

## **Road Trip Macan S – One Month and 7781 Miles**

By Scott Witt

It was June and we'd had about enough of the COVID panic. Everywhere we turned, people were acting like it was the end of the world and were busy throwing their common sense out the window as the "experts" changed the guidance over and over and over again. Seriously, wearing masks while jogging was going to help?

We decided to get out of Dodge and take a trip, a long trip, to refresh, re-orient our perspective and generally just try to fake some normalcy. Also, this September I was turning 70 and I've made this past year one of purposeful renewal and restoration. Taking a long road trip across America seemed like the right thing to do, and it was!

We set some rules for the trip: We decided not to travel by interstate highway if at all possible, and it turned out to be quite possible to take the roads less traveled without delaying planned stops too much. We wanted to visit a lot of family along the way and we were able to do that.

We didn't listen to any news along the way, or even SiriusXM, Pandora or Spotify. If we wanted some entertainment, we just ran my playlists or read books to each other. Fran kept her Facebooking to a minimum. We avoided all large cities and made it a point not to eat at any chain restaurants, seeking out the local joints and dive bars along the way. Basically, we tried to keep distractions at a minimum and focus on what was in front of us. Our route took us from home in AL to GA, TN, VA, KY, IN, MI, WI, MN, ND, MT, ID, WA, OR, CA, NV, UT, CO, KS, MO, IL, KY, VA, TN, and back to AL.

We touched base ahead of time with family along the route as part of the planning and were strongly encouraged to drop in and stay a night or two by all of them. Yay.

So, we have a 718 Cayman GTS and a Macan S and it really was a no-brainer on which one to take. Fran's Macan S had 7736 miles on it so it was well-broken-in

with plenty of tread left on the tires. We'd had zero issues with the car since we got it in November, so we were good to go. As it happens, we had plenty of cargo space for both of us and some left over...not bad since we are both typically overly attentive to planning for EVERYthing possible that might happen (it's a Navy thing...once you leave the pier, you got what you got). Who knows, we might get invited to the opera so we'd need that tuxedo and evening gown!

I had a notion to do a Jack Kerouac kind of thing, so I kept a contemporaneous journal during our travels. I thought I'd share some random jottings from my notes as we cruised along, "with a wheel in my hand and four on the road," to paraphrase young Jack:

\* Fences! They are everywhere. Especially out west...they go on forever. I thought of Robert Frost's *Mending Wall* and his wrestling with the notion that "good fences make good neighbors," but this is something else. There must be tens of thousands of miles of fence out there, maybe more, very often in the middle of nowhere where there are no neighbors. And the peculiar thing is, I have never actually seen anyone building one of these fences. I mean, it's not an easy or quick thing in some of that terrain to pound in posts every 10 or 15 feet, run three or four strands of barbed wire, cinch them down and tighten them up. But there are hundreds of thousands, likely millions of them out there. How could all that happen and I've never seen a single person at work doing it? The fences seem to do the job, mostly, although we did encounter a cow and two calves who broke down a fence and walked onto Hwy 50 in Nevada where the speed limit is 75. That was attention-getting.

We did see an actual cowboy riding fences outside of Jamestown, ND. Turns out that Jamestown is the birthplace of Louis L'Amour, the western novelist, short-story writer and historian, and there is this cowboy, right out his book, out riding fences. Louis was born in 1908 and started writing in the 50's. Seventy years later, there are still cowboys doing what he wrote about. Some things change more slowly than others and there's nothing wrong with that.

\* Our country is vast, which I appreciated sort of academically, but to drive through hundreds of miles of plains with only the occasional small farmhouse,

stock tank, windmill, barn...it's beautiful in its loneliness and inspiring in its reach. Anything seems possible. You can see why the people would be different out there, and they are quite different, in very good ways. To take on the task of managing the agricultural and grazing use of, say, 10,000 acres is a daunting enterprise, I would say. So many things out of your control: weather, seed prices, buyer prices, timing the harvest, scheduling transportation, veterinary costs... It's astounding how well it works.

We talked to some of these folks outside of Fargo, ND. They were happy to chat with a couple of lost Alabamians at breakfast. They've got stories you wouldn't believe. They are tough and gritty when they need to be, but kind to strangers for no particular reason at all other than it's just their way. And they don't seem to think they are anything special.

We went to pay the bill for breakfast, and the server told us that we only needed to pay a little. Apparently, there's a rancher in the area who buys a \$50 gift card at the restaurant every week and tells the staff to use it to pay for anyone's meal they want. There were a few bucks left on the card and she gave them to us. This was such a nice thing to do that we've started doing it here. God knows there are people who could use a little extra.

\* I was reminded that one thing I like most about the West is that the horizons are far, far away. Here in the east/southeast, the whole coast is a forest. You can drive for miles and miles on I-95 and never see anything but exit ramps and trees alongside. Out in Montana, where we visited my nephew at Flathead Lake, it's possible to feel small again as the sun sets behind the peaks of the Bitterroot Mountains. It darkens quickly, even in summer, and the temperature drops like a stone. And it's so quiet you can hear the blood rushing in your ears. Night life takes over and you can hear coyotes and foxes yipping, night birds rustling and sometimes, large, unidentified beasts making their way through the brush.



**Sunset in Bigfork, Montana, at Flathead Lake.**

\* There's a place in Kansas where windmill blades go to die. Man, they were everywhere, all cut up and stacked in big piles. Apparently, you have to use diamond saws to cut them down to disposable size. I have no idea what you would do with that much fiberglass and plastic; it's all toxic. I found out that thousands of these blades (60m – 107m long!) are put to landfill every year and buried. Now what?

\* I live on coffee. Started when I was 15 and it's a habit I have no interest in breaking. Finding good coffee on the road has always been problematic, but I think we broke the code on this trip. I like to drink Americanos (espresso slightly diluted with hot water, no sugar, no cream). We now have discovered three reliable sources for good Americanos within a gas tank's distance while on the road: Starbucks; McCafé at McDonald's; and Love's Travel Centers where the semi's go to refuel. The Americanos are made fresh every time, so no burnt coffee, and we found them to be consistently good at any of those places. Just thought you might like to know in case you ever have to feed the beast.



**Us at Crater Lake, Oregon.**

\* Out there in flyover country, cell service is more than just spotty, it's non-existent. If they don't have 4G out there by now, they are never going to get 5G, which requires stations every 500 meters or so to get the millisecond latency and 10-100GB speeds they keep promising. But, those folks out in middle America seem to be pretty self-sufficient, so I guess they'll do just fine. Not a lot of office jobs out there, everybody works hard and takes care of each other. They might not have cell service everywhere, but they've got tractors with wheels taller than my car.

\* Even in the self-inflicted pain of COVID times, the country is hard at work outside the cities. Infrastructure repair and improvement is ubiquitous. I gave up counting bridges under repair or construction when I hit 50. New/renewed roads are going in everywhere.

\* Just this last note, and I'll stop with the list. We made it a point to drive the Loneliest Road in America, which is Hwy 50 across Nevada and Utah. The Hwy actually starts in Sacramento and goes all the way to Ocean City on Maryland's eastern shore. But the lonely part is from about Reno, NV to I-15 in Utah. Get your car inspected, get a full tank of gas, some coffee and snacks, and go for it! It's a little bit otherworldly.

We stopped overnight in Eureka, NV (pop. 480) to stay at the Jackson House, a historic hotel that is supposedly haunted, but, much to Fran's disappointment, we didn't see any haints at all; I guess that's the point. We had a nice meal and a long conversation with Keith, the owner of the Owl Bar and Grill about small-town life. I must say, it has its attractions, stuff I would never have thought of, and he made an interesting case.



**The loneliest road in America, Hwy 50, Nevada, somewhere between Eureka and Hwy 15 in Utah. It goes on like this for more than 100 miles.**

I guess I'd wrap things up here with my overall impression. America is in good shape and growing well in so many places. One of our new favorite places to visit is Fargo, ND. It looks like a brand-new city that just came out of the box. And yes, we got pictures of the woodchipper.

People are living their lives like they always do, and so many of them shared their stories and opinions with us along the way as we sat and talked with them in the diners and bars. It's a crazy time in so many ways but by-and-large, folks were bucking up and focusing on what needs to be done, in spite of the many obstacles to doing so that they may be facing. This drive, for us, was a wonderfully positive and refreshing, enriching experience. My advice to you if you're planning a long one: Stay off the interstates and go a little slower! It's a lot more interesting and intimate out there on the roads less traveled.

The mighty Macan S acquitted itself superbly on this trip. We covered 7781 miles, averaging 27.3 mpg for the whole trip! You read that right. Way more than we expected. And that's with a fair amount of cruising at 75 – 80 mph, poking around

the little towns and burgs that we stopped at along the way, going over several passes in the Rockies at 10,000 – 11,500 feet, crossing the desert floor in Nevada at 104°F and headwinds all the way back heading east on the return.

We burned less than 1 quart of oil. We were watchful of tire pressures the whole way, going through about a 70°F temperature spread over the course of the trip and making adjustments as necessary.

Important note: We'd had Exoshield windshield vinyl protection installed at Freddie Louis' shop before we left. Fran has a way of attracting rocks on the road (she's whacked three windshields out there), so we wanted to see if we could avoid having that problem again.

The Exoshield was a wallet-saver. We took three pretty good hits. Two of them you can barely see now on the vinyl. The third one was a big one and hit the windshield just right. We got a small star-shaped chip in the windshield but it has not cracked and spread. We talked to Freddie when we got back and he recommended leaving it the way it was...heating the vinyl to remove it and repair the chip might cause cracking. It's been two months since we got back and so far, so good.

Travel safely! Travel by Porsche! But travel!

