



LEO'S DREAM

Chicago to Alaska and Back Again

By David Mathews

What's your dream road trip? A meet-up with a few friends for a drive to a state park or some other interesting destination, a hundred or so miles from home? Maybe you're a little more ambitious. How about a big-bucks, fancy-pants rallye, where you can "ooh" and "aah" over priceless vintage machinery, rub shoulders with the hoity toity, and relax at a five-star hotel, savoring haute cuisine at the end of the day?

Maybe you prefer something a little more basic... more personal... a check off your bucket list. What about a little jaunt from Wheaton,

Illinois, through Canada, into the Yukon Territory, across the Alaska Highway, braving bear and debris to Fairbanks, down through the majestic Northwest to California, east to "What Happens Here, Stays Here" Nevada, over the Rocky Mountains, and finally home again? How about doing that trip solo in a T-6 coupe? Nearly 11,000 miles—how does that strike your fancy?

Midwest 356 member Leo Dreisilker is a l-o-o-o-n-g distance kind of guy—a veteran road warrior.

"This was my fourth long trip," Leo said. "My first was after I'd restored my car and shipped it to the 2014 Werks Reunion in Pebble Beach, California. After Pebble Beach Week, I drove 6,196 miles, taking in Yosemite, Reno/Tahoe, Lolo National Forest, Glacier National Park, Banff [Canada's oldest national park], Ice Fields Parkway, Mt. Ranier [highest point in the Cascade Mountain Range], Mt. St. Helens, the 356 West Coast Holiday at beautiful Skamania Lodge, Sturgis, South Dakota, and finally back to Wheaton."

Leo's second road trip included a couple of his other passions: ice hockey and golf. "...Newfoundland via Toronto and Montreal, up the St. Lawrence Seaway, through the Bay of Fundy, squeezed in a little golf at Cabot Cliffs *and* Links, and a six-day ice hockey camp in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, onto Cape Spear, the easternmost point in North America, then back through New England to Wheaton." This second trip was shorter—only 5,954 miles.

In 2018, Leo embarked on his bucket-list trip to Alaska, but mechanical issues plagued the car and caused Leo to wave the white flag. He got as far as Dawson Creek, British Columbia, also known as "Mile 0 City" because it is the southernmost end of the Alaska Highway. "[My car] ran out of gas in Alberta. All the extra starting [attempts] caused the starter winding to short out. Then I got some bad gasoline en route to Dawson Creek. I tried repairs in a hotel parking lot, but

finally decided to abort the trip." In addition to the tainted fuel and the starter problem, he experienced an issue with the generator. "That trip was only 4,500 miles long." Yes, *only* 4,500 miles. Dismayed but undeterred, Leo immediately began planning a second attempt.

Who is this marathon man? Leo is a "take charge" kind of guy, passionate about his business and equally passionate about his hobbies. One of those hobbies is cars—old cars.

"While on a family vacation in 1999, we happened to stop for burgers at a Hardee's restaurant in Kingsport, Tennessee. In front of Hardee's there was a red '62 356 coupe."

When an unexpected opportunity arose, Leo didn't hesitate. "I went inside and asked aloud who the owner was," Leo said. "An older gentleman responded that it was his. He was there to meet a father and son who wanted to look at the car for an inspection before buying it.

"As we were eating, I watched the inspection. After they [the prospective buyers] left, the gentleman came back in and said they were no longer interested due to the car's condition. He asked if I was interested and if I wanted to go on a test drive. We did. I looked at the car and got details. We exchanged information and I told him I would call him in a day or two. That evening and the next, I researched 356s on the Registry website and other sites. I didn't know anything about 356s before seeing this car, and was intrigued. After verifying serial numbers and other [facts] I decided to negotiate and then buy the car."

Did Leo get a sweet deal or a pig in a poke? Maybe a bit of both. "I had the car shipped to Wheaton and then started tinkering and learning



Carved over eons by the Colorado River, Glen Canyon National Recreational Area encompasses 1,254,429 acres.

more about the history, maintenance, and so on," Leo said. "I found Windige Stadt Club (WSC) and joined it. I learned more from members and drove the car occasionally. I found a hole in the rear bumper after removing a park sticker, and later found more rusty areas, and the transmission was skipping in third gear. After three years, and based on the car's condition, I decided to store it until I could do a full restoration. I remained active in WSC, as it later became Midwest 356 Club, while the car was stored. Business demands, kids in college, and buying a bigger house prevented the start of the restoration until 2009."

When restoration began, it was "katy bar the door." "I completely disassembled it down to the last nut and bolt, cleaned the body, had it chemically stripped, and later sent it to a specialist body shop for restoration of the body," Leo said. "I repaired and restored many small items myself. Tom Funk, owner of 356 Works [see sidebar], rebuilt the engine, transmission, brakes, and completed the reassembly and restoration. The process took four and a half years. It was finished in early 2014."

The result was worthy of display at the Werks Reunion in California. But after that week of spit polish and display, Leo did the unthinkable—at least to elite concoursistas. He drove it. "I was not worried about minor mechanical issues, paint scratches, or other issues. A 356 needs to be driven and enjoyed, especially in our fantastic USA."

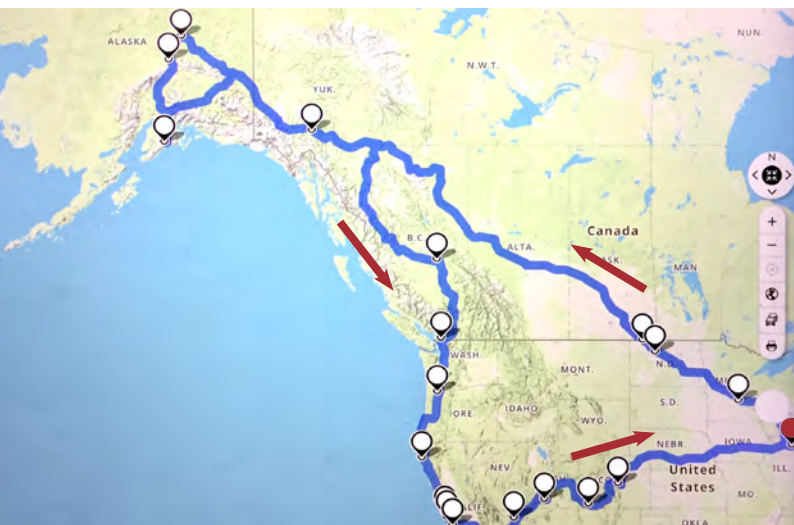
After his initial bout with road trip fever, Leo was addicted. That first long drive, "...set the stage for the Newfoundland trip and the Alaska trip. After years of family and hard work it was time to see and enjoy things I had not done or seen before."

Leo drew inspiration for his long-distance trips from reading early *Porsche 356 Registry* magazine articles, particularly those written by Jerry Keyser, one of the club's founding fathers. A thorough planner, Leo meticulously mapped his latest trip to, "...achieve more bucket list items. My route took me through Minneapolis and Minot, crossed into Canada at Portal, North Dakota, went on to Fairbanks, Alaska, and down to Denali National Park. I fished at Seward, went back east to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, south through Prince George, British Columbia, and back into the US via Abbotsford, BC."

Any unexpected issues? "Yes, a star crack in the windshield on the first day," Leo said. "Also, [I found] a loose backing plate and dented rim in Fairbanks. I hit a pothole somewhere near Yukon-Alaska border."



One of Leo's lifelong dreams was driving a car through a Giant Sequoia. Mission accomplished in Klamath, California.



Top: Leo, roughly 2,400 miles from home...as the crow flies. Above: One map, a lot of miles traveled.



Rest stop at Durango, Colorado, home of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Train Museum.

Butt sore? Wait, there's more. During a pre-planned maintenance service at Heckmann & Thiemann Motors in Portland, Oregon, "...they found a bad bearing on the cooling fan side of the generator. The shop had a rebuilt generator in stock, installed it, and completed all the work."

While in Portland, Leo attended the 2nd annual Germanpalooza at Portland International Raceway. Co-sponsored by Heckmann & Thiemann and the BMW Car Club, this festival featured a car show, swap meet, track day, and plenty of jaw-boning. Leo did not mention a long distance award, but if one were given, he would have been a shoe-in.

On Leo's drive down Highway 101 to Eureka, California, his luck sputtered. "I noticed a noise, and after an inspection in a hotel parking lot I found the cooling fan was loose on its hub," Leo said. "I had the socket and bar in my tool kit, but could not torque it down. After a



Pikes Peak, Colorado: At 14,000 feet, breathing for both man and carburetor can become a bit labored.

number of calls to auto repair companies, I found German Motors in Arcata, only 15 minutes north. They said they were busy with appointments, but to bring it in.

"When I talked to the owner and he understood what my issue was, he said they would be able to look at it later in the afternoon," Leo said. "Since it was still mid-morning, I told him I could take the generator assembly out myself because I had all the tools and had done it several times before. He only allowed me to work on the car in his parking lot.

"After removing the generator, I took it into the shop. The owner found an additional washer, we torqued down the bolt, and I reinstalled the unit. While finishing up, the owner came out to say the *original* shop owner, a man named Helmut, just called and said a 356 had come into *his* shop for repair.

"Helmut came over to see me. He checked over my work and found out that I spoke German. He was originally from Germany and we started to speak about all things 356. Helmut invited me to see his restoration shop located at the other side of the building. He showed me the 911s and 912s he was restoring, his tools and equipment, engine parts and cases, and more. We really hit it off. After this lengthy visit, I left his shop and continued to Monterey."

From Monterey, Leo drove to Big Sur, then to San Simeon and through California's Central Valley, where temperatures ranged from 55 degrees to 105 degrees. After briefly considering a drive through Death Valley, Leo instead detoured through Las Vegas, Bryce Canyon, Utah, Zion National Park, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Glen Canyon, up through Durango and Pike's Peak, Colorado, and finally home to Wheaton.

"I met many people who told me they had owned 356s," Leo said.

Considering that this trip more serious than a quick sprint to the local Dairy Queen, what did Leo bring along and how did he prepare? "Plenty of tools—spark plugs, bulbs, headlight lenses, meters, infrared temperature gun, oil, RainX and anti-fog spray (for inside the windows), several flashlights, carbon brushes, and so on. Unfortunately, I didn't bring a spare generator or starter. Before I left, Tom Funk changed the oil, did a tune up, and gave it a good inspection."

Besides a few mechanical hiccups, Leo experienced a few notable complications. "I ran into a bad storm and a washed-out road in Toad River, British Columbia. I also was taken aback by how fast pickup trucks pulling trailers and campers drove in Canada. And, you must plan ahead for gas stops. Some stations close pretty early [in Canada and Alaska].

Leo Dreisilker's epic road trip was a dream come true. Perhaps his tale will inspire you in turn, to dare you to pursue a dream that is just as big. ³⁵⁶

Tom Funk, 79, proud father and grandfather, good friend, and expert in all things 356, passed away November 22, 2019.

Tom played a key role in Leo Dreisilker's 11,000-mile Alaskan adventure. "Without his restoration, guidance, and travels with me, I could not have been confident and successful in my trips," Leo said.

A Porsche Club of America member since 1964, Tom was also a founding member of the Midwest 356 Club. After cutting his teeth on British sports cars, Tom's first 356 was a Champagne Yellow coupe, followed by a 1964 cabriolet that he continued to enjoy and drive throughout his lifetime.

A well-known and highly respected engine builder and mechanic, Tom owned 356 Works in Glenview, Illinois. Tom selflessly provided support, encouragement, and advice to any 356 owner. Tom knew no strangers. His broad smile and disarming demeanor created an instant bond.

Tom is survived by his daughters Kris (husband Joe) and Amy (husband Mike), and three grandchildren. ³⁵⁶