



**ROUNDEL** MAGAZINE  
BMW CAR CLUB OF AMERICA  
F E B R U A R Y 2 0 1 7

# EAST BY NORTHWEST

---

THIS ISSUE:  
LA AUTO SHOW  
Z3 M COUPE  
ART CAR

# EAST BY NORTHWEST



THE ROAD TO OKTOBERFEST MAY BE AN EPIC ADVENTURE OR A PAINFUL JOURNEY—OR BOTH.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY SATCH CARLSON

Sometimes driving is a joyous pleasure, the open road calling us to distant adventures, an asphalt ribbon winding temptingly through high mountain passes, magnificent vistas presenting themselves over every rise. That's what BMW meant by *Freude am Fahren*, the joy of driving, when it coined the slogan more than 75 years ago.

For many people, of course, there is no joy in driving; the daily commute is a smoggy slog, the only joy an oldies radio station and the hope of arriving intact without being rear-ended by some texting minivan driver. But then—at least for some of us—there is the occasional special need for an epic drive, a journey of necessity, Balto

delivering diphtheria serum to Nome.

That's when you drive through the pain.

*The first thing you need to know about pain is how to describe it. When you are trembling in the emergency room, clenching your jaws in mute agony, at some point you will be asked, "On a scale of one to ten, what is your discomfort level?" Do not answer four or five, or even six; this is no time for stoic heroic posturing. Know this: They will not give you anything useful below an eight—perhaps that's the secret pain threshold. Start with ten; that's your best hope for Dilaudid.*

Any drive spurred by necessity has an underlying reason, and



For some reason, Party A is usually accompanied on road trips by something called Towelie, or Towlie, who appears in odd photographs.

this one is complex and varied. Yes, it is always my intention to drive to Oktoberfest; in those years when it's on the East Coast, however, I may break the journey into two parts, stashing my roadster somewhere closer to my destination. (That's what friends are for... especially if you leave them your keys.) And in this case, the year in question was 2015, with Oktoberfest set for New Jersey, about as East Coast as you can get.

But this trip does not involve my Z4 M roadster, nor is it solely a trek to Oktoberfest. Instead, it has something to do with the whimsical investment strategies of my partner in misbehavior, my lifestyle coordinator, my loving amanuensis—how

# THE WEST



many times do you get to use the word *amanuensis*?!—the marvelous Party A, she who decided a couple of years ago that instead of leaving her retirement funds in stocks and bonds, she would rather invest in a collectible BMW. The plan was (and remains) for us to enjoy such a car as long as I am on this side of the dirt, and then sell it at a long-term profit when I am on the other. (Okay, she'll be the one to sell it; I will be busy elsewhere.)

Sometimes *long-term* seems longer than it does at others.

The car that she chose was a BMW Z8, or it chose her; all I know is that within two weeks of deciding that a Z8 was a better investment than a dubious 1938 BMW 327, she owned a glorious black-over-crème Z8 named Buffy.

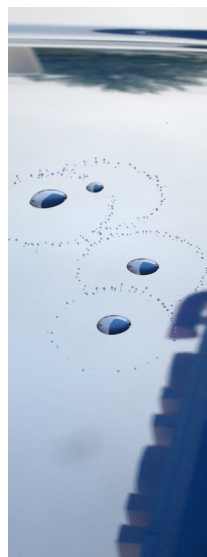
The real trouble started with the bank.

That is, we were no sooner in the collector-car world, waiting

to be invited somewhere for brie and Pinot Noir, than we discovered that there are lending agencies which are sharkishly circling these communities, and I was suddenly confronted by an opportunity to borrow a huge pile of cash against Buffy, with which we might partially replenish Party A's investment account—

Or not.

I am sure that such good sense might have prevailed, except that Buffy had only some 23,000 miles on the odometer, and mileage seems to be a key element of collector-car value. Unfortunately, with a low-mileage car, you spend more time looking at your investment than driving it, because every mile decreases its value by a smidgen or two. Of course, you could buy a higher-mileage car, a driver whose value is much less penalized by additional miles: after 100,000 miles, another 5,000 or 10,000 miles are not going to move the investment meter



There are some Z8s that have never seen rain. Nancy Drew is not one of them.

very far.

So what were we to do when a Topaz Z8 came on the market for just about the same pile of borrowed money that I now had sitting right there in front of me? A Topaz Z8 with nearly a hundred thousand miles?!

Well, buy that one, too, of course. It only makes sense.

*Shingles: You do not want to ever get shingles. Probably the best thing to do is to never have chicken pox in your childhood, which is an unfortunately difficult task after the fact; it seems that childhood chicken pox creates an interesting virus, which somehow tunnels its merry way into your brain, where it lolls around for a few decades, mutating into an interesting, hideous viral agent that emerges from time to time as something called shingles. This condition is not a disease, exactly; more of a plague, or cosmic retribution for all the rotten things you have ever done in your life, even those long*



Kelly Kirkland



runs according to plan—but the plan is convoluted by geography. The Z8 is in Atlanta, and the day I spend there with the delightful Donna and Dan Dietz—who is selling the car to make room for a Porsche Targa, alas—is great. These fine folks make me welcome in their post-bellum Southern home, and even let me stay over in their guest room. In fact, I get all the way through the first night before finding even a single omen of potential doom. This comes the next morning as we line up the car for a photo shoot with Bob Shapiro. “Turn on the lights,” he says, and I do—but after the ten-minute shoot, the car will not start. Dietz throws a battery charger on it and we all adjourn for a round of coffee and tall tales while the electrons migrate. Eventually the mighty V8 fires up, and we are off, the Nancy Drew roadster and I—although at this point it is more of a Nancy Drew *coupe*, what with the removable hard top and all. (All Z8s came with matching hard tops.)

*forgotten, sins large and small: The pain of shingles is enough to atone for every one.*

*This scourge may present itself in several ways, and although I am incredulous at the thought, I may actually be lucky: Mine begins as a spreading band of pustulent sores artfully arranged around my left side, from spine to sternum, about three inches wide. Heat a three-foot bar of flat iron, four inches across, in your nearest forge until it is red-hot and pliable; bend it carefully in a torso-shaped arc. Now apply it, before it cools, and you have a vivid understanding of shingles.*

*And while the sores and lesions eventually crust over and subside into scar tissue, the subcutaneous pain continues. This postherpetic neuralgia may continue for years—or might even continue for life. That varicella zoster virus may be fairly benign in childhood chicken pox, but it grows up to be a nasty companion.*

Surely this is madness: It is one thing to mortgage your future, sink all you can borrow and everything you’ve saved into one Z8—but *two*?! Perhaps the appearance of a second investment car at such a fortuitous junction of money on the table, combined with the breaking of a fever and a renewed urge to hit the American highway, proves that there is some order to the

universe, some cosmic master plan that controls our fates. All I know is that at this point I am now well enough to travel—I think, I insist—and that I have been given a marvelous mandate to put some miles on one of my favorite cars of all time. This will surely be a bonding experience, as my inner Nancy Drew gets in touch with a shiny blue roadster! A chance to learn the quirks and foibles of a fifteen-year-old halo car and make it my own! Another adventure across the stunning landscape of America!

What could possibly go wrong?

At first, this hopeful scheme

After a few thousand miles back and forth across the West, the Z8 had earned a brief respite in Indiana.

Dan Dietz “de-acquired” his Z8 in order to make room for another Porsche: his loss.

Destination Oregon.

Wait, what? Isn’t New Jersey in the other direction? Well, yes—but we are still some months away from Oktoberfest, and it might be a good idea to register



Bob Shapiro



the car, you know? Maybe put license plates on it? And since for decades I have kept my rally cars and such in Oregon, home of the Monte Shelton Northwest Classic Rally, among other events that I favor, then it makes sense to add a blue Z8 to the fleet. There's plenty of room, since now I will no doubt be dis-acquiring everything else in the garage, along with various limbs and organs, in order to pay off the blue Z8 in my lifetime.

Besides, by heading northwest instead of eastward, I can stop in Memphis and visit Mark and Melinda Calabrese, who are good friends *with a guest room*—plus a garage. This is where Calabrese and I will dis-mount and stash the shiny—and heavy—blue hard top. There

are those who say that the Z8 is just as beautiful with the hard top mounted, but I am nothing if not a roadster guy, so I mooch not only the guest room but enough garage space for the hard top, which I will pick up later—well, eventually. Really. I promise.

And now, a day later, the hard top safely stashed in the Calabrese garage, I am truly headed west—but since it is raining, the convertible top is up as I drive across the Hernando de Soto Bridge over the Mississippi into Arkansas. Nothing against the Great State of Arkansas, but this is not my favorite stretch of I-40, because it seems like all roads lead to this point, or at least many major highways come together to feed into I-40, and it

Dan Dietz displays proper remorse as he says farewell to his Z8.

doesn't look to me like they have done much to improve or widen the highway since the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Sixty years later, I-40, one of the first highways constructed during the Eisenhower administration, is now a roaring sea of trucks.

I am happy when the rain abates and I spot a Waffle House sign, because I will be much safer when I have the top down and can see my adversaries. The respite is brief, however, because no sooner do I lower the top for a few snapshots than more dark clouds begin looming in the west. Since I do not care to encounter squalls on the Interstate, I press the button to raise the top—

And nothing happens.

Well, that's not exactly true. The top *starts* to go up, but it doesn't get close enough to the windshield to lock it in place, which requires pulling the top frame down and forward and activating a magic button that pulls it into place. Nothing doing; it's stuck about halfway up. And then it won't go back down again. And then it won't go *up* again, either. I am sitting here in the spitting mist, reading the Z8 owner's manual in hopes of finding a clue to yet another idiosyncratic mystery of Z8 ownership.

By now all the sequence and warning lights have gone off, so maybe the temperamental Computer That Controls All Things is merely pouting, or napping. Sure enough, after a



few minutes, the top-up switch elicits a grudging whir, and the locking hooks retract themselves far enough for me to pounce; I pull the top into place and finally the mechanism cycles itself into Top-Up mode.

But now, of course, I am afraid to lower the top until I am sitting in the driveway of a dealer who knows how to fix it. Yes, Roadster Boy is now confined to a fabric cocoon for the foreseeable future—and thus we head into Oklahoma.

*Pain is relative, of course, and comes in different flavors. I remember a sort of white, numbing blank shock when a steel-edged door took my finger off when I was five, and I remember the excruciating, almost electric jolt when an ER technician inserted a needle into*



*the open wound of my thumb when I split it with a fishing knife twenty years later. But the nerve pain of a spinal virus I encountered a year before taking on shingles—think of Lyme disease without the benefits—enabled me to concentrate on the creation of a more logical pain scale. Level Three involves an inability to sleep. Level Four adds such a*

Paperwork signed, the editor cheerfully mortgages his future and hits the road.

*focus on the pain itself that you cannot concentrate on a given task, like reading. At Level Five, it is impossible even to form a complete sentence; no random or directed thought can escape the black hole that brings all of your focus back to the seething cauldron of disrupted synapses from shoulder to sacrum.*

*This is the point where you beg for Dilaudid, and it makes mere shingles seem like a walk in the park. Still, that annoying aftershock of shingles, the chronic neuropathy that may last for years or decades, is, shall we say, a distraction from what should be a wonderful road trip.*

Oklahoma is a pleasant state, where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain, but I opt to escape the trucks by heading north by northwest. I figure on heading up through Kansas before hanging a left to Denver, because Darlene and Mark Doran live in Denver—and they, too, have a guest room. Are you beginning to sense a theme?

I-40 was one of the first Interstate Highway projects, and I am happy to leave it for a slanted route across the north-eastern quadrant of the state, through Muskogee and Tulsa, although Merle Haggard pretty much guaranteed that I would never set foot in the former with one single line: *We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy, like the hippies out in San Francisco do.*

If it seems odd that I should be humming whatever lyrics I can remember of anything, even “Okie From Muskogee”—a song which, to his credit, Haggard later regretted—you must remember that part of the charm of old cars lies in their quaint musical devices. Fifteen years doesn't seem like all that long ago unless we're discussing technology; did I even have a cell phone in 2000? Let alone Bluetooth connectivity? No, and neither does the Z8. Instead, it has a whiz-bang six-disc CD

**I LOWER THE TOP FOR A FEW SNAPSHOTS AND DARK CLOUDS BEGIN LOOMING IN THE WEST. I PRESS THE BUTTON TO RAISE THE TOP—AND NOTHING HAPPENS.**



changer, which was high tech in the mid-'80s, maybe.

However, I have embraced retro technology; planning ahead, I have grabbed a few CDs from my moldering collection—well, four, anyway—and I have installed them in the six-CD cartridge that lives in an unreachable box behind the driver's seat of the Z8. But for some reason, after only two days into this journey, I am heartily sick of all four CDs; before I would listen to one more round of these

discs, I would use them for skeet. I must say that I am surprised to discover how fast my affections for Buddy Holly and Don Henley have faded, but there it is. So instead I am entertaining myself by singing just about everything I can remember of—well, just about everything I can remember. Which creates an odd mélange of everything from Oscar Brand sea shanties to Broadway show tunes—*I'm gonna wash that man right outta my hair; a poy-son could develop a cold; stick with me, baby, I'm the one that you came in with*—until I realize, sometime after the hailstorm that has me cowering in a gas station, that I am beginning to hallucinate.

Hallucinatory free association is not an unpleasant way to drive, however. The great attraction of the American landscape is that it is varied and vast, with hours and hours of time to do nothing but drive, soaking in magnificent vistas and pleasant passing views. This is the very essence of *grand touring*, and I seem to have settled into an existence focused on just that pursuit; everything in my entire life seems to have been designed, like a four-dimensional game of Chutes and Ladders, to lead me to this point, to this place, to the Cimarron Turnpike, in what is surely the consummate grand-touring car. So what if this is the last car I ever own? So what if the rest of my life is committed to the care and feeding of BMW's pinnacle of 20th-Century design? Where

would I rather be, what would I rather be doing? *This is the life*, I realize and reaffirm, between verses of "Angel In The Morning." (I cheat and add harmony instead of reaching for the high notes of Merilee Rush and the Turnabouts.)

Or at least this is *my* life. And yes, the residual nerve pain is somewhat distracting, but come on: *I'm driving a BMW Z8.*

Distracting? Well, the Cimarron Turnpike is a limited-access toll road, a magnificent ribbon through the sparkling green hills northwest of Wichita—I am a *lineman for the countee*—and now that the hail is behind me and the rain has abated, the wet grass sparkles on the hills like diamonds. I stop singing in order to get my bearings, my relationship to my route and my surroundings, for the Cimarron will take me to I-135, and I will need

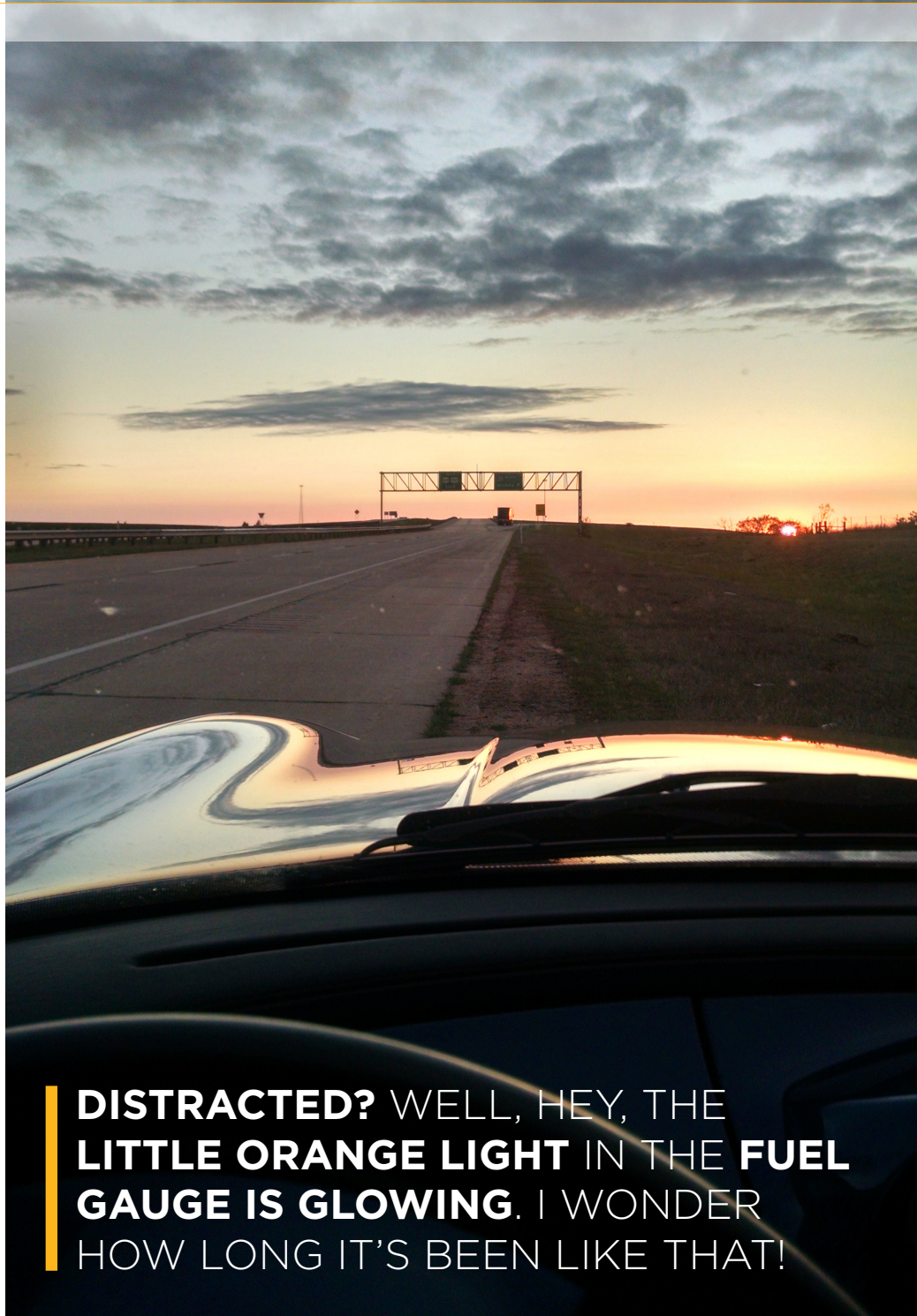




to get off that freeway at some point, because when I picked up the car in Atlanta it had something over 98,000 miles on the clock, so this journey will take it to the magic 100,000-mile mark, and every BMW CCA member knows what that means: a picture for *Roundel*! So I am zeroing and re-zeroing the trip odometer in the hope that I will notice it when I get closer to the mark, and I stop singing lest I find myself distracted by my best *a capella* Ray Charles—if you don't want, you don't have to get in trouble; say, you'd better leave my woman alooone—setting the tripmeter when I have 100 miles to go, no, wait, if I notice then it will be too late; I'd better reset it *now* so I'll notice well before it gets to 100; no, wait, I'd probably notice 50, wouldn't I? But wouldn't that leave too many miles in which to be distracted?

Distracted? Well, hey, the little orange light in the fuel gauge is glowing. I wonder how long it's been like that! Hmm: probably since before I re-set the trip odometer. How far's the nearest Shell station? In fact, never mind the Shell part—just get me to anything that burns.

Vintage cars, and retro-vintage cars like the Z8—that is, a car with loving salutes to the glory days of motoring, with a few modern touches, like cranky electronics—do not have much in the way of whiz-bang navigation, but the highway signs tell



**DISTRACTED? WELL, HEY, THE LITTLE ORANGE LIGHT IN THE FUEL GAUGE IS GLOWING. I WONDER HOW LONG IT'S BEEN LIKE THAT!**



▲  
Hmm: stone empty.



Possessed by an obsessive-compulsive need for palindromic symmetry, the driver rolls on that extra tenth of a mile.

me of two locales that I think I can reach with ease; the third is Enid, 85 miles away, and well out of range. But alas, the first signed exit turns out not to be a *place*, exactly; it is merely an exit to a crossroad, with the town, or village, or hamlet, somewhere up thar or down yonder. So I head for the last hopeful opportunity between here and I-135—only to discover that this one, too, seems to be an exit to nowhere; there is a name on the sign, but no sign of the town that bears the name, just a few cows lolling in a pasture—and the Z8 doesn't run on methane.

I am rather loath to enter the Interstate running on fumes, but by the time I can see it, I have probably gone too far to attempt to backtrack past the cow pastures. As Macbeth put it—although he was talking about fluids other than high-octane gas—*I am in blood stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er.*

Anyway, before I can come back with the other side of this

debate, the Z8 chooses for me: The engine dies, and we coast to a stop at 99,979 on the odometer, a few hundred feet shy of the I-35 onramp.

Now, any BMW owner past the days of the 2002 can tell you that you don't want to run out of gas, ever—not so much for the inconvenience, which would not be all that terrible if the AAA truck carrying two gallons of low-octane could find the only blue Z8 in Oklahoma parked a hundred yards from the Interstate in less than three hours—but because BMW fuel pumps are submerged in the fuel tank, where the gasoline keeps them cool. When you run low on fuel, you also run low on the longevity of the fuel pump, and its mortality may prove itself in interesting ways.

But when the AAA truck arrives—well after dark—the blue car leaps back into life. I am only about ten miles from a real gas station, which also provides a route to a Kansas farm road where I can waste half an hour or so with the ritual recording



The lovely Oklahoma sunset strikes a lonely Z8 on the side of the road, stone-empty.

of the 100,000-mile turnover. Then, from my unexplainable need for symmetry, I roll on another tenth to make it 100,000 000.1. (Yes, I am aware of Tom Robbins' dictum: "Never mistake symmetry for balance." Leave me alone.)

From previous experience, I know enough not to drive a Z8 after dark, for its low beams tend to suck light out of the atmosphere. This is one of the many quirks of an iconic halo car that may surprise a blissful owner, along with such sobering realities as its delicate neon tail and signal lights. (These beautiful Futurama details are like a frail, ethereal aunt who drifts about the mansion in a tenuous transition from this side of mortality to the other; you know full well that she's going to die, but her passing is nevertheless shockingly inconvenient and expensive.) So I motor on into the Stygian depths of Kansas to Salina, perhaps best known as the small town Millie flees in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Here I spend an abbreviated night,





intending to get on the road to Denver early, but the next morning, when I press the button to unlock the Z8, nothing happens. Another foible: These keys have an internal battery that is supposed to charge when the key is in the ignition. The batteries are not replaceable, and they have the same life expectancy of that ethereal aunt.

I panic before I remember that it is, after all, a key—and sure enough, the Z8 comes complete with a keyhole for it, concealed under the door handle. Oy.

*Gabapentin is an artificial neurotransmitter introduced by Pfizer as Neurontin; it is used to treat seizures and neuropathic pain, although nobody seems to know exactly how it works. It supposedly has a chemical structure similar to that of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), and may affect certain brain receptors, the ones in charge of agony. It is probably best known for Pfizer's efforts to promote it for conditions for which it was never approved; while it is legal for your doctor to prescribe medications for non-specified ailments,*

*it is not legal for Big Pharma to promote those non-approved uses. Meanwhile, an effective dosage seems elusive; hoping for at least an increased placebo effect, I am gobbling gabapentin like peanut M&Ms without any noticeable success. Common side effects include dizziness and drowsiness, plus fatigue, ataxia, and nystagmus, whatever that is—not to mention tremors. Oh, and sexual dysfunction.*

Driving the straight, flat eternity of Kansas makes me glad that I came in toward the middle, and eastern Colorado is more of the same, except that

The Dorans' Denver retreat provides an appropriate roommate.

As an astute friend put it, "Some o' them bugs look like triple-digit impacts."

we have left behind the personal friends of Jesus who believe that he must be driving the I-70 corridor; they have put out signs of devotion, which I am sure must be a comfort to him, and a distraction from endless miles of wheat. I am also urged to Choose Life, which I may consider once I get to Denver and pick up more gabapentin. At this point I am gritting through a certain amount of what they like to call *discomfort* in the medical business; the pain is oddly localized and polar, as if a half-inch poker had been heated and thrust through my chest on the left side. The points of entry and exit are radiating an interesting contrapuntal chorus of irritation. At one point, I discover that I can get some relief by steering with my left hand while I massage the left side of my chest with my right; suddenly I realize to my horror that if muscle memory is accurate, I have somehow attained the same cup size as my first wife.

With both hands back firmly on the wheel, I ponder the lyrics to "Woolly Bully," which I have recently learned does not have a protagonist named Hadacol Hattie, who sounded rather interesting. It turns out that the lyric is "Matty told Hatty about a thing she saw," but at this point I would welcome a couple of bottles of Hadacol, since I am stone out of gabapentin.

Ah, well. Denver provides relief in several ways, not the least of





Portland's Renée Damm earned eternal gratitude for her driving chores.

which is the hospitality of Doreen and Mark Doran. Doreen even hauls me off to a pharmacy, where my GABA prescription catches up with me. Even better, my friend Renée Damm flies in from Portland to spell me at the wheel. This should be a boon and a blessing, and I go to bed in anticipation of clear sailing to Portland. I wake up hungry, however, in the middle of the night, and go foraging for food. The Dorans keep a huge bowl of apples in the dining room, so I select a fine green

Granny Smith.

The apple is not real, of course. I credit the gabapentin for my hallucinatory judgment.

The next day dawns bright and clear, and we make great progress with Renée at the wheel, running up I-75 to intersect I-84 in Wyoming—great progress, that is, until the entire Interstate is detoured toward Medicine Bow on Highway 30. It seems that there has been a fiery incident involving a tanker truck or two on I-84,

and this detour will carry us around it.

Or not.

We are some miles past Medicine Bow, out where the wilderness laughs at your cell-phone desires, when the Z8 simply stops running and coasts to the side of the road. The symptoms are familiar, but how can we possibly have run out of gas? The gauge still shows a quarter of a tank, and we've only come about 200 miles on this tank! In any case, our position is rather precarious, and Renée would prefer to have the car a few yards farther along, where there is a little more room to get it off the road. "Do you think we could bump it there on the starter motor?" she asks.

"Can't hurt to try," I say. In my past, I have moved a few cars with the starter motor, and burned up a starter motor or two in the process, but this is no time for delicacy. Renée turns the key and hits the starter button—

—and the blue car inexplicably roars to life again! We're saved!

The next 60 miles southwest to I-84 are spent in speculation: Perhaps we got bad fuel at the last fill-up.

Maybe there's water in the tank. It could be that the fuel pump needs more than a quarter-tank of fuel to cool its delicate feelings, since I was so mean to it in Oklahoma.

Whatever the cause, we encounter no further trauma in the day and a half it takes to reach Portland, where I finally take the wheel again when I drop Renée off at Chez Damm—home of Those Damm Cats—and head for the DMV. On the way there, of course, I must visit the smog station, for a smog certificate is a prerequisite to registration. I have been grateful to Renée for driving through two long days, but instead of resting, I have spent my time in the passenger seat in a worrisome fret, going through all the possible DMV scenarios. After all, the Z8 now has over 100,000 miles on it; what if it fails the emissions test? I have one flexible day built into my rigid schedule; will that be enough to fix whatever causes it to fail?





Nancy Drew waits her turn at the Oregon smog station.

**THE Z8 NOW HAS OVER 100,000 MILES ON IT; WHAT IF IT FAILS THE EMISSIONS TEST?**

What if it can't be fixed?

I have lost sleep over nothing: The Z8 flies through the smog test with ease. Title and registration are no more tedious than usual; I even have time to run the blue car through a car wash on my way to get some sleep at the Damms' before heading east again. Yes, a car wash; that's the kind of thing you can do when you drive a 100,000-mile car.

My first stop for fuel the next day comes after I drive through some sort of a time warp, for I find myself at a vintage-'50s Texaco gas station smack dab in the middle of La Grande, Oregon. You probably know plenty of people who restore cars, but in La Grande, one Father Hank Albrecht spent most of a decade restoring a Texaco station. It is more a museum than the sort of Kwik-E-Mart we encounter

today, but its vintage pumps work just fine, and it is the highlight of my day, a serendipitous discovery during what would otherwise be a moderate slog to Exit 81, the Utah location of my favorite Motel 6. I expect to be there long before dark—that Z8 headlight thing, remember?—but my enchantment with the La Grande Texaco station takes some time, and I experience a further delay at mile 102,540, just short of

Burley, Idaho.

When the car stops again. Yes, just like in Wyoming! But this time I have coasted to the side of I-84 during what appears to be rush hour in Burley, which is at least closer to civilization than the wilderness west of Medicine Bow; I have about two bars of cell phonage. So I call AAA again, hoping they will have more luck finding me here than they

No, it isn't a time warp, it's a restored Texaco station in La Grande, Oregon.



did in Oklahoma, and wondering how far it is to the nearest BMW shop. And after a while spent waiting for AAA, I decide once again to see if I can bump the car along on its starter motor to get it a little farther away from the semis rushing past.

Yes, you guessed it: Nancy Drew roars back to life once more.

I quickly cancel the AAA service and head for the nearest gas station. This time the car had about a third of a tank left when it stopped, so I determine that henceforth I will not let the fuel level fall below the halfway mark, since the car seems to run fine until the fuel level reaches a certain point. The drive to Exit 81 is rather fraught, because I am apprehensive about leaving the right lane, which I deem safest for any sudden fits of fuel-system failure, and it is full dark by the time I arrive at Motel 6. Moreover, I arrive in a

frog-strangling downpour; I am drenched by the time I have my bag out of the trunk and swim through the monsoon to check in. It is raining so hard that I cancel any thought of leaving the motel. I go to bed without supper and fall asleep clutching my chest and feeling very, very sorry for myself.

*There is a vaccine for shingles, but it is not all that effective. Something called Zostovax is supposed to be about 51% effective for people in their 60s. A newer two-dose vaccine, the improbably named HZ/su—I'm pronouncing it huzzoo—seems to be 90% effective in people in their 70s—but an alarming number of researchers involved in studies of HZ/su are connected one way or another with GlaxoSmithKline or Pfizer. But then, I'd be happy even with a placebo effect, so I am definitely putting huzzoo on my shopping list.*

The new day arrives full of promise and sunlit skies, and



**IT IS A RATHER PRETTY CAR, AFTER ALL. SHOULDN'T I BE SHOWING IT OFF?**



yesterday's depression is soon dissipated as I chase last night's storm back into Wyoming. This is Big Sky Country indeed, skirting the northern edge of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, and the scenery is spectacular—enough to reconfirm the underlying mad philosophy of this whole adventure: *I am driving a BMW Z8 through most of America.* I think it was William Saroyan who wrote, “Live while you live, and then die and be done with it!” I’m doin’ my best here, Bill.

The delicate, frozen wind-blown snow curling off the highway signs tells me that I am not all that far behind the storm; the road is still wet in some places. But I am warm and cozy in my rag-top coupe, with another three days to go on this part of the journey. Another night at the Dorans’ manse in Denver is followed by a smooth run to Betty and Scott Blazey’s home in Kansas City, and a final day



who fixed the air-conditioning in my E30 at Oktoberfest 1999 during a hot Indiana August. Under my guiding philosophy—Try The Cheap Fix First—they obligingly change the fuel filter, along with other 100,000-mile items like an oil change. Actually, I am curious about a quirk of the S62 engine: It has small internal oil reservoirs to keep it lubricated in hard turns, and I have heard that the only proper way to change the oil is to hook it up to a computer and drain those reservoirs along with the sump. Shop foreman Eliot Tecs even takes pictures of the computer screen so I can see the process. Oh, and since D&B is the closest shop to the Dinans' Carmel house—in Indiana, it's CAR-mull, not Car-MELL—they thoughtfully remind me that they are in fact a Dinan *dealer*; would m'sieur perhaps wish to add a dash of Dinan software to the mighty S62 V8?

Well, who wouldn't?

By now the top has been pronounced operable, which means down, and I am elated as we finally head southeast through Kentucky and Tennessee in top-down weather, the dame I love at the wheel, me playing Ned Nickerson to her Nancy Drew. Ah, this is the life! This is what it's all about! This is—

Wait: Is the V8 missing a beat?

In fact, it is stumbling, if not

of intermittent rain brings me to Steve and Jan Dinan's place in Carmel, Indiana, where I stay for the night, keeping intact a ten-day mooch, and park the Z8 while I fly home to make further arrangements.

It is a rather pretty car, after all. Shouldn't I be showing it off?

Indeed, when I return to Indiana some months later to continue the trek to New Jersey, my peripatetic route has now turned south to Asheville, North Carolina, and the inaugural Biltmore Concours. Yeah, I have become one of *those* people, as if possession of a certain car has somehow leached some sort of status into my being. I do know that the Z8 has been an object of passionate pursuit since it first appeared in 2000, but I had never considered it all that rare. But now I encounter a surprising number of people, even BMW CCA members, who have never seen one in the wild, and what is our good fortune

for, if not to share? So I am back on the road, this time with an ample supply of gabapentin and with Party A doing most of the driving.

But first, there's that little matter of the fuel supply....

Our first stop is BMW dealer Dreyer & Reinbold, one of my favorite dealerships in the country, for these were the people

In Portland for a day, the Z8 shows the signs of five days on the road.

In Indiana, Nancy Drew gets a new fuel filter—and Dinan software.



exactly sputtering to a halt. It must be time for a fill-up—even though the gas gauge reads half-full. The problem evidently was not the wistfully inexpensive fuel filter; it may be time to start pricing fuel pumps. But first we have to reach Asheville, even if it means that we have to stop every hundred miles for gas. Which we do, repeatedly.

We are almost starting to relax when the blue Z8 stumbles, coughs, and dies.

Now, the roads in the Southeast are not exactly equipped for breakdowns, but this time we are at least off the fog line by a few feet. And since I know from experience that the car will probably behave itself once we sit here for half an hour or so, that's what we do. The girl detective spends this time sleuthing the weather, which naturally bodes rain; since the exits are few and far between, she suggests that we put the top up before we set out again from

the next gas station—assuming we reach one.

Sure enough, the blue car comes to life again as if eager to show off all 397 horses, and we make a beeline for the first available fuel. Topped up—and top up—once more, we drive into lowering clouds over the hilly country of the Cherokee National Forest, and sure enough, the rain comes, first in fits and starts and then in a confident downpour. It's the sort of afternoon disguised as night that makes driving a bit of a challenge, lights on, wipers working, two people huddled in a damp cocoon as we splash through the spray into the occasional dry oasis of a tunnel—where the engine starts to stumble again.

There is no room to pull over in a tunnel.

There is no room to do *anything* in a tunnel except to be creamed by a careless



Party A greets adversity with remarkable aplomb. "If we had bought a pre-war car," she muses, "we might have been stuck by the side of the road—but perhaps not so often."

eighteen-wheeler, of which we have more than an abundance, so I am doing everything I can to keep the family investment moving forward, now catching for a moment of fourth-gear roar, now slowing as if I've cut off the ignition, start and stop, stumble and chug. Judging from the sound of the horns around us, we are probably down to half the speed limit by the time we see the gray of the end of the tunnel, but I have no time to even glance at the speedometer; I am concentrating on bursting free of the tunnel and finding a break in the guardrail—

Yes! It's not exactly a freeway exit, but it is a beautiful sight, an oasis in the desert, a lifeboat in a stormy sea: We have come upon a construction clearing by the side of the highway! There is even a construction crew, painters working on the tunnel, whose work has been cut short by the rain. And wonder of wonders, as we coast to a stop in

IT IS A **BEAUTIFUL SIGHT**, AN **OASIS IN THE DESERT**: WE HAVE COME UPON A **CONSTRUCTION CLEARING BY THE SIDE OF THE HIGHWAY!**







Kelly Kirkland

this muddy glade, I find that we have bars on the cell phone—not to mention a Port-O-Potty in the clearing. Is this luxurious travel, or what?

Of course, our original plan was to attend the tutti-tutti black-tie dinner at the Biltmore that evening, but by the time the AAA flatbed drops us off at the Asheville hotel—where of course we fire up the Z8 and motor into the garage—the dinner is long over. But we would not have wanted to tempt fate by driving the 30 miles or so to the Biltmore estate anyway, especially at night; in fact, we opt for diagnostics at BMW of Asheville the next morning instead of joining the other concours cars at the magnificent Biltmore. The Nancy Drew Z8 will have to wait a little longer to make her concours debut.

By now it comes as no surprise that the Z8 fires right up the next day. That's a good thing, because we can drive to the dealership, but it has its downside, too, because when the car is running as it should, it does not lend itself to a positive diagnosis. The service manager agrees that the fuel pump *might* be intermittent, however, and at this point I am willing to bet that the tank-mounted pump is the true source of the problem.

Of course, the parts department at BMW of Asheville does not keep a large supply of Z8 fuel pumps in stock, but we are assured that one can be expressed to our next stop on this convoluted journey:

Greenville, South Carolina, home of the BMW CCA, the BMW CCA Foundation, and Century BMW. Here we leave the blue Z8 in the capable hands of service manager Jon Bright, who will see to the replacement of the fuel pump; as Party A so sweetly puts it, “Another day, another dealer.” But look on the bright side, I say: Surely the Z8 will emerge as good as new, and we have made many friends with the car already, met numbers of people eager to help. Scott Hughes offers to shuttle the car to the Foundation

Nancy Drew prepares for her ignominious ride to Asheville, North Carolina.

Another day, another dealer: Century BMW finally installed the curative fuel pump.

headquarters, where Michael Mitchell offers to look after it until I figure out how to complete the final leg to New Jersey.

Alas, in the end, I have to leave that task to friends; Blanche DeBois is not alone in her dependence on the kindness of others. Our friend Matt Russell agrees to drive the car from South Carolina to New Jersey in time for Oktoberfest 2015.

I am sure that he'll make it on time. After all, there's a Triple-A card in the glovebox. **R**

