

# GETTING UP TO SPEED

*tldr; This story is not about making motoring history. It's not about a fantasy car and its not even about impressing our friends. It's about the two of us deciding this "horrible idea" was a good idea, then going for it.*

This book is about Don Michaelson's and my horrible idea – doing a cannonball run in the Tinyvette. Our reasons for doing this, none of them particularly good, are described in this story. Our experiences freezing in the little yellow Opel while speeding through the dark in over half the states we crossed constitutes the bulk of this story. People we met, things we saw, ideas that rattled around in our heads as we crossed twelve states heading east and thirteen states on the return trip, are part of this story. What we plan to do next is where this story leaves off, to be continued after we get home from our next run.

As for this being a horrible idea, picture yourself crawling over the railing of a bridge over a deep gorge, standing on a ledge narrower than your shoes, hooked to a bungee chord, and summoning the courage to jump. At that moment you're probably thinking, horrible idea. Whose idea was this? Why did you listen to them? Do you really need this in your life? Yes, you do, and you jump. That was us. We needed this in our lives. We jumped.

The Tinyvette is a 1969 Opel GT all dressed up to look like the famous "Compuware Corvettes" that Corvette Racing has been so successful with at Le Mans. We have been racing it in the 24 Hours of Lemons since the summer of 2010. In May of that year, Alan Brattesani and I purchased the car for \$200, dragged its stinking carcass home, and, nine weeks later had built our first race car and were loading it onto the trailer to go to our first race. Eight years and nearly 30 races since and Alan has retired from racing but the Tinyvette and it's core team are still racing it. When not racing it, and when not on jack stands, it goes on tours, to shows, to auto-crosses, to Bonneville, is driven in parades, and once was in a museum



*The Tinyvette at the 2014 World of Speed, held at the Bonneville Salt Flats. It ran 117 mph then returned home for the Lemons race at Thunderhill Raceway the following weekend.*

exhibit. It's a race car. It's supposed to be fun. So that's what we do, find ways to have fun with it.

A big part of the fun of racing is talking about racing. Racing burns gas and generates stories. Racing eats tires and feeds ambitions. Racing wrecks marriages and builds new... wait, let's not go there. When said and done it's all about the story, and when we got back home we told our stories to everyone within earshot. Don and I also wrote separate articles for the Opel Motorsport Club's magazine and I tried to get us published in Jalopnik. Initially they were interested but eventually quit answering my emails. Don suggested Sunset and I thought AAA and AARP, for their lifestyle sections. I gave them a ring. Crickets. Weeks later friends on the OpelGT.com forums asked for a book, something that would tell them about more of our adventure than we could fit into our 1,500 word articles. This is that book.

Our story is not extraordinary in any history-of-motorsports sense, or even in an over the top crazy car guys *Road Kill* (the car show) sense. It's a story about two old guys (but not *that* old) in an old car, on a lark, doing something challenging and fun, just for the hell of it. And as horrible as we thought this idea was we think it is the kind of thing more people

should be doing. In my pitch to the editors at AARP I described it this way:

Later in life, usually after retirement, the urge to hit the road and see the country hits. I have friends who did this, and family too. They bought a motorhome and struck out to see the sights and visit distant cousins and grandkids. Finally back home after months on the road, they sold the motor home and settled in, their wanderlust sated. Meanwhile in the garage is a classic car, the product of years of evenings and weekends meticulously restoring a prized piece of motoring history, and in a sense, one's own youth. Alas, it's a garage queen that, if lucky, may get driven on weekends, in good weather, perhaps to a show, maybe to dinner at a friend's house where you talk fondly of your recent travels. This rekindles your desire to be out on the road, just not in a motorhome. As dinner concludes, your friend suggests you hit the road in your classic. What better way to tour the country and enjoy the car you've spent years working on than to set out on a leisurely coast-to-coast Rain Man-esque back roads journey? It sounds interesting but there's no thrill in that. You need something more exciting, something challenging, maybe even a little crazy. Well here's an idea, do a cannonball, like in the movie. Do a non-stop run from New York City to Redondo Beach. You don't have to go fast, elude the police, and all that. You didn't get to your age being that stupid, presumably. Even at legal speeds it is a challenge, something that will take detailed planning, meticulously researching the best route, preparing the car for a 3,000 mile sprint, and above all, finding a competent and compatible co-driver. And for all that trouble there is nothing to win. There's no prize, no trophy, no glory, only the satisfaction of completing your own personal endurance race from sea to shining sea. Then, after you are done, and rested, you can do that Rain Man-esque back country cruise home, where at dinner with friends...