

## Driving Beyond Gold Demands Courage & Determination By Dwayne Bublitz

To accept a challenge and to put one's vintage Corvette to the test is to risk failure and disappointment. For Jeff VanHooser of Big Rock, Illinois, the challenge of living with Parkinson's disease for the last 20 years is a reality he faces every day. The disease has even taken away the one thing Jeff loves so, driving his Bloomington Gold award-winning 1956 Corvette. It was Christmas 2009 when Jeff first heard of the new Bloomington Gold TourCertified™ Award and the Bloomington Gold Tours Vintage 500 Tour scheduled for September 29-October 1. To become eligible to achieve Tour Certification, a 1953 to 1973 Corvette must first achieve Bloomington Gold Certification then complete the Vintage 500, a challenging 500 mile tour through the mountains of northern Arizona, with no major mechanical breakdowns. If the Vintage 500 wasn't a big enough hurdle for Jeff and his Silver Certified '56, there was also the 2,000 miles that separated Illinois from the Grand Canyon State.



Jeff knew he needed help to participate in the tour so he turned to his two sons, Brent and Bryan. The VanHoosers decided to trailer Jeff's 1956 Corvette across the country to attend the Vintage 500 in Arizona. The open road took its toll on Jeff with Brent and Bryan having to administer medication to their father every few hours. When the VanHooser family finally arrived in Flagstaff, AZ for the start of the tour, Jeff apologized to Bloomington Gold Tours owners, Dwayne and Cindy Bublitz for not being in the best of shape. Jeff was exhausted from three days on the road and needed the assistance of his sons to walk. However, Jeff assured everyone he would be ready to go for the start of the tour the next morning.

Day 1 of the tour traveled 180 miles along the Mogollon Rim of northern Arizona to the beautiful red rocks of Sedona. Brent and Bryan took turns driving their father's '56 Corvette



while Jeff rode shotgun. At times Jeff would be so slumped over in his seat, it was difficult for him to see out the passenger window. However, the VanHooser team had no problems on day 1 even though record high temperatures near 100 degrees made vapor-lock a nightmare for the other vintage Vettes on the tour. Hal Vatcher of California noticed the 7000 foot elevation playing tricks with his excellent running 1962 Corvette. Hal had driven his solid axle an amazing 3,000 miles in just three weeks.

On day 2 the tour traveled north to Sunset Crater Volcano and Wupatki National Monuments for a total of 140 miles. Everyone enjoyed a traditional Navajo taco for lunch on the Indian Reservation while temperatures again soared to record highs of 95 degrees. Jeff's 1956 Corvette performed flawlessly but not so for Lee Schuster's 1954 Corvette that had to be towed back to Flagstaff.



Day 3 was the finale of the Vintage 500 Tour with participants cruising to magnificent Grand Canyon National Park. The heat wave finally broke and everyone enjoyed cooler temperatures. However, the cruise today included driving over the highest mountain pass of the tour at 8,000 feet elevation through aspen and pine forest. Roundtrip for the day was 180 miles, completing the 500 mile tour total for three days. Vapor lock again plagued the 1954 Corvette, forcing it off the highway, but problems were eventually worked out and the '54 managed to finish the tour under its own power.

On this last day of the tour, Jeff's 1956 Vette piloted by the VanHooser sons performed just like Chevrolet had intended, handling the heat, the canyons, the mountain passes and elevation on its way to becoming the first ever vintage Corvette to achieve Bloomington Gold Tour Certification. With his sons by his side, Jeff accepted his well-deserved award with pride and joy. Jeff VanHooser had proven his 1956 Corvette along with his courage and determination are the best in true American spirit.



If Jeff and his 1956 Corvette can do it, so can you. Go for the challenge of Bloomington Gold Tour Certification. The Vintage 500 Tour will take place again October 10-14, 2011 with registration opening in January. **New for 2011, the Vintage 500 Tour will be open to all 1973 and older automobiles, whether they have received Bloomington Gold Certification or not.** Experience a Bloomington Gold Tour, *America's Best Auto Tours!* For information on this and all Bloomington Gold Tours, visit [www.BloomingtonGoldTours.com](http://www.BloomingtonGoldTours.com) or call 928-527-VETT (8388).