

Sun Shines on Fun Run to French Lick

by Gary Collings

Under threatening skies Indy Miata club members gathered in the back parking lot at the Adams Mark Airport on the morning of June 1 (Saturday) for a caravan tour to French Lick. Thirteen cars dropped their tops and headed south. We picked up the 14th Miata at Martinsville where the Barrick's joined the caravan at the first pit stop.

Our purpose was to join nine cars from the Windy City Miata Club that left Chicago on Thursday evening; they had arrived at French Lick on Friday for an extended weekend of touring and relaxing. We planned to arrive at the majestic, old hotel by 12:30 for lunch. Sheryl and Mark Sackett had made overnight reservations and had scheduled golf and spa times.

Gary and Kathy Collings, our tour masters for this event, reviewed the route sheets, which included a copy of the map section and alternate routes home. The caravan left the Adams Mark with tops down at the appointed time of 9:30 for a scenic but boring drive down S.R. 37. Half way to the first pit stop at Martinsville, the sky opened up and the rain poured as the drivers made a quick stop along the berm to put the tops up. Those who had painstakingly snapped their boots over the folded tops seemed to get a little wetter than others who had driven under threatening skies before (and had already learned the lesson to leave off the boot at least if the sky is dark during the middle of the day). At the pit stop, a group decision was made to put the tops back down and the skies cleared for the remainder of our journey. What a pleasure to ride with the top down and the air conditioner blasting away to cool our feet!

After the first pit stop, the caravan continued on the first leg of the journey to the next pit stop at Bedford. The tour masters led the caravan and had walk-about radios with which they talked to Sheryl and Mark Sackett, who were bringing up the rear (a.k.a. the "sweep" car). The radios worked well on the straight line of S.R. 37 but were useless when we hit the hills of Lawrence County. Each Miata in the Windy City Club uses a CB radio on weekend tours as a great source of communication on a long trip. The hills of southern Indiana also interrupt a CB radio and, as we later learned, there are few telephone relay towers in this region so that our mobile telephones were usually out of service in the Lawrence-Martin-Orange counties of our route.

Sheryl and Mark Sackett took over as lead car after the second pit stop at Bedford for our second leg of the 117 miles journey on those curvy roads less traveled (S.R. 450). Actually, Jim and Georgia Barrick became the "rabbit" car with Sheryl and Mark and a few others in pursuit. That's the last we saw of these four or five cars for the next couple of hours.

Kathy and Gary were in the sweep car and had just pulled onto the S.R. 450 curvy route when a state trooper slipped in behind them. Needless to say, we begrudgingly complied with the 40 mph posted limits. The trooper got bored and passed us only to tail Jim Jones for a few miles. Fortunately, Jim spotted the trooper in time to crank it down to the speed limit. All we could think of was that the trooper had seen all of us leave the parking lot in Bedford and had radioed ahead to other troopers to start picking off those shiny, little foreign cars. This would allow the troopers to get their day's quota in less than hour. As it turned out, after a few miles, the trooper pulled into a driveway where he apparently lived and all of our imagined scenarios were for naught. But the day was far from over....

It seemed the route instructions had a critical typo where S.R. 450 ended at U.S. 50/150. The instructions said turn right (but we needed

to go left to get to French Lick). By the time the tour masters, who were now the last car, arrived at the junction and discovered the error, the second group of eight or nine cars was waiting patiently along the side of the road near Loogootee. Keep in mind the "rabbit" cars were long gone and this group had also not seen them since we left Bedford. At this point, we assumed they had caught the mistake and were already having lunch at the hotel.

We back tracked to the junction and continued on our route. Our group arrived at the French Lick Hotel a half hour behind schedule but the "rabbit" group was no where in sight. I told everyone not to worry about the lost group of "rabbit" cars as Jim Barrick knew this countryside and would not travel far before discovering the error. We visited with members of the Windy City club and were half way through lunch, when in walk the members of the "rabbit" group. When asked where they had been? Jim Barrick quipped "they drove to Illinois". Actually, after 30 some miles, they turned around in Washington, Indiana when it occurred to them that they may have made a wrong turn. Anyhow, they discovered another great route on S.R. 550 as they back tracked to French Lick. Reminds me of a story about the tortoise and the hare....

Look for an article in the September issue of Miata Magazine about the French Lick area and Windy City's tour.

(More photos on page 5)



Miatas lined up in front of the French Lick Hotel.