users. Countless friendly gestures, horn beeps, smiles and thumbs raised from other users, countless pictures were taken while driving. Many stories were told to us, spontaneously on a 356 by 356 lovers or by someone having possessed one, still regretting having sold it.

For our next long journey, I will add a transmission boot in the bag of parts. I will make an engine oil change, and we will return in 2014 for new adventures and even more fun. 🚗

Left: Parts of the return trip did not match the pleasant weather the pair experienced heading west.



Pierre Doyle is Canadian from Quebec, a 356 Registry member, who owns three 356 (B coupe, B cab and C sun-roof) and a 911 SC.

Cedric Chirat is French, with two 356 (Convertible D in Paris and this A coupe) and five classic 911s. He is a 356 Registry, 356 Club de France, PCA and early 911s member.

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