

Corvette'N America Road Tour - Grand Canyon: June 2 - 4

by Jim Cartwright

As I mentioned at our June meeting, this was by far the neatest Corvette event I've participated in to date. I know I'm just a rookie up beside some of you more experienced members, but I'm fairly confident you'd have fully enjoyed this trip as well.

Cheryl and I started out on Thursday morning with a drizzle falling here in Long Beach, not a happy way to begin a trip in your pampered baby. But the clouds fell behind as we headed out across the desert, 'course most things fall behind when you're driving America's sports car, right? Would have been nice to have a few other Vettes round about us, but it turned out that we were the only representatives of our fine club to make this trip to Flagstaff. After hours of desert travel, it was marvelous to climb up into the pine forest surrounding this 7,000 ft. high city. And the Little America Hotel/Resort was all we could have hoped for. It's the best of hotel/motel/resort all rolled into one. The buildings (lodges) are spread out among the trees with plenty of wide-spaced parking areas surrounding them. And the ladies had to love the accommodations; each room a suite with large rooms and bathtubs you could swim in. For us guys, they anticipated our grandest desire. A section of the parking lot was set aside just for washing our babies, complete with soap, buckets, sponges, polishes, waxes, window cleaners, and best of all.....shade.

Entering the hotel lobby, we were immediately aware of and impressed by the event's attention to detail. Everywhere there needed to be a sign, there was a sign. Where someone was needed to help you with something, there were two or three event personnel. Starting with registration, every moment of the weekend was handled by intelligent, smiling people who answered every question and made each person feel welcome and glad to be there. A package of information was waiting for us when we stepped toward the Registration sign, finding our name at the A - E table, right where it should be. Our nametags were all preprinted for us; tickets for the IMAX theatre and the ski lift portions of the event were all there. And every participant was handed a gift bag of Meguiar's products right off the bat.

That first evening included a Welcome Reception, consisting of a buffet line, entertainment by native Hopi dancers, time to meet some of our wonderful Corvette family members and then a rundown of the weekend's activities by our hosts Dwayne and Cindy Bublitz. This young Flagstaff couple has spent the last two years planning and organizing the Road Tour. They say their vision is to make Flagstaff an annual Corvette destination for outstanding scenery and entertainment. They pointed out that we had folks attending from 13 different states, from as far away as Florida, Minnesota, Missouri and Nebraska.

Friday marked the signature event, the run up to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. With the sun shining bright and the air still fresh and cool, we started forming up in a nearby Albertson's parking lot at 6:00 a.m. Yeah, it was early, but it was worth it. For the next hour, we watched in amazement as gorgeous Vettes of every legitimate color rolled in and were expertly directed to

their parking spaces by orange cones and a few more of that seemingly endless supply of Event Staff members. Coffee and donuts were provided, compliments of **Bloomington Gold**, for those able to eat before the rooster's even begun to clear his throat. By the time we'd made half a dozen new friends and watched the local media interview a few of the more colorful members of the group, we heard the voice of one of Flagstaff's finest over a bullhorn. It was time to mount up. We were directed out of the lot in very orderly fashion by, you guessed it, the Event Staff, and followed the flashing lights of a Flagstaff police cruiser as we headed up Highway 180 toward the national park. How cool! The cops had intersections blocked off for us through town like we were VIPs or something. And the locals must have thought so, 'cause even at 7:00 a.m. they were standing and staring at us like they were watching a Macy's parade. Another benefit of the police escort seemed to be that the speed limit no longer mattered. While posted at 45 to 55 mph, we quite often were running between 65 and 75. Maybe we were late, or maybe the officer just didn't like the thought of Corvettes putt'n along at 45 miles an hour on a nice open road.

Before we entered the park, we stopped at a beautiful IMAX theatre in the small town of Tusayan to view the film, *The Hidden Secrets of the Grand Canyon*. So, after learning the history and getting a bird's eye view of this wonder of the world, we were on our own to enter the park and gasp to our hearts' content. And WHAT A VIEW! The Grand Canyon is one of those natural wonders that you just can't take in all at once. You stand and stare.....and stare.....and stare. And to put a cherry on top of the whipped cream for us, a couple of the recently-released California Condors were circling around the rim of the canyon. With a nine-foot wingspan, I was a little concerned about just what they were circling, but it was incredible to see. (Side note: Each condor released from captivity is tagged with a number under its wing for future reference. The one circling me was number 43. I felt like Darrell Waltrip getting lapped by Richard Petty.)

3:30 p.m. came way too soon, but we formed up again at the IMAX theatre and headed back via a little different route. Along the way we spotted deer, coyote, squirrels, rabbits and lizards. We were now destined for the Museum Club, a historic Route 66 nightspot that dates back to the Depression days. (No, I don't mean those days before you managed to buy your first Vette. I mean the 1930's. Remember?) And wouldn't you know it; there was a crowd of people already there waiting for the string of cars to show up. Seems the Museum Club had kind of leaked the word that there was going to be about a hundred beautiful sports cars show up that evening and the neighborhood came out in force again. (Do you suppose there's not too much to do in Flagstaff on a Friday evening?) Here we were each awarded a trophy for participating in the 2005 Road Tour and invited to hang around for an evening of Country/Western entertainment. For me, it was time to hit the wash station and get all those bugs off the windshield.

Saturday morning and early afternoon was set aside for an all-Corvette Show & Shine on the Flagstaff High School football field. Those trusty Event Staff folks were out there again, helping get all the cars situated just right. Dwayne and Cindy's hard work paid off once more. They even arranged for a number of local and national vendors to set up booths to show and sell their products. A notable example was Bob Bondurant's School of High Performance Driving. The school brought two of their racing Corvettes and raffled off a \$4,500 4-day driving course, as

well as a couple of one-day courses and a \$400 pair of Piloti driving shoes. It was a lovely site; green grass, glistening cars and snow-covered mountains in the background. I figured that if I couldn't take good pictures in that setting, I didn't deserve to own a camera. So Cheryl snatched it away from me and took 'em herself! (She told me she just wanted me to be in the pictures, so that made me feel better.) Oh, did I mention the town turned out again? These people must really like Corvettes! And I could tell that was true when I walked out to the parking lot and noticed about 40 of 'em sitting out there. It was a good thing the show only lasted from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Some of the participants were starting to glow from all the mountain sunshine before it was over.

On Saturday evening everyone drove up to the Arizona Snowbowl for a Skyride to the 11,500 ft. summit, followed by the event's closing banquet and awards ceremony. As far as I know, every Corvette made it up to the Snowbowl's Hart Prairie Lodge parking lot, which sits at an elevation of 9,500 feet. That's impressive, considering some of the 1st and 2nd generation models that were there. The sunset was magnificent, and the view of the full parking lot wasn't bad either. A great time was had by all. The evening's entertainment was provided by Richard and Sherry Mangum, who are lifelong Route 66 historians and authors of several books on the famed road. They favored us with a history of Flagstaff and Route 66 by way of a humorous slide show. Trophies for the Show & Shine class winners were handed out by the Bondurant guys and our hosts. And then it was back down the mountain for a good night's sleep before the 7-hour drive home on Sunday. (Have you ever noticed what great gas mileage a 'vette gets going down hill?)

Now that I've attempted to tell you what a blast the first annual Corvette'N America Road Tour was this year, you need to think about signing up for next year's road tour. The planning is already well underway and it promises to be every bit as grand as this year's. Once again, the Little America Hotel/Resort in Flagstaff will be used as home base. But the road tour will head South instead of North, winding down through Oak Creek Canyon to the red rocks of Sedona. I'm sure Dwayne and Cindy will again have a weekend full of great fun for us to enjoy. The dates are set for June 8 - 10, 2006, and the Little America is already taking room reservations. At \$109 per night, these king suites are a bargain. Their phone number is 800-352-4386. Just mention you'll be part of the Corvette'N America group to get the special rate. If you're at all interested, please go ahead and make your room reservations (you can always cancel if you change your mind). We'll be receiving the road tour reservation information later this year or early in 2006. Oh, and there's a cash award for the club that has the largest number of cars in attendance. This year the prize was \$500 and it only took 7 cars to win it. They're hoping to have 300 to 400 Corvettes next year, up from the 100 that attended this year. I have a feeling they'll make it.