



# THE CHESAPEAKE BULLETIN

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## Tin Can Tourists on the National Road Bicentennial Caravan

The lure of the open road has been a significant part of the American automotive experience. When the automobile's novelty began to wear off early in the 1900s, Americans started to use their horseless carriages for other purposes besides basic transportation. An expanding navigable, all-weather road system between towns helped hasten the recreational use of cars and the development of camping vehicles of all kinds.

Judging from the variety of antique trailers, motor homes, and RV's that assembled at the Allegany County Maryland Fairgrounds on June 3<sup>rd</sup> for the start of the Tin Can Tourist Caravan, there have been some imaginative recreational vehicles produced, mostly for the purpose of traveling the open roads and camping along the way.



*Sharon & Doug Cuyler - Rochester Hills, MI  
1949 Buick towing a 1949 Airstream Liner Southwind*

The Caravan was organized by the Tin Can Tourists organization and was sponsored by the Six State Alliance of the Historic National Road Bicentennial. On the morning of June 4<sup>th</sup>, the Caravan participants held an open house at the Fairgrounds to show off their antique camping rigs, some of which were towed by antique vehicles. Tin Can Tourists are a very friendly group who really enjoy talking about the trailers and campers and showing the features of their respective units.

The Tin Can Tourists was organized in Tampa, FL in 1919. The group's objective was "to unite fraternally all auto campers." Their guiding principles were clean camps, friendliness among campers, decent behavior, and to secure clean, wholesome entertainment from those in camp. Known for a soldered tin can placed on their radiator caps, the group grew rapidly during the 1920s and '30s and had a national membership that was estimated to be between 30,000 and 100,000.

The original organization remained in existence until the mid-1970s. After a decline, the Tin Can Tourists was revived in 1998 with an emphasis on the restoration and use of vintage camping units. The group has grown steadily, currently holding annual gatherings in Michigan, Florida, and regional rallies.



*Carol & Don Mayton - Zeeland, MI  
1936 Buick towing a 1936 Bowlus Road Chief*

Twenty-nine Caravan participants pulled out of their overnight camping spaces just before 1:00 PM on June 4<sup>th</sup> to begin the seven-day trek west along U.S. Route 40 from Cumberland, MD over the Allegheny mountains to Vandalia, IL. The significance of starting the Caravan in Cumberland is to recognize the first tollgate and toll keeper's house, built in the 1830s, at the entrance of the toll portion of the National Road.

*Continued on the next page >>*

**Tin Can Tourists – continued**

During the seven day Caravan, the Tin Can Tourists will travel approximately 650 miles with stops at many bicentennial events sponsored by local, state and national groups.

It's noteworthy that five of the Caravan tow vehicles are GM straight 8 powered cars (1936 Buick, two late 40s Buicks, plus two late 40s Pontiacs). The pulling power of those straight 8 engines seems to work well when towing vintage trailers.

In 1806, an Act of Congress allocated funds for George Washington's dream of building an all-weather road across the Allegheny Mountains and into the heart of the frontier. Thomas Jefferson signed the

bill into law and The National Road; the nation's first federally funded interstate highway, was born.

Construction of the road began in 1811 at Cumberland extending the already existing route from the seaport of Baltimore. It was known first as The Cumberland Road, but has since been known by several names including The Great National Pike and The Old National Road. It took more than 25 years to complete across Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and eventually Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.

In the 1850s, the increased popularity of railroads caused the road to go into decline. The National Road remained unimproved until the 1930's, when it was paved and renamed Route 40.



**Lana & Ken Hindley - Union, Ontario Canada**  
*The Hindley's 1938 International truck is a custom bodied unit with camping features to compliment the 1936 Curtiss Aerocar, a fifth wheel model with no actual chassis and constructed with a fabric covering similar to early airplanes.*



**Paul Pieche - Berkley, MI**  
*1968 UltraVan, made in Hutchison, KS, weighs 4,300 pounds. It's made of aluminum with fiberglass corners and Formica paneling. The van is powered by a rear engine 110hp Corvair engine and will cruise at 65 MPH.*



**Nancy & Clayton Snyder - Penalosa, KS**  
*1972 Superior 22 ft. Class A Motorhome. The Superior was built from 1970 to about 1978. Construction is all welded galvanized steel. Built on a Dodge M300 chassis, powered by a 413 Dodge truck engine. This unit is original with a few modifications.*



**John and Dot John Flis - Brown City, MI**  
*1940 International Pickup with homebuilt "Shack" camper made from 90% recycled materials. The Flis decided to get a camper in the mid 1990s, but they didn't want any of the pedestrian looking offerings at the RV dealerships. Continued on the next page >>*

Tin Can Tourists – continued



*Kim & Brian McCool - Delton, MI*

*1948 Pontiac Deluxe convertible, which the McCools have had for 31 years, tows their 1948 Spartan Manor trailer that has been refurbished from a gutted hulk.*



*Susan & Hunt Jones - Mountain Lakes, NJ*

*The Jones' 1955 GMC 100 pickup truck tows a nicely refurbished 1964 Airstream Globe Trotter. The GMC 1955 truck was the first year of a restyled body.*



*Michelle, Paige & Terry Bone - Wixom, MI*

*1966 Ford F100 Custom Cab pickup tows a restored 1957 Sportcraft 15 camping trailer. The Sportcraft is a traditional "canned ham" style trailer.*



*Marion & Alan Woods - Thorndale, Ontario, Canada*

*With vanity plates –“Ze Car” & “Ze Home”, the 1948 Pontiac Streamline sedan tows a one-of-a-kind homebuilt teardrop camper of a similar vintage.*



*<< Historic building sign on the Toll House site*



*The restored seven sided National Road toll house on Route 40. Mile marker zero is in the foreground >>*



*Mary Jane & John Merschdorf - Mansfield, OH*

*1969 Volkswagen Westfalia Campmobile has everything including the kitchen sink and a second story bunk, all in a compact package.*