

The 2025 Orphan Car Tour

By Jeanine Ingram



*Above: A shot of the Blue Angels flying over the Willow Run Airport in Ypsilanti, Michigan. (Photo by Chuck Anderson)
Below: Matt Eby tries out a fire engine cab.*

The 2025 Orphan Car Tour was a progressive touring event held on June 22-27. Sunday afternoon's registration at our first hotel had a bonus. The United States Navy's Blue Angels were doing a show at Willow Run Airport. We heard and saw them fly very low over the hotel.

The Michigan Fire House Museum in Ypsilanti opened at 4:00 p.m. We had plenty of time to tour the museum of historical vintage firefighting vehicles, equipment, and artifacts.

We enjoyed a full buffet banquet on the lower level of the museum. Following dinner, Rick Thomas of the Brighton Chapter had a PowerPoint presentation of famous TV vehicles of years gone by. The members had to try to guess the show, the year, and the model of the car. Then Rick added a few more facts about the vehicles, such as how many were used in making the show, if any were still in existence, and so on. Rick's presentation provided for great memories, a few laughs, and thoughts about the TV shows we all used to watch.

Monday morning's tour route took us to the Automotive Heritage Museum, also in Ypsilanti. Several companies occupied the building, but a Hudson dealership was the last. After some beverages, we viewed and drooled over the orphan cars produced at Willow Run's former World War II B-24 factory. Here is a little-known history fact that a couple of us didn't know—the Hudson Motor Car Company was named in honor of Joseph L. Hudson, the founder of Hudson's Department Store, who provided the seed capital for the car company. Memories of Hudson's Department Store (now

Macy's) had some of us sharing shopping stories, envisioning visits with Santa, and reliving the manned elevator rides in its downtown Detroit store. We walked amongst the vehicles for two hours and asked questions of the museum folks.

After lunch we drove over to the Roush Automotive Collection that took us into another era with a variety of vehicles. The assortment of vehicles included custom pony cars, classic Mustangs, concept cars, drag race cars, and high-end formula racing machines, which Roush builds for the Ford Motor Company and





Above left to right: A selection of Ford race cars at the Roush Automotive Collection. A sign that sums up the philosophy of NASCAR.

private owners' custom orders. Now, would a Mercury Comet fall into one of these categories? After this visit, we headed back to the hotel for an evening of fellowship and relaxation.

Tuesday's drive was 1.5 hours along Michigan scenic back roads to the "Ye Old Carriage Shop" in Spring Arbor, Michigan. VMCCA member Judi Ganton gave an hour-long talk about the 30-plus cars built in the Jackson, Michigan area. Other products made in the region were also on display. Do you remember when you were young and had that pedal car? I bet the one in the museum may have looked just like yours because there were over 100 displayed. Did you ever have a Stanley radio at your house? Many were here also. And, do you remember your mother's or grandmother's pale-yellow kitchen from the 1950s? Yes, there was one of those too. Our coffee and donut hole stop was held in the diner with tons of Coca-Cola memorabilia, booths, coolers, soda fountain, and metal chairs with round tables.

More Michigan back roads took us to Cornwell's Turkeyville for lunch. Everyone enjoyed turkey in some fashion (sandwich, traditional dinner, or salad), followed by homemade pies and ice cream. Next we drove a very short distance to Marshall, Michigan. We toured the second largest Postal Service Museum in the U.S. located in the lower level of the current Marshall Post Office. Some tourists ventured to Walter's Garage, housed in an Interurban Railway Depot. There they checked out old gasoline collectibles and historical newspaper articles, while chatting with relatives of R.C. Dick Walters, Jr. Some visited other shops along the way. We all got a little wet when a pop-up rainstorm came. It was time to wash the dust off the cars anyway. After the rain we drove more backroads with a detour here and there to the Delta Hotel in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Upon arrival we met the Willys-Knight Club's Hub Tour in the parking lot. What an excellent opportunity to admire more great cars and socialize with the owners!



Top to bottom: Bob and Jackie Peinert's 1985 Mercedes 350 SL. Matt and Eileen Eby's 1957 Mercury M100 Pick-up truck.

On Wednesday we went to the Air Zoo Aerospace and Science Center. It was a step back in time to see early aircraft, flight suits, and the newest defense aircraft. Some saw the restoration center where a World War II airplane is being restored. We left the Air Zoo to head to the Gilmore Car Museum in Hickory Corners, Michigan. The 90-acre museum campus has numerous buildings with exhibits covering countless automobile brands and models. The Gilmore Car Museum has various car clubs that have constructed their own display buildings modeled like barns and old dealerships. Some Orphan Car tourists had lunch in an old diner, while others took rides in 1930s to 1950s cars, and others just walked around in amazement while drinking lots of water to stay hydrated. Around 5:00 p.m. most of us headed back to the hotel to cool off, eat dinner, and reminisce.



A Curtiss P-40 Warhawk at the Air Zoo Aerospace Science Center in Portage, Michigan.



Left to right: A 1939 Plymouth on display at the Gilmore Car Museum in Hickory Corners, Michigan. Steve Fitzgerald and John Zimmerman have a chat.



Some went back out in the early evening to the cruise-in being held at the Gilmore.

It was rise and shine for an early start time on Thursday morning to go to the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum in Auburn, Indiana. Once we arrived, the group was greeted with coffee, water, donuts, and watermelon at their pavilion, before touring the beautiful cars. Right behind this museum is the National Automobile and Truck Museum filled with more cars and trucks of the past, plus a huge Matchbox car collection. Next it was off to the Early Ford V8 Museum for an excellent box lunch. The museum encompasses Fords from 1932 to 1953. We left there to go to one of the three hotels selected from the registration form in town for a night of rest and fellowship.



This picture shows some of the amazing vehicles on display at the Gilmore Car Museum.





Left to right: A 1950 Studebaker Champion on display at the Studebaker Museum in South Bend, Indiana. Andrew Shephard, Bill Shephard, and Ed, Sarah, and Wenda Wenger at the Oliver Mansion.

Friday morning came early again. We traveled on back roads through Amish and RV Manufacturing areas to get to the Studebaker Museum and the Oliver House in South Bend, Indiana. We split into two groups, one toured the Studebaker Museum while the other visited the Oliver Mansion.

At the Studebaker Museum, there were three floors of cars to see. We learned about the history of wagon building, wheelbarrows, and the end of their car production.

J.D. Oliver of Chilled Plow Works fame, moved his family into the Oliver Mansion in 1897. The family lived there for 72 years. The mansion is a time capsule and remains the way it was when the last surviving relative lived there. The family agreed that it should be preserved as it was. The three-storied structure had many steps for tourists to climb. Remember, there was no air conditioning when the family lived there. Luckily, box fans helped to keep us cool. We had lunch on our own and then took a tour of the South Bend Art Museum.

All good things must come to an end. The closing banquet was at the Scottish Rite Bear Dyslexia Center in downtown South Bend, a short walk or drive from the Aloft Hotel. We enjoyed a traditional Polish wedding dinner and chatted about the week's activities. And, of course, a discussion about future tours, some of which were scheduled for later in the summer. After a well-rested night, some departed for home.

You know the saying, "There is still more." Saturday saw nine cars travel to an optional private car collection in LaPorte, Indiana, lunch at Mama T's restaurant, and then to the LaPorte County Historical Museum. There was a Tucker at this museum, just like the one on the tour's flyer. This museum had cars, airplanes, furniture, glassware, and a gun collection. What more could one ask for except to return home to sleep in our own beds.

(Photos by Trisha Copley, Jeanine Ingram, and John Zimmerman)



Top to bottom: The entrance to the J.D. Oliver Mansion. Karen and Alexander Kompanowski at the final dinner.

