

Route 66 Poker Run!

by Chris Winslow



A few meetings ago, we discussed the possibility of a Route 66 poker run cruise. Will and Donna Bower took that idea and ran with it. We set the date for August 23rd and as luck would have it we wound up with perfect weather!

Our day started at the new park on the west side of the old Chain of Rocks Bridge. This used to be mostly a run down parking lot, but a recent renovation has expanded the lot and added a nice pavilion to the site. This was the perfect place to gather up for the start of the event. The only real hiccup for this site is that for those of us coming eastbound on highway 270, there was no marking for the exit and GPS was not exactly on target. Fortunately, everyone got it figured out. Amazingly enough, there was a couple from Sweden visting at the bridge. This would not be the last group from overseas we would run into during the event.

Once everyone arrived, we anted up and we were on our way. The next stop on our run was the Neon Sign Park in Granite City. All of the poker runners made it to that stop with out any issues. Once there, we ran into a charming couple from the Netherlands that was visiting the US on a 3 week trip to see Route 66. Like the visitors we met at the Chain of Rocks, they were thrilled to see all of the GTO's. They visited with us while we were stopped there.

After everyone picked up their next card and did some socializing, we took some photos and got back in the cars to head for the next stop. We did have a little car drama on that part of the run when Ron and Sharon Wildebrant's '69 started to make some strange smells. Several of us pulled over and we ultimately determined it was probably something going on with the air conditioner compressor. We disconnected the wire harness to the compressor to make sure it would stay off and then continued on our way.

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The next stop was the Luna Café. Unfortunately, we had a second car issue on that leg of the journey. Allen and Pam Neal's GTO began to make a strange grinding noise that was suspected to possibly be a broken brake spring. Ultimately Allen and Pam decided to get the car towed home, so they were not able to continue. Fortunately, that would be our last car breakdown for the event.

The next stage of our run took us past the historic Greenway Motel. This segment of the journey also took us past some beautiful homes in Edwardsville before stopping at the West End



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Service Station on Saint Louis Street.

This attraction has been recently renovated and was both a photo op and also a museum inside. The staff at the museum was very friendly and while there we met up with a group of tourists from Poland who were touring Route 66 and thoroughly enjoyed seeing our cars.



Our next stop along the way was the historic Henry's Rabbit Ranch. Unfortunately, the owner of this iconic landmark along Route 66 passed away in 2024, so the site was not open, but we were still able to stop and look around.

Next up on our Route 66 poker run cruise was Soulsby's Gas Station in Mt. Olive. This classic gas station first opened in 1926 so it will be celebrating its 100th anniversary next year.



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When we arrived, we found that the station was actually open so we were able to go inside and look at some of the displays. While there we met up again with the group from Poland.

Now it was on to our final stop of the day, the legendary Ariston Café in Litchfield.



This is probably my most favorite place in this corner of Illinois. Their food is always great, but you have to be careful not to fill up too much because they bring out a huge tray of amazing desserts after the meal. That reputation for great food had also attracted that same group from Poland.

It was here, once we had all settled into our tables, that Donna had us open the envelopes to see our 5 cards and figure out who had the best poker hand. After the dust settled the two best hands, 3 of a kind and 2 pairs queens over jacks, were the winners. Donna had the three of a kind and I actually had the 2 pairs. I was pretty stunned because I never win anything! We split the pot, which turned out to be \$130 each.



Will and Donna did a great job organizing this event! Everyone had a great time. We had not done a poker run in a long time. We will have to plan on doing another one very soon.