

Hannibal Cruise

by Chris Winslow



For the last few years, Gateway has been so busy helping with car shows and charity events that we have not had time for events that were just for fun. To address that, we started planning a cruise to Hannibal in 2022. A big part of that event was to be the really beautiful drive up to Hannibal along Highway 79. Unfortunately, Highway 79 was in really bad shape last fall for the 20 miles or so south of Hannibal due to construction and repaving. Since the roadwork was not scheduled to complete until late fall, we decided to postpone the cruise to 2023. (Incidentally, for those following Paula's ongoing car sagas, that first trip we made late last summer to Hannibal to check out the route was the last trip we made in her Edge before the engine went out).

It turns out that postponing the event was the right move. The Highway 79 is now in great shape the entire way from O'Fallon to Hannibal.

Most of us started the cruise on Saturday morning from the Deer Run Library on Main Street in O'Fallon. Joining us from this starting point were the Oxlers in their '66, Andrew O'Sullivan and his friend Cody in Andrew's '04, the Chapmans in a '70 Judge, Harry Timmerman in his '65 Lemans, the Lewis' in their '67, the Bowers' in their '67 convertible, the Melrose's along with Mark's sister and brother in law Diane and Mark in Mark's '06, Marty in his '69, and Paula and me in the '04.

There had been some predictions for rain on Saturday earlier in the week, but there was



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no rain that morning and it would turn out that there would be no rain at all on Saturday for our cruise.

As usually happens when enough of us get together, and even though we were parked at the back of the parking lot at the library, we attracted enough attention that the bank next door sent a teller over to see what we were up to.

With 8 GTO's and Harry's Lemans in a row, we left the library and headed up Main Street to Highway 79. We managed to hit the lights right and all 9 cars got onto 79 at the same time and we headed to our first stop. It was a great morning for a drive and we had the highway to ourselves for much of the cruise to our first stop in Clarksville. This stretch of the highway is really pretty this time of year and include passing through some great small towns along the way.

When we arrived at Clarksville, we ran into what turned out to be the only part of the event that did not go as planned. The plan for this stop was to stop at the viewing area a bit downstream of the dam and get a photo of all of the cars lined up in a row in the viewing area parking lot. That stop also has a restroom available for a mid cruise rest break. Paula and I had made this drive several times when planning this event and there was never anyone in this parking lot. On this particular Saturday, however, there was some sort of a national chili cookoff underway in the lot and it was packed. Fortunately the lot of the boat club next door was largely open, so we were able to park there. But we missed out on the planned photo. The photo below is the best we could do under the circumstances.

After a short stop in Clarksville, we were on our way north again for the second half of the drive up to Hannibal. This second stretch is a lot of fun to drive with lots of hills and curves so we all had a great time. Despite winding through some more small towns we managed to



keep all 9 cars together, albeit with an occasional or two interlopers slipping into our convoy.

Once we arrived at Hannibal we headed straight for our lunch stop at Fiddelstiks. There we met up with the Finkenbinder's driving their '70 and their friends the Rapp's driving their '66 Tempest. This gave us a total of 22 Gateway GTO members and friends for the lunch stop.



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Paula had arranged for our lunch in a private room with the management at Fiddelstiks and they were ready for us. They had a room that was the perfect size for our group and we had a pair of servers who were just excellent. I don't think I have ever seen a group of this size handled so efficiently and the food was great.



After lunch, Marty had to leave us to get back to St. Louis for a Saturday evening event, but the rest of us headed to downtown Hannibal for some sight seeing and activities.

Being that this was a Gateway GTO event, naturally most of us wound up at the local ice cream shop, Becky's Old fashioned Ice Cream. Afterwards, Paula and I went to the Mark Twain museum and others in the group did some of the other sights. Andrew and Cody decided to go to the cave. That might have been the smartest move as it had gotten a bit warm in the afternoon and that cave was nice and cool from what they told us.

It was great wandering around downtown Hannibal and finding Gateway GTO's parked all over the place.



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With our afternoon activities winding down we all gathered at the Mark Twain riverboat for our dinner cruise. Once we had everyone together we boarded the boat in one big group. When we got to the spot where they take souvenir photos, the photographer asked me how many we had. I told him 21 and at first I don't think he believed me. Despite the large size of



our group we were able to get gathered up and they got a great photo.

Paula had also made all of the arrangements with the river boat staff for the cruise and it was another awesome setup. They had all of us ground together along the windows near the

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band. The meal was excellent and because of these seats we got to see a lot of great scenery along the Mississippi during the trip.

After the cruise, Barb and Earl had to head back home to prepare for the big gender reveal. Most of the rest of us headed for our hotels for the night. It had been a nearly perfect day and the rain that they had talked about being a possibility for Saturday had held off. In short, the day could not have gone better.

Sunday turned out to be a bit of a different story. As seems to have become a recurring theme when we go on long distance trips, getting home presented a few issues. First up was the



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weather. We woke up Sunday morning to a steady moderately heavy rain.

Paula and I were heading back early, along with Tom and Terrie, in order to get back and then head to the chicken dinner. We dodged the rain as best we could under the hotel canopy to get loaded up and then started to head back. That is when my day went south. After nearly 20 years of faithful service, the clutch hydraulics on my 04 chose that morning to go south.



As we pulled out of the hotel, I barely had enough clutch pedal to shift gears. I figured if I could just get it to Highway 61, then I could jam it into 6th and at least get it as far as the Main Street exit on Highway 70 in O'Fallon. That way, if I had to get a tow truck, it would only be for 2 miles! Luck was with me, however, and not only did we make it to 61, we had enough pedal left to limp it home and get the old girl in the garage and out of the weather.

And, as I later learned, we were not the only ones that suffered a problem on the way back. Harry was at the chicken dinner and he told me that he and Frank and Cheryl had to stop on the way home due to issues with the accelerator pump on Frank's judge. As is typical for those two, they take stuff like that in stride. They made a roadside repair and got back under-way and made it the rest of the way home.

Overall I think it was a great event. As with a lot of things, I had the big idea, but Paula did all the work. Her planning and coordination up front was what brought this all together. We will have to get to work on something to top this next spring.....