

YAHOO YELLOWSTONE !

by Gerri McManis

Friday, September 9th, 2011:

It was a sunny morning when Charlie and Gerri McManis left their home and were joined by Charlie Morgan and Renee Dugan (Diamond Valley Vettes) as we began another fun adventure with Corvette friends. We pulled into the Starbucks parking lot at Ontario Mills to meet more of the group: Oscar and Marilyn Amaro (The Vette Set), Jerry Clement (TVS) and his friend Ed Puerta, John and Jane La Bella (TVS), Clarke and Gail Latimer (Pacific Coast Corvettes), Gordon and Trudy Lenz (Corvettes of Temecula Valley), Jay and Marcia Lynch (Diamond Valley Vettes and Corvette Super Sports), and Raul and Maritza Rodriguez (TVS).

Introductions were made and Charlie distributed the travel booklets and name badges. Gerri presented each driver with a trip favor---a small snow globe with a miniature black bear fishing inside—to hang on each rear view mirror.

Trip Favor



After a pit stop in Barstow, we stopped at The Mad Greek for lunch in Baker, and with full tummies set out for South Point Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, where we were joined by John and Linda Tully (TVS), Hal Vatcher (TVS), Dick and Toni Whitford (TVS), and Lloyd and Helene Yabsley (Corvettes of Temecula Valley). We parked in front of the hotel and some passersby seemed to think it was a Corvette show and meandered among our cars, some snapping photos. While we waited for the group to organize, Gail Latimer presented a female companion rubber chicken for “Charlie the Chicken.” She sported fake eyelashes and bright red lipstick on obviously Botox-ed lips. Some veteran participants had apprehensions regarding her qualifications to pair with our beloved “Charlie,” but we agreed to give it a try.



Gerri accepts Henrietta from Gail & Clark

We formed our caravan and headed north to our evening’s destination, St. George, Utah, where a luxurious Best Western Hotel awaited our arrival. During the cocktail party prior to dinner, John La Bella introduced “Charlie the Chicken” to the group and explained to newcomers who he is and the role he plays as our trip mascot. John then performed a “marriage” ceremony to unite “Charlie” and “Henrietta,” after which Hal Vatcher donned his swim suit and, amid cheers, baptized “Henrietta” in the motel swimming pool.



Hal gives Henrietta a sip of wine

Hal baptizes Henrietta



Walking to dinner is always preferred and we were fortunate to locate an Italian restaurant a short distance from the motel, where we enjoyed great food.

Saturday, September 10th:

During the drivers meeting after breakfast, participants were asked to check the underside of their trip favor to determine the winner of a prize for owning the favor with a smiley face on the bottom. John and Jane La Bella were the lucky winners of a soft cuddly Halloween doll.



John & Jane won the prize

Waiting to enter Zion



The group entered Zion National Park and commandeered a shuttle, dubbed “the party bus,” for a tour through the towering monoliths.



On the party bus

The weather cooperated until the end of our ride, when thunder showers began to threaten and a few rain drops spattered our driving machines.



Driving in Zion



John La Bella gets fair warning



Waiting to enter
Zion exit tunnel

Hunger pangs dictated a stop at the US89 Junction outside the park and we descended upon a Subway in Carmel Junction, where we enjoyed made to order sandwiches.



Linda, Toni, Dick, John with the chickens at Subway



Maritza, Ruly, Marilyn, Oscar at Subway

We encountered rain from the junction north and finally, Hal Vatcher reluctantly had to stop and put the top up on his beloved '62 Toy. It rained off and on all the way to Springville, Utah, which abuts Provo and was our overnight destination.



Hal puts the top up in the storm

During the cocktail party prior to dinner, the guardianship of the nuptial chickens was passed to Dick and Toni Whitford. Most of the group walked across the street to partake of vittles at a Denny's restaurant.



Some of the group at Denny's

Sunday, September 11th:

Some of the participants displayed American flags to commemorate 9-11. Charlie had brought extra small flags, which were affixed on the rear window with duct tape---not the best option, but better than nothing. Several people said they had been unable to find flags to fit on the car window.



Flag display on 9-11

We departed Springville, Utah, at 8:00 am and arrived in Diamondville, Wyoming, at lunchtime. After cruising through the small town, we determined that the only option for food was a Pizza Hut. We wondered where the residents go when they want to go out for dinner....? The food and service turned out to be just fine, and we headed out toward Jackson, Wyoming. On the way we encountered more rain.



Pizza Hut in Diamondville

The rubber chicken couple was handed over from the Whitfords to Lloyd and Helene Yabsley during the cocktail party, after which most of us walked to the Gun Barrel Steak House for a feast.

Monday, September 12th:

After a more than adequate breakfast (as was the norm in all the Best Westerns where we stayed), the group split up and headed for Grand Teton National Park. The McManises stayed behind to help Charlie Morgan (henceforth referred to as “ChasMo”) repair his windshield wipers, which refused to turn off after driving through rain the previous day. “ChasMo” is an experienced car repairman and knew that the simple solution was to remove the fuse that enabled the wipers, so we headed to a Chevron station to fill up and “ChasMo” raised the hood to remove the fuse. After several minutes of frustrating attempts to locate the offending fuse, “ChasMo” realized it was located in a different fuse box under the carpet on the passenger side. Charlie McManis (henceforth referred to as “Chaz”), who had been standing by to offer condolences and help, if needed, was asked to close the hood. On the first attempt, it didn’t close all the way, so “ChasMo” reached under the dash to release it for a second try and in so doing, he accidentally closed the driver’s side door. Fortunately, it didn’t close completely. It was then he realized the door was locked and his C5 key was in the ignition. He asked Renee for the spare key, but alas....the key was in her purse inside the car!

“ChasMo” went inside the station to find a tool to unlock the door and was loaned one, but it was too short to reach the lock. Just when the next step seemed to be a call to AAA, a very pleasant young lady employed by the Chevron station warned that it would probably be an hour wait for AAA, and insisted on driving to her nearby apartment to fetch a longer tool. She was back in five minutes. As “ChasMo” struggled to insert the longer tool into the narrow opening between the rag top and window, he cut his arm and scraped his face---a couple of battle scars to commemorate the experience. Success was achieved and “ChasMo” tipped the young lady with lunch money. The car was unlocked and the hood was securely shut, but that is not the end of the story.

The next stop was the nearby Chevrolet dealer, where “ChasMo” hoped to have the correct fuse removed in order to stop the confounded windshield wipers. It was a Monday morning and the cars were lined up at the service department, but (and this could NEVER happen in LA) a serviceman took pity and within minutes had removed the fuse. However, in so doing, he dropped it into the fuse box and out of sight. Rather than try to retrieve it, he gave “ChasMo” a new fuse and told him to put it in his pocket. A grateful “ChasMo” tipped the man lunch money and at last we were on our way sans wipers and praying for clear skies.

Grand Teton Park is nothing short of spectacular and we were all on our own to explore the park. The plan was to meet again at Jackson Lake Lodge at the north end of the park for lunch at 1 pm and then form up for the ride to Cody, Wyoming.

On our way to the lodge, the McManises and “ChasMo” and Renee decided to take a side trip up a winding road to the top of Signal Mountain, where a panoramic view of the valley was promised. We parked at the top and began to walk the to the view point. There was a small crowd gathered along the railing and as we neared the group, we heard a man’s voice say, “Boy, you never know where you’re going to meet Corvette people!”

We turned around and standing at the railing were Frank and Deborah Whaley, a couple who live in Virginia and drove out to California in 2009 to join the SoCal caravan to Bowling Green for the 15th anniversary celebration of the National Corvette Museum. At the start of the trip, they happened to park next to our small group and we invited them to join us. We had a fun time as we crossed the country together, sharing meals, and getting acquainted. When we said goodbye, we vowed to keep in touch, but....well, you know how that goes. As we parted in Grand Teton, we hugged each other goodbye, promising (again) to stay in touch. They plan to drive to So Cal to join the caravan in 2014 and want to join our group again.



Chaz, Gerri, Frank & Deborah
Whaley, Renee, ChasMo

After lunch at Jackson Lodge, we departed for Cody, Wyoming, and arrived just in time for cocktail hour, during which guardianship of “Charlie” and “Henrietta” was passed to Lloyd and Helene Yabsley and since it was Lloyd’s birthday, we all sang Happy Birthday. Sans cake, John Tully offered the flame of his cigarette lighter so Lloyd could make a wish and blow it out.

Lloyd takes charge of the chix





Lloyd makes a birthday wish

On an unhappy note, Lee and Hazel Beidleman were unable to accompany us on this trip due to urgent surgery for Hazel. Lee, always full of fun, had purchased a bottle of hot sauce to be given to John La Bella and had changed the label to read “Chicken Hot Sauce, great with rubber chicken.” During the happy hour, Gerri presented the gift, much to John’s amusement.

While the rest of the group was enjoying the park that day, Jerry Clement, Jay Lynch, and Hal Vatcher chartered a river raft for a wild ride on the Snake River. It was an exhilarating experience and the charter company photographed some of the wildest moments. Hal and Jerry somehow wound up in the river and were rescued by the crew. Interested persons may view a slide show of the event which Hal created and posted on his Facebook wall.

Tuesday, September 13th:

After breakfast the group split up again to explore the town of Cody. Most went to the Buffalo Bill Museum, which simply cannot be done in one day, but we gave it a shot.

Cody Monument





Sacagawea statue Cody Museum garden

Gerri, who had been suffering from sciatica, aggravated by hours of sitting in the car, was unable to walk the museum and found a chair to wait for the others. John and Linda Tully sauntered by and, concerned, stopped to chat. Gerri mentioned jokingly that she was just about ready for a wheelchair. A few minutes later, John disappeared and Linda surmised he had gone outside for a cigarette, but he reappeared moments later pushing a wheelchair loaned by the museum. "Chaz" was summoned by cell phone to provide legs and Gerri was able to enjoy the displays, although she was at the mercy of her driver and OD-ed in the vast firearms display.



Display in Cody Museum

The full entourage reassembled in the parking lot of the Best Western in Cody at 1 pm and departed for Cooke City, Montana, at the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Participants were free to explore and then meet for the overnight stay at Best Western in Gardiner, Montana, where all but one of the rooms overlooked the rushing Yellowstone River. Occupants of the room with no view were Charlie and Gerri, whose names were mysteriously omitted from the reservation list. Since the entire town was sold out, they were fortunate to be given a room that is reserved just for such an emergency. Their view was a brick wall.

During the cocktail gathering on a deck overlooking the river, “Charlie” and “Henrietta” were handed over to Ed Puerta for the next day’s activities. There was a restaurant next door to the motel and we walked there for dinner.

Wednesday, September 14th:

It had rained during the night and after breakfast, a woeful looking bunch of Corvettes began the drive back into Yellowstone via the north entrance. It was a “free” day, providing participants the opportunity to explore the park at their discretion. There were several sightings of herds of bison and elk, but no one saw a bear.



Bison in Yellowstone

Female Elk in Yellowstone



Most of the group visited Mammoth Hot Springs and Grand Canyon of Yellowstone, which offers breathtaking views of the upper and lower waterfalls and rock formations.



Not quite so wild bunch



Adventurous group



Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone



Grand Canyon of Yellowstone

We stopped for lunch at Canyon Village and continued on to Old Faithful, where we waited about 40 minutes for the eruption. Since it occurs on average every 93 minutes, we felt fortunate that our wait time was relatively short.



Waiting for Old Faithful



Thar she blows!

We left the park via the west entrance and checked into the Best Western in the town of West Yellowstone, Montana. At the cocktail party prior to dinner, Ed attempted to turn over guardianship of the chicken couple, but certain members of the group had observed that the couple was missing from activities during the day; i.e., they were left unattended in a locked Corvette while their guardian enjoyed the day's activities. This, of course, was unacceptable, so his penance was deemed to be continued guardianship for another day and performance of more appropriate supervision. Chagrined, Ed accepted the challenge.



Ed accepts the challenge

The group split directions for dinner and about half walked across the street from the motel to a restaurant called Spanish Tapas. The food was served as it is in a Chinese restaurant, with platters shared among the diners. The cuisine was interesting and delicious.

Thursday, September 15th:

Following breakfast, Trudy and Gordon left the group to travel eastward to Sheridan, Wyoming, where they grew up and have family. The remaining group left West Yellowstone and drove south into Idaho. We stopped for lunch in Arco, Montana at a restaurant called Pickles, "Home of the Atomic Burger", which is a reference to the U.S. Navy nuclear training center nearby. It was noted that "Charlie" and "Henrietta" were included in the fun.

Henrietta and Charlie the
Chicken cuddling at Pickles



Gerri and Chaz McManis



Maritza and Ruly Rodriguez



Gail and Clark Latimer



Dick and Toni Whitford



Marilyn and Oscar Amaro



Jerry Clement and the chickens



Helene and Lloyd Yabsley



Jay and Marcia Lynch



Hal Vatcher and the chickens

Renee Dugan and
Charlie Morgan





Linda and John Tully



John and Jane
La Bella

On the way to our overnight in Twin Falls, Idaho, we stopped at Craters of the Moon National Monument, where we saw lots and lots of interesting lava formations.

Ed, who had redeemed himself, presented the chicken couple to Marcia Lynch during the cocktail party.



Marcia takes charge of the chickens

Maritza interrupted the proceedings to announce that she had found a bird's egg during her hike at Craters of the Moon. She intimated that "Henrietta" had produced the egg and accidentally broke it. It was a feeble attempt to prove the chicken couple had consummated their union--- perhaps while alone together in the locked car? No one knows for sure.

Marcia presented a bottle of Dewar's White Label Scotch and a greeting card signed by the participants to a surprised Charlie and Gerri in celebration of their 38th anniversary.



Marcia presents gift to anniversary couple

We enjoyed a delicious Italian dinner at a nearby restaurant called "Tomato's."



Dinner at Tomato's



More Tomato's



And more Tomato's

Friday, September 16th:

After breakfast we were off to visit Dierkes Lake and Shoshone Falls, near Twin Falls. As we were preparing to leave the lake parking area, a van full of young French femme fatales spotted the lineup of Corvettes and with excited exclamations of "C'est bon!" descended upon Hal's '62 "babe magnet" for photos, most likely to show their envious friends at home. The other cars were granted a polite glance.



Nice rides at Dierkes Lake

We were amazed at the size of Shoshone Falls and the tremendous volume of water. Some of us who had visited Niagara Falls were inclined to make a comparison, albeit Shoshone Falls is much smaller but almost as spectacular.



At the top of Shoshone Falls



Spectacular
Shoshone
Falls

We formed up for the drive toward Ely, Nevada, with a pit stop in Jackpot, Nevada, where some quickly spent a few dollars in the slots. Renee deposited \$25 and walked away within minutes with a net profit of \$114! Some people have all the luck! We stopped for lunch in Wells, Nevada.

Between Twin Falls and Ely, the traffic was sparse and the road was straight for miles. “Chaz” had suggested that if a driver should feel the urge to blow out carbon to do so in a safe manner; i.e., notify the group by radio first. Jay Lynch felt the urge and clocked out at 145 mph, after which Clarke Latimer blew past at 138 mph. “Chaz” clocked a poky 128 mph.



Long straight highway

In Ely, we stayed at a La Quinta Hotel, a change from the usual Best Western, which was sold out because there was a road race in town. The town prides itself on a series of murals painted on the sides of buildings around town, depicting its history, and a first class Nevada Northern Railway museum with a working machine shop.



Chaz at Ely Railroad Museum

Shortly after our arrival it began to rain and then the sky opened up and we were treated to a full blown lightning and thunder monsoon style storm. During cocktails, “Charlie” and “Henrietta” were handed over to Gail Latimer.



Marcia hands over the chickens to Gail

The cocktail party lasted a bit longer than usual while we hoped for a letup in the storm to go to dinner. No one wanted to drive in the rain and finally, John and Linda Tully took orders, braved the storm and went to an Arby's a block away to fetch food and they generously treated the whole group to dinner.



The ladies at La Quinta in Ely, Nevada



The guys at La Quinta

Saturday, September 17th:

After breakfast, “ChasMo” and Renee left the group to go home. Renee had suffered from an abscessed tooth all week and decided the fun was over for her. The remaining group began the drive toward Las Vegas and made a pit stop in the charming little old mining town of Pioche, Nevada, where we browsed the museum (lots of really neat old stuff in there!) and squeezed in a bit of shopping in the quaint little stores.



Pioche, Nevada

We continued on to Caliente, Nevada, where we had lunch and then formed up for a photo shoot with the historic landmark Mission style railroad depot as a backdrop.



Mission style railroad station in Caliente, Nevada

The road from Pioche to Las Vegas was another long straight stretch with a bit more traffic than we had experienced the previous day, so the drivers got their thrills by kicking it up to pass cars, trucks, motor homes, etc.

We arrived at Best Western in Las Vegas in time for cocktails. At the cocktail party, guardianship of "Charlie the Chicken" was returned to John La Bella, the official adoptive father. John's and Jane's daughter is manager of a Grimaldi's Pizza Restaurant, a chain that originated in New York City, and John had arranged seating for our group. We persuaded the hotel staff to allow us to use the shuttle van for transportation. The menu seemed endless and probably without exception, we all overindulged the pizza.

Sunday, September 18th:

It's the saddest day---having to say goodbye. The La Bellas opted to stay an extra day in Vegas and the Lynches, Yabsleys, and Latimers headed for home early. Before embarking on the last leg of our adventure, during breakfast "Henrietta" was returned to her adoptive mother, Gail. The remaining group made a pit stop at Peggy Sue's famous 50's diner outside of Barstow. It was too early for lunch, so most opted to indulge in an old fashioned milk shake to tide us over for the rest of the trip home.

As we always say, no Corvette trip is complete without at least one U-turn. On this trip we passed the quota within the first couple of days. Missing turns, little trials and tribulations, cracked windshields, whatever....it all adds to the spirit of adventure and we enjoyed it all.

Thank you to all the participants in this year's trip. The camaraderie was wonderful, the scenery was awesome, and the ride was fun.

Next year's caravan will begin on the Saturday following Labor Day, instead of the usual Friday, and will end the following Sunday. It will be called "Ramblin' Roads," and plans are already in the works. All Corvette owners are invited to join in the fun, so mark your calendars!