



The thrill of 50 Corvettes on the open road

Enthusiasts join the AZ-NM Corvette Caravan pilgrimage to the National Corvette Museum's 15th Anniversary

Story by Bob Koblewski and Bob Kroener • Photos by Bob Koblewski

The grand opening of the National Corvette Museum (NCM), in Bowling Green, Kentucky, was held in September 1994. Corvette owners formed caravans across the country to attend. Again in 1999, caravans were formed and attended the Museum's 5th Anniversary. In 2003, 19 caravans were formed to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of their beloved Corvette, again at NCM.

September 3, 2009, brought a two-fold reason to form caravans to parade back to Bowling Green. First, it was the 15th Anniversary of the NCM, but the second reason was to cut the ribbon for the Grand Re-opening of the NCM. Over the previous two years, a construction cam-

paign had taken place to almost double the square footage of the NCM to near 115,000 square feet.

Twenty-six caravans were formed across the country. Bob Kroener, who had captained the 2003 AZ-NM Caravan, volunteered to head it up again. This time Bob solicited a staff. Co-Captains were Don and Sharon Mikkelson of Los Alamos NM. Local Leaders were Carolyn and Chuck Van Santen of Scottsdale, Daryl McClellan of Phoenix and Bob Koblewski of Tucson. All volunteered to help Bob organize the 2009 AZ-NM Corvette Caravan to Bowling Green KY.

Over 50 cars signed up to go with the AZ-NM Caravan. Due to mostly economic

reasons, another almost 40 cars signed up but were forced to cancel. This was typical of the whole country. However, Corvette owners and lovers of the car came to the NCM. Over 5000 people and over 2500 cars made the trek to the Home of the Corvette. You see, the GM Corvette Assembly Plant is right across the street from the NCM.

Plans had to be made for restaurants, motels and gas stops. These and many more details went into a Driver's Manual supplied to all participants.

The trip started with a special pre-kick-off event provided by a special sponsor—and the Grand Marshall of the Caravan—Bob Bondurant and his School of High

Performance Driving. On Sunday, August 30, Bob welcomed everyone to the School and had his team of professionals give a tour of his facility and a short driver training course before all had a chance to enjoy several laps around his road course with their Corvettes. The thrill started here.

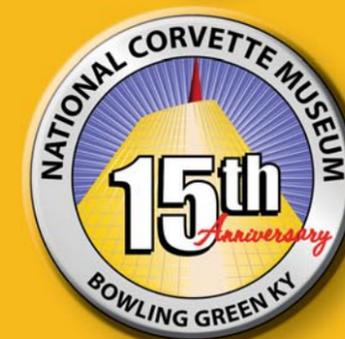
The Caravan really got underway on Monday, August 31, at the Kickoff Sponsor, Courtesy Chevrolet, on Camelback Road in Phoenix. Courtesy provided a fine breakfast and Bob Bondurant said the most famous words in the sports car and racing world... "Ladies and gentlemen—START YOUR ENGINES." Captain Kroener and Bondurant followed a police escort provided by the Maricopa County

Sheriff's Office to Highway 51, then off the Caravan went to Loop 101, then I-17 on to Flagstaff and I-40 eastbound.

Gas stops were planned at many of the Flying J and Love's truck stops. At all stops, their people were at the pumps helping everyone get gassed up as fast as possible. After a stop at the New Mexico Visitors Center, the Caravan cruised to Galles Chevrolet, an On the Road Sponsor. Everyone enjoyed a great BBQ dinner provide by Galles. The next day's departure was facilitated by the Albuquerque Police Department. The Caravan continued on to Oklahoma City and



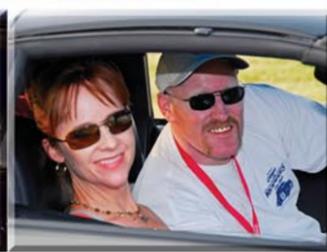
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David Stanley Chevrolet for a pizza buffet. The Oklahoma City Police escorted the caravan into and out of town the next day.

The third day of the Caravan took the group to Jackson TN, where once again a police escort was provided both into town and out the next morning by the Jackson Police Department.

The final leg of the trip took place on September 3, as the Caravan arrived at the NCM around 10:30am to the waving and applause of the NCM staff, other Caravan participants and Corvette enthusiasts. There is nothing like looking down the highway at Corvettes in line as far as you can see.

Labor Day Weekend saw one of the world's largest moving automotive events take place, as Corvettes from all over the country participated in Caravan '09. Corvette lovers from all corners of the US, Canada, the Netherlands, the UK and even Australia converged on Bowling Green to celebrate the 15th Anniversary and Grand Re-opening of the NCM.

The weekend was highlighted by several events, seminars by VIPs and a surprise visit. The Stingray concept car "Sideswipe," used in the movie *Transformer 2: Revenge of the Fallen*, was driven and displayed by Tom Peters, Corvette Design Director. Attendance at the five-day event exceeded 24,000, as visitors toured the new facility, including the Exhibit Hall, Library & Archives, Corvette Café and other interactive exhibits.

Other VIPs included 2nd Corvette Chief Engineer Dave McLellan, 3rd Corvette Chief Engineer Dave Hill, Director of Corvette Racing Doug Fehan, Bob Bondurant and Bobby Moore (who discussed early Corvette racing days), Corvette Engineering Team members Tadge Juechter, Kirk Bennion, Corvette Product Manager, Harlan Charles, and former Plant Managers Wil Cooksey and Paul Graham.

After raffling off three Corvettes, NCM Executive Director Wendell Strode commented, "The tremendous success of this year's event says a lot about the love people have for—America's Sports Car and for fellow car enthusiast."

Thank you Captain Bob for a great week of "Vetting." ■

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