

The **BULB HORN**

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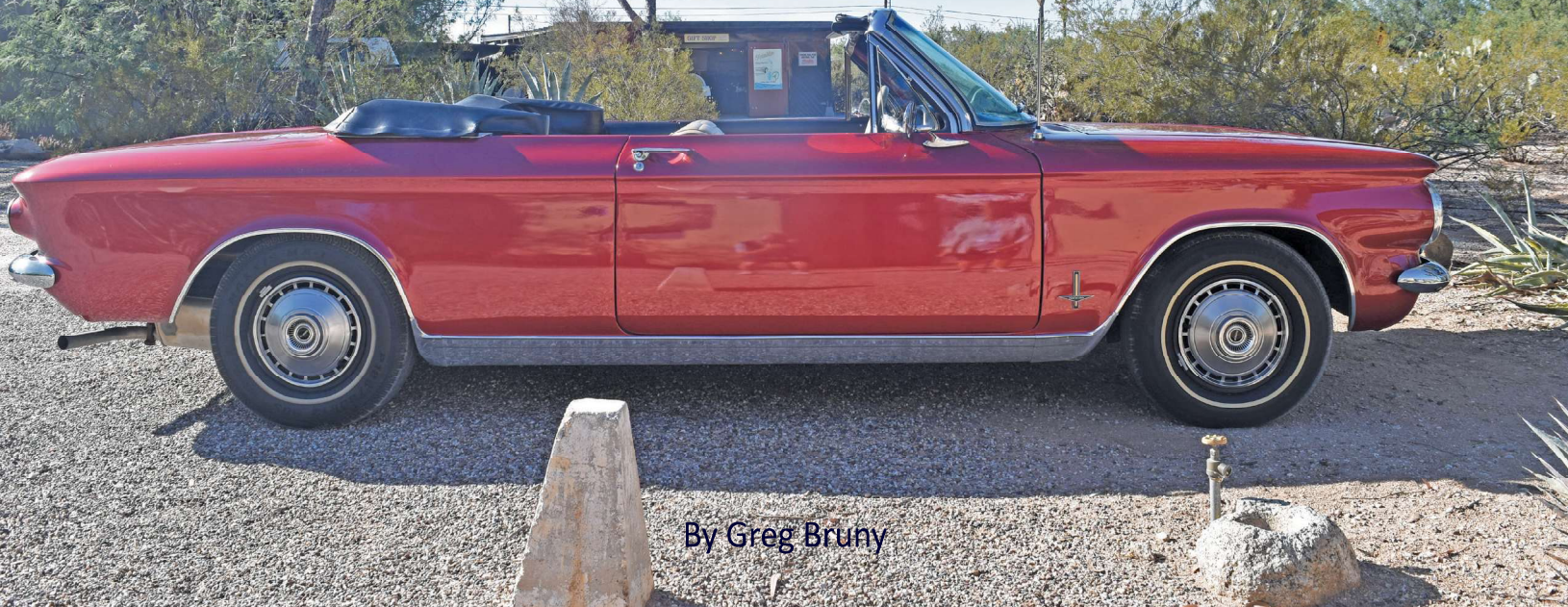
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March-April 2025

The 2024 Western National Tour



By Greg Bruny

Above: A 1960s Corvair in the parking area near the Franklin Museum.

Below: At the Ernie Adams' Dwarf Car Museum.

Early in 2024, I saw the announcement for the 2024 Western National Tour in November in Tucson, Arizona. That seemed of great interest to me, so I processed my registration, and was glad I did, as the tour sold out fairly quickly. Steve and Mary Partman of Chandler, Arizona, hosted the tour based out of the Desert Diamond Hotel and Casino. The hotel was an excellent venue. It had nice rooms at decent prices, very attentive service, and plentiful and well-lit parking for the cars and trailers.

Flying in from Denver, I expected much hotter temperatures, as had been the case for a very warm fall in the Southwest, but it was a bit chilly and windy when I arrived. Even though it rained later in the day, the weather stayed sunny and warm for the rest of the tour. Some of the attendees came in a day or two early to visit the Ernie Adams' Dwarf Car Museum in Maricopa. The museum consists of exact replicas of various cars but built to about a 50% scale size of each car. All are licensed and roadworthy to drive.

There were 41 cars and 77 people on the tour. Because of the

size limitations of some of the venues, the vehicles were split into two groups, so that we all showed up at different times. The oldest cars on tour were Rod Frazier's 1940 Buick Century and Mark Appgood's 1940 Dodge Deluxe Sedan. There was a

wide range of vehicles from every decade from the 1940s through the 1990s! A couple of interesting cars were a pair of 1950 Oldsmobiles, Randy and Sandy Carlson's coupe and Frank Wenzel's 4-door sedan. Buick was the most represented make with five cars, followed by Ford, Mercedes, and Studebaker, each with three.



I met many of my fellow tour participants at prior annual meetings or at the two recent Old Spanish Trail tours. Many were fellow chapter members from the Northern Colorado chapter. But, of course, it's always fun to meet and get to know new people. Some of us came as singles,

so there was a good match-up of people who needed navigators. I had the pleasure of again navigating for Steve Fitzgerald in his recently acquired 1998 Lincoln Town Car, which served as the tow vehicle since his Studeolet Trouble Truck was currently having "trouble" and was unable to attend. Thankfully, no one needed to be towed!



After the opening banquet meal, tour host Steve Partman welcomed us to Tucson, provided a preview of the coming week, and reminded us to stay in our appropriate groups so we didn't overwhelm a venue.

Steve Fitzgerald spoke a bit about the awards process and nomination forms and reminded us about the opportunity to attend the Old Spanish Trails Part III Tour, to begin the following week. Sally Murray, a former VMCCA Activities Vice-President introduced the current national officers on the tour: Elaine (and AJ) Johnsen—Treasurer; Clare Oestreicher (and Dion Stams)—Membership VP; Ray (and Carol) Maxfield—Publications VP; and Steve Fitzgerald—Technical VP. At least two regional directors were also present. There were cars from 16 states, led by Colorado, followed by Texas, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and California. Other long-distance participants came from Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, New Jersey, Louisiana, Illinois, and British Columbia in Canada. We had a wide geographic representation on the tour. The longest-driven cars to the tour, around 1,800 miles each, were Fran and Kathy Tremain from Wisconsin and Mike and Joan Huffman from Michigan. In recognition of their lengthy drives, they were awarded gas money to take them all the way back to the Tucson city limits!

The hotel provided a breakfast room for us where we had a continental breakfast each day. The room also provided a private space to review any last-minute details for the day.

Monday was what I would call our "Science" day. After a 10-mile drive, we (Group one) arrived at the Pima Air and Space Museum. Group two started at the Titan Missile Base, and then we switched places mid-day.

To help preserve our nation's aviation heritage, the Pima Air and Space Museum was started as a concept in 1966. Aircraft began moving to the location in 1973, with a public opening in 1976, displaying about 50 aircraft in a fenced-in field. Also of interest is the Space Gallery, which opened in 1999. Pima Air has grown to be one of the largest aircraft museums in the country, with over 250,000 square feet of indoor display space

Jets on display at the Pima Air and Space Museum.

and approximately 400 aircraft. Some of us opted to walk the 80 acres, while others decided to save the shoe leather and take the tram tour.

The two groups met for lunch at the Air and Space Museum. Afterward, Group one drove about 35 miles to the Titan Missile Museum, a program started in 1960 as a Cold War deterrent. Titan II missiles replaced earlier Atlas and Titan I's, so we got a good overview of the Titan II program from an introductory film and a visit to the underground silo. In its heyday, there were 54 Titan IIs underground at 3 US Air Force bases. By 1987, the Titan II program ended, and this last base was converted into the only Titan II Museum in the country. In the control room, the guide sat Marty Roth and Joe Marino in the commander and assistant commander's chairs and ran an exercise as if we were going to launch!

We ended the day back at the hotel, where tourists could spend the evening as they wished.



Marty Roth and Joe Marino sit at the command station.





Above: At Kartchner Caverns.

Below: At the Crystal Palace Saloon (left to right)—Steve Fitzgerald, David and Anna Louisa Fields, Sandy and Randy Carlson, Carol Maxfield, and Greg Bruny.

On Tuesday, we were divided into four groups to accommodate the venue limitations of Kartchner Caverns, which was about a 60-mile drive from the hotel along mostly back roads.

In 1974, some college students discovered these caves on private land. The caves were kept secret until 1985, when work began to make them more of a public resource after the Arizona Legislature and governor passed an acquisition bill. The state of Arizona acquired

the caves in 1988 and they were opened to the public in 2003.

Despite their recent discovery, Kartchner Caverns are a fascinating display of Mother Nature, which developed over hundreds of thousands of years. The caverns are easily accessible to visitors. The views within the caves are quite majestic, so it's worth a visit if you are ever in the area. When we toured the caves, the rules were strict regarding what you could bring into them to avoid damage. The air quality and humidity are regulated, and any surface that is touched by clothing or hands must be sanitized at the end of every day!

Upon leaving the Caverns, we made a 30-mile drive to the historic town of Tombstone, Arizona, which began as a silver mining town in the late 1800s and is best known for the shootout at the O.K. Corral between the Earps and the Clintons. Tombstone quickly boomed into a relatively modern and sophisticated town for the day. A series of fires in 1881-1882 disrupted the downtown business district. The town faded somewhat with the national economy and decreasing silver prices until corporate mining ceased in 1923. Tombstone continued as a sleepy little desert town. It became known as a ghost town even though it was never a real outlaw encampment. During the 1950s through the 1990s, movies and media brought more attention to the area. Tombstone still has much of a tourist flavor as we walked through and enjoyed some of its historical renaissance. Some of us stopped at Big Nose Kate's Saloon to grab a bite and gaze at some of the more interesting locals.



Wednesday began with car problems, including McKai Apgood's flat tires, Frank Wenzel's keys locked in his car (the locksmith never wants to see his car again), and an exploded distributor cap on Dion Stam's Buick Skylark. Most issues were resolved by the end of the day. Group one headed to the Franklin Car Museum and group two headed to the Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures. Franklin Cars were produced from 1902 to 1934, with about 150,000 produced and 3,700 estimated to survive today, including what's in the nice collection in Tucson, housed in some historic structures. The museum now belongs to a Foundation endowed by the original collector/restorer of these cars, which number a couple of dozen, most fully and nicely restored. One of the interesting facts about Franklin cars is that they were air-cooled and had several other "firsts" in the design and production of automobiles.

Our next stop at the nearby Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures that displays many different stories and scenarios in miniature form. The museum founder moved to Tucson in 1979 and expanded her collection of miniature presentations into what has become a showpiece collection of her and other artists' works. There were hundreds of miniature displays, some simpler and others more elaborate.

It took about an hour to walk the museum, but a detailed study of the particular displays could have warranted a lot more time. The museum was worth visiting. One of the most amazing displays was the carvings of a bird in a birdcage out of the lead in a lead pencil while it is still part of the pencil!



A peek inside the Franklin Car Museum in Tucson, Arizona.



A winter scene display at the Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures.



After a quick lunch, we drove another 20 miles to the Saguaro National Park (East), watched a movie about the park, spent some time in the gift shop, and then drove the eight-mile loop. There were also several hiking opportunities available, but we needed to head back into town to locate a replacement distributor cap, which we finally found after visiting four different parts stores. On the way back into town, we also drove by a bone yard of military aircraft, with hundreds of military aircraft awaiting their next purpose.

Carl and Kris Edem check out the Mini Time Machine Museum.





Above left to right: Chester and Nancy Bradfield and Engle and Audrey Bouwmeester examine a 1960s Studebaker wagon while a docent in a western hat discusses the car. Bob and Cheryl Clifton wander around the area surrounding the Sonora Museum.

Below left to right: Jo Reale, Joe Marino, and Sue Mook stand in front of saguaro cacti. Jo and Sue are Joe's two daughters.

Thursday was our fourth day of touring, and it was more of a nature day as we explored Tucson's #1 tourist attraction, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. An early restored 1960s Studebaker wagon welcomed us to the museum. Everything else displayed in the museum was of natural origin.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, founded in 1952, is a 98-acre experience of native plants and animals and features ecological exhibits. It's located about 12 miles west of Tucson, in the foothills of the Tucson Mountains. It was still a little chilly when we first arrived there, so many of us initially visited the indoor exhibits of aquariums, reptiles, minerals, art, etc.

As it warmed up, we transitioned to the outdoor exhibits. About 85% of the museum is outdoors and presents a very informative and interesting display of desert plants, animals, and a large aviary. The easy walking trails had helpful guides stationed throughout. Most of us were there for about three hours, including a nice lunch in their on-site cafeteria.

After that, we drove through the adjacent Saguaro National Park (West) with many acres of Saguaro cacti and other desert plants growing out of the rolling hillsides. From there, it was about a half-hour drive back to the hotel, and most of us arrived there early in the afternoon. Total travel time that day was about 60 miles.

Every tour has its engaging experiences, and one that I want to share is about some locked-in car keys. Frank Wenzel had acquired a very nice 1950 Oldsmobile 4-door sedan but had only received a single key for the car. Frank accidentally locked the key in the vehicle. It took three days and ten+ hours of work by three different "experts" to finally get the car unlocked. Many of us cheered on the process of opening up a very tight car. Another consistent problem was McKai Apgood's 1940 Dodge, which had three flat tires on the same wheel during the week.



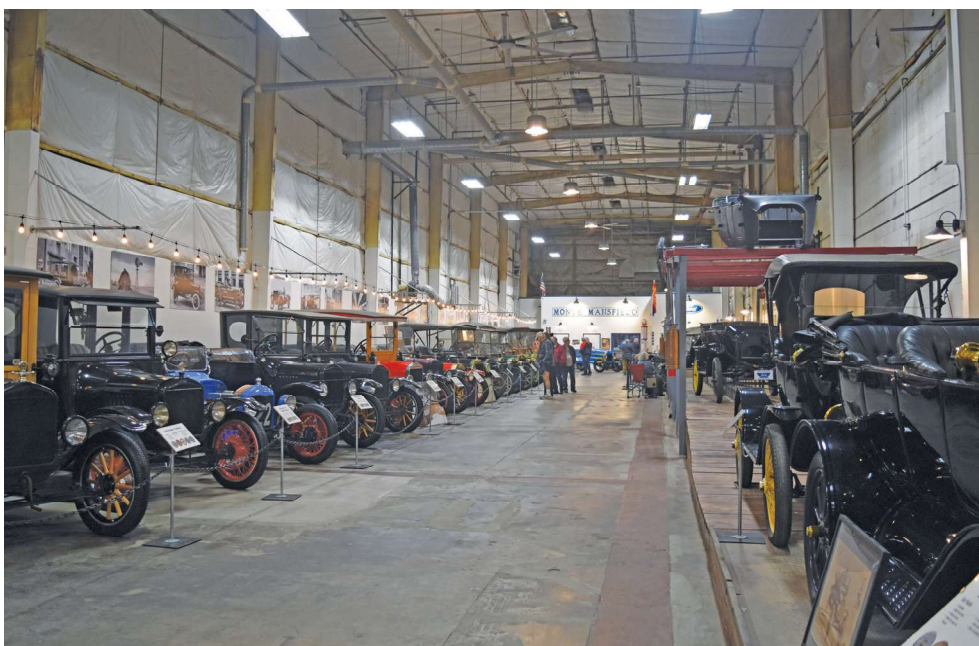
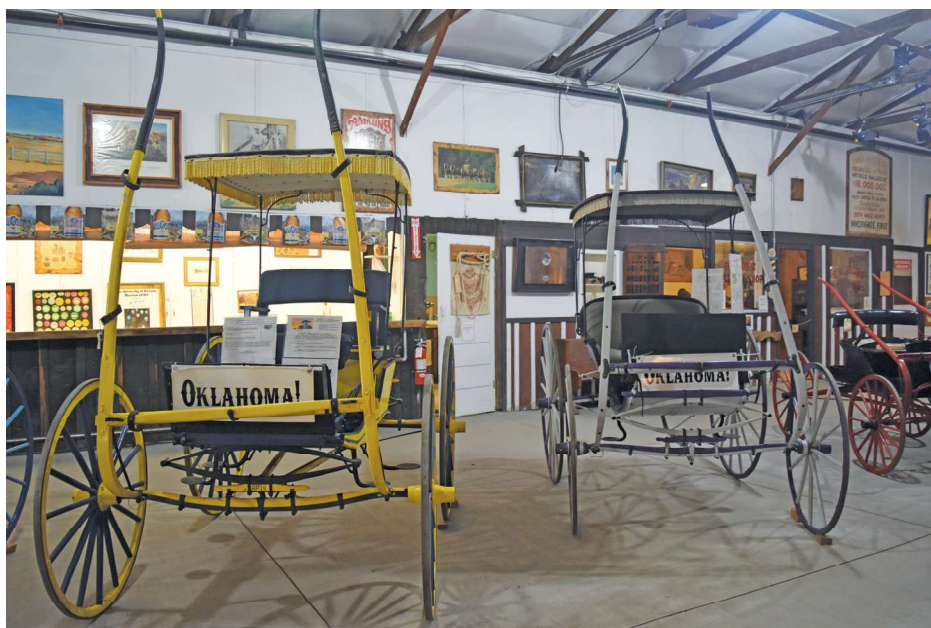


Friday was our shortest tour day at 16 miles, with three different stops. Our first stop was the Rodeo Wagon Museum, honoring the Tucson Rodeo Parade, which started almost a century ago in 1925. The museum now has approximately 150 horse-drawn vehicles, from small buggies to elaborate coaches that help tell Tucson's history. Many of these have been used in prior rodeo parades and western movies.

There were so many great stops and venues we saw on the tour, that it's hard to pick a favorite. I must admit that mine was our next stop, The Rolling Thru Time Museum, which just opened three weeks before our tour. This was one of my favorite car museums, based on the quality of cars and how they were displayed. These were the cars that I grew up with rather than the true classics that many museums feature. The mission of the museum is "to educate visitors about the history of automobiles and their significance in American

life while providing a platform for local clubs and historians to share their stories," and at the same time embodying the spirit and camaraderie of Tucson, especially among car enthusiasts.

The space is about 77,000 square feet, with the main room displaying the majority of the cars and the outside walls devoted to toy cars and trucks. In addition, there are also two large areas dedicated to fire trucks and to early Model T and Model A Fords, including a replica of a Model A assembly line. In addition, the gift shop was more than just souvenirs, prompting some of us to purchase items missing from our toy car collections. So far, we had only traveled five miles from the hotel but we certainly saw a lot.



Our attention then turned from cars to religion and historic architecture as we traveled another six miles to the San Xavier Mission and Church, which dates back to the late 1700s and is now a National Historic Landmark. Following Mexican independence in 1821, San Xavier became a part of Mexico for a while. An adjoining school was opened in 1872 and remains in operation today.

Top to bottom:

Left to right—McKai Apgood with his grandparents Sharon and Mark Apgood look like they stepped out of a western movie.

A few of the many restored horse-drawn buggies at the Rodeo Wagon Museum.

The Rolling Thru Time Museum has an extensive antique automobile collection on display.





Mary Partman, Sally Murray, Bob Murray, and Patti Werckle pose for a picture with the San Xavier Mission and Church in the background.

We got back to the hotel in the early afternoon to pack, load cars, rest, and, in my case, work on this article before the 6:00 p.m. banquet started. Randy and Sandy Carlson brought along some tools that had belonged to Bob Edelman, previously VMCCA Treasurer, for a silent auction, which raised around \$400 for the VMCCA Scholarship Foundation.

After a delicious dinner, Steve Partman closed the banquet with a recap film of the week, some awards, humor, thanks, and fond farewells. Total mileage for the tour was pegged at 368 miles, although many folks took various side trips.

Unfortunately, Steve and Mary's Rolls-Royce had developed some mechanical problems near the end of the tour, so they needed assistance to get back to the Phoenix area. Again, a big thanks to Steve and Mary Partman for hosting this enjoyable, interesting, and well-organized tour, and to Steve Fitzgerald for letting me ride with him.

(Photos by Steve Partman, Bob Murray, and Ray Maxfield)

An earthquake, a lightning strike, and a couple of fires took their toll over the years until restoration began in 1978, and work to date will hopefully help preserve this national treasure for future generations. The architecture of the building is truly amazing and historic; undoubtedly it's worth a visit. Unlike many of the other venues we visited, there was no admission charge to the mission, and Catholic services are held there almost daily.

Western National Tourists got together for a group photo during the final dinner.



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