

# ONE HUNDRED PLUS ONE HUNDRED PLUS SIXTY-SIX

Story and photos by Larry Edsall

It was as if there was no other choice. The 2012 Chevrolet "Centennial Edition" Corvette arrived just in time for the weekend when the state of Arizona began the celebration of its centennial as

the 48th and final of the contiguous United States. We had to do a road trip. Let's see... Corvette convertible... centennials... of course! The Mother Road! Old Route 66.

We left Phoenix and climbed to Payson—climbing being no challenge at all to the manually shifted 6.2-liter, 430-horsepower V8 beneath the Corvette's hood—and then on up onto the Mogollon Rim, then northeast across the Mogollon Plateau to Holbrook and its historic Wigwam Motel, where each of the 15 "rooms" is a standalone unit shaped like a Native American's teepee.

At one time, there were seven such Wigwam Villages, stretching from Kentucky to Florida and on to California. This one was constructed in 1950 by Chester Lewis, who had seen the original in Kentucky and agreed to a rights fee that gave him the building plans in exchange for installing coin-operated radios in each

teepee; the dimes inserted into those radios were forwarded as what amounted to a franchise fee. Lewis ran the village until Interstate 40 took traffic away from the Mother Road, though his children reopened the facilities in 1988. What better way to begin our Route 66 adventure than by spending a night in the Wigwam?

The sunrise was gorgeous, but the temperature didn't rise with it. Twenty-eight degrees! The top stayed up as we traveled west on the Interstate.

"Don't forget Winona," Bobby Troup wrote in his lyrics to "Route 66." We didn't. That's where we left the superslab, but after we did we wondered what had made the small cluster of homes so memorable to Troup back when he drove the road soon after World War II.

What is now called "Historic Route 66" zig-zags through Flagstaff, and then becomes little more than the I-40 frontage

The Corvette poses in Holbrook next to the Route 66 mural at Joe & Aggies Cafe (opposite page) and at the Wigwam motel (this page, bottom). Also this page: The old Mother Road and a closeup of the new Corvette's wheel design.

road—and at one point it even turns to red rock gravel as it climbs through the pine forest west of that city.

Further west, the city of Williams has time traveled itself back to the 1950s and '60s in an ongoing Route 66 celebration, which seems only fitting because Williams was the last original Route 66 downtown to be bypassed by the Interstate system. Enjoy that cruise through time in Williams, because as you head on west, you're forced back onto the Interstate for nearly 20 miles, until just east of Ash Fork.

Finally, we've reached the longest continuous remaining stretch of the original Mother Road—158 miles from just east of Ash Fork all the way to bank of the Colorado River. And not only are we departing I-40, but the weather has warmed enough for the top to depart from overhead—though we'll still make use of the Centennial Corvette's heater and seat warmers.

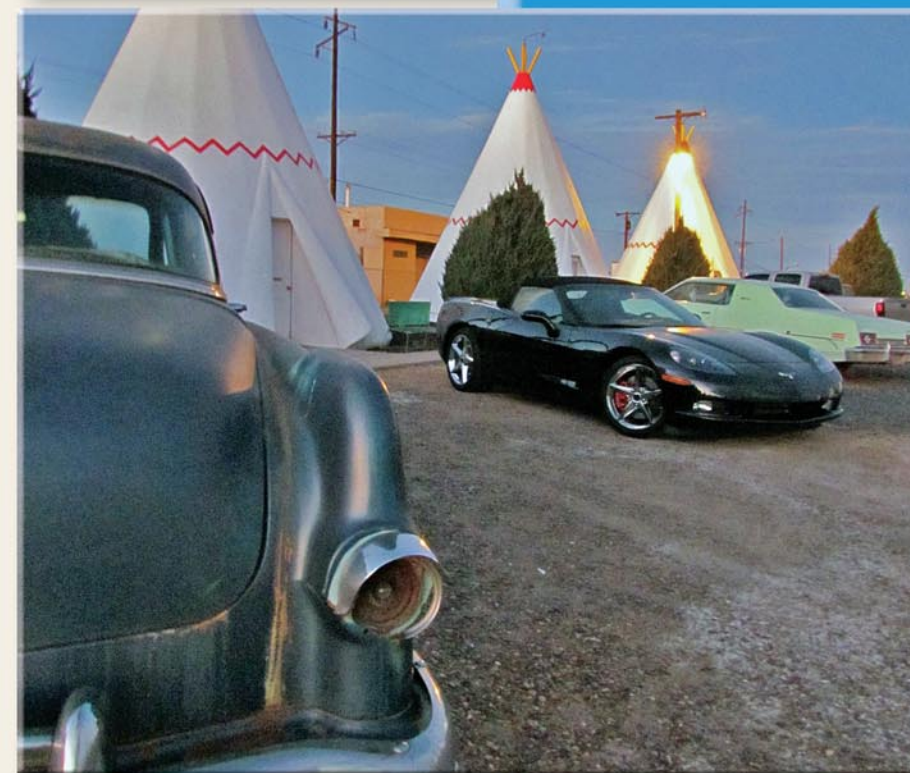
## The Centennial Corvette

Chevrolet celebrated its 100th anniversary as an automobile manufacturer late last year. Part of the celebration included the creation of a special Centennial Edition 2012 Corvette.

The Centennial package—a \$4,950 option—provides special Carbon Flash Metallic paint with satin-black graphic racing stripes; special badges featuring a CHEVROLET 100 YEARS logo with Louis Chevrolet at the steering wheel of a racing car; crossed-flag Corvette emblems with "100" instead of the fleur-de-lis; Satin Black Centennial wheels (replaced on our test car by \$1,850 optional chrome-aluminum rims); red brake calipers, Magnetic Selective Ride Control—basically, turn a knob and you're ready for the race track; leather-covered dashboard and door panels with red stitching; microfiber suede-wrapped steering wheel, shifter and seat inserts; and embossed centennial logo on the headrests.

With black-on-black stripes, black power convertible top, and black interior,

KEEP RIGHT >>







The new Corvette and a vintage Chevrolet pickup at the Cool Springs Station west of Kingman (above). Left, one set of Burma Shave signs. Opposite page: Mountain curves, and an historic gas station in Peach Springs.



the Centennial Corvette looks as menacing as its 430-hp V8 sounds when you nail the throttle. On the other hand, once you're up to speed and simply cruising down the highway, the car is rated at 26 mpg (16 in the city), and we averaged 27.1 on our 890-mile centennial celebration drive.

By the way, base price on the 2012 Corvette convertible is \$54,525. In addition to the Centennial Edition package and those wheels, our car was equipped with the 3LT Preferred Equipment Group, which for \$7,995 provides sport seats with power bolster and lumbar, heat and memory; a power convertible top; tilt and telescoping steering column; Bose premium audio with nine speakers, navigation, XM satellite radio (which we keep tuned to channel 5, listening to the same songs as Route 66 travelers in the 1950s, CD player and Bluetooth hands-free cell phone connection; head-up display—a wonderful feature that projects information such as your speed and how many g's you pulled in that last turn onto the inside of the windshield so you don't have to divert your eyes from the road—and a net in the trunk for smaller cargo items.

Speaking of the trunk, with the top down there's still 7.5 cubic feet of cargo, but think duffle bags not hard suitcases for your weekend trips.

### The Mother Road

Route 66 dates to the 1920s. John Steinbeck's Joads and others who fled their

farms and their homes in the face of the Dust Bowl traveled west on what the author called "the Mother Road" in the late 1930s. Originally rutted gravel, by 1938 the road was paved all the way from Chicago to Los Angeles. While the Joads and their ilk may not have enjoyed the drive, others no doubt got their kicks, as Troup wrote, along the way, especially after World War II had ended and Route 66 became the route to California and its sunny promise of prosperity.

The road and the promise it represented for a post-war America searching for its future even took top billing over two young stars and their new Corvette in the *Route 66* television series, aired by CBS from 1960-'64.

But people couldn't get to California—or anywhere else for that matter—quickly enough. Everyone, it seemed, was in a hurry to find the future.

The Interstate highway system took care of that. Instead of kicks along the way, Route 66 communities were kicked aside as Interstates 10, 15, 40, 44 and 55 took traffic off city streets and took money out of local businesses. By 1972, Route 66 had lost its official designation as a federal highway. Tourist traps became ghost towns.

The Mother Road was gone, but she was not forgotten, at least not for long. Eager for her embrace, her children and grandchildren would return. Towns along

the route celebrated the road that linked them. Businesses were reborn. Tourists came again, this time not merely to travel through on their way to the golden west but to linger as they tried to hold on just a little longer to their own youthful innocence and the promise the road had represented, the potential of new life, renewed life, out West.

There was a time long before dash-mounted CD players and satellite radio when in-car entertainment meant playing license plate bingo or reading the Burma-Shave signs spaced poetically along country highways.

*Dinah doesn't... Treat him right... But if he'd shave... Dinah-mite!... Burma-Shave.*

Signage restrictions along the Interstates didn't allow for such frivolity, and even if they had, the faster speeds of travel would have ruined the pace of reading. As it was, Route 66 across northern Arizona wasn't part of the original Burma-Shave campaign, which ran from 1925-1963, because there was too little traffic to justify the expense. And yet, they're here now, placed by old road preservationists at various spots along the historic road between Ash Fork and Kingman.

Some are whimsical: *Cattle Crossing... Means Go Slow... That Old Bull... Is Some Cow's Beau... Burma-Shave.*

Others are more serious: *Thirty Days... Hath September... April, June... And the Speed Offender... Burma-Shave.*

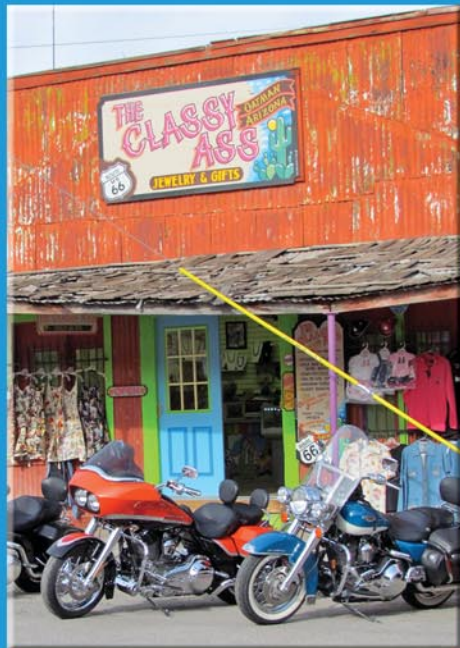
Seligman is the last town for the next 80 miles with both an Interstate exit and a Route 66 heritage. Though much smaller than Williams, Seligman and its businesses also celebrate their historic Route roots, with brothers Angel and Juan Delgadillo playing important roles in the route's revitalization.

From Seligman, the old road heads northwest across the high desert, past the Grand Canyon Caverns, where you can descend into a limestone cavern more than 200 feet underground. A few miles on, the road turns southwest and goes through Peach Springs, where, if you're driving something more suitable for off-pavement travel than our Corvette, you can pay a small fee and drive north on a trail that ends at the Colorado River, making this the only place you can drive to the river within the Grand Canyon.

KEEP RIGHT >>







Clockwise from above: A sign on the road assures you're on the right road. Racer Louis Chevrolet gained fame on the race track, and the car that bears his image would please his racy nature. Speaking of nature: Oatman is known for its wandering burros. Sometimes called the jack ass, an Oatman emporium proclaims that even an ass can have class.



The road loops south through Valentine, turns back northwest through Hackberry and past its famed Hackberry General Store, then turns southwest again at Antares for a 20-mile run into Kingman, where you end up on Andy Devine Avenue, so named because Kingman is the home town of the portly, rasp-voiced cowboy actor perhaps best known for his role of Jingles, sidekick in *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok* television series.

Beyond Kingman, the road runs flat through the Sacramento Valley until the topography takes a dramatic turn as you approach Cool Springs and work your way up through Black Mesa to Sitgreaves Pass.

The road is narrow, curves are tight and the drop-offs may have you holding your breath—and wondering how people drove this route back in their Model Ts. In the days of sputtering engines and gravity-fed fuel systems, some cars had to be driven up the hills in reverse, a skill perfected by local residents who were paid by the tourists to get their cars safely across the pass.

The Corvette has no trouble negotiating these hills, but at one point near the Gold Road Mine the downhill switchback is so tight and steep that the chin spoiler

scrapes along the pavement.

And soon we find ourselves at a dead stop. We've arrived in Oatman, an old mining town (also where Clark Gable and Carole Lombard spent a night on their honeymoon) famous for the wild burros that roam its streets and for the Wild West history it relives by staging gunfights right there in the middle of the road for tourists. We arrive just as such a shootout is about to take place, and have great seats for the show as it unfolds right in front of the Corvette. In fact, after taking pictures of the shootout, some folks turn and take pictures of our car!

Beyond Oatman we descend into Golden Shores in the Mohave Valley and drive along the tamarisk trees and the shoreline of the Topock Marsh.

The historic route rejoins the Interstate to cross the Colorado River into California. We do as well, but not to cross the river. Instead, we head east, though only for a few miles, before turning south toward Lake Havasu City, where we drive the Corvette back and forth across London Bridge before continuing south to Parker Dam, which was completed in 1938 and was responsible for turning some 20 miles of the Colorado River into Lake Havasu.

After crossing the dam, we follow California 62 south along the river bank for 16 scenic miles to Earp, named after the US Marshal who retired here and worked his many mining claims in the nearby Whipple Mountains.

From Earp, a bridge takes us back to Arizona, where AZ 95 and then 72 lead us across the Cactus and Ranegras plains to Hope, which from what we can tell was named because locals hoped its location on the coast-to-coast highway, US 60, would lead to a business boom. It did not. Nor did the opening of Interstate 10 just a few miles south appear to benefit yet another town, New Hope.

From 1922-'66, US 60 was a coast-to-coast highway, running from Virginia Beach to Los Angeles. The Cactus Derby auto races (1908-'14) from LA to Phoenix blazed Route 60's western-most trail. Later, US 60 was the route people drove when they traveled between Phoenix and LA.

Though it has retained its official U.S. highway designation despite losing its traffic to I-10, there are no historic markers, no shiny Burma-Shave signs, no song, and no kicks along its gritty right-of-way. ■

## Where the roads are dry and the cars are slick.



Arizona Driver Magazine

[www.arizonadrivermagazine.com](http://www.arizonadrivermagazine.com)

Advertising: [sales@arizonadrivermagazine.com](mailto:sales@arizonadrivermagazine.com)

480-948-0200

