

## 7th Annual Unofficial "Miatas at the Gap" Event

# We Went To Deals Gap and Had Fun! - 2003!

by Doug Bartlow

This was our second year at Miatas at the Gap and like last year we drove down on Thursday and also like last year we got caught in a rain storm with the top down. It started with a few sprinkles and then suddenly began falling with Ark like proportions. We were soaked and there were puddles in Mo (our car) that I sopped up with paper towels as soon as we were able to get off of the road and into a service station. Other than that the trip down was an uneventful seven and a half hours. I am sure an hour or more could be cut off of that time with less pit stops, rain delays and a more blatant disregard for the speed limits. I tried to hold a steady 75 miles per hour and put my faith in Michael Valentine's detector to help me steer clear of speed traps. Even at that speed we were far from the fastest thing on the road as we were even passed by a truck pulling a mobile home.

Last year we stayed in Bryson City at a bread and breakfast place (Charleston Inn) that was too far away and way too expensive. This year we stayed at the Phillips Motel (Miss Reba's place) in Robbinsville and were pleased with the accommodations, location and the cost which I believe was something like \$35.00 a night. Both Martha and I approved of the room which was clean, had a microwave, small refrigerator and a small bathroom with a postage stamp size sink. Robbinsville is 18 miles south of Miata central, the Tapoco Lodge and the start of the Dragon's Tail.

BRP Performance held a cookout at Fontana Village (a resort that I think is a little weird and way too family oriented) Thursday evening which featured hamburgers and superchargers, a perfect combination. In addition to four or five cars with BRP superchargers on them, they had a prototype S1 Turbo that we managed to finagle a drive in (thanks, James). We drove it down SR28 on a nice long drive. Both Martha and I were impressed with the performance, but being new to Turbos we weren't used to the hiss and chung that comes whenever you back off on the motor. Still, we understand why the say that "boost is addictive". We're saving our pennies.

We got up Friday at 6:00 a.m. to do the Dragon's Tail before the crowds and traffic showed up. There is a motorcycle park at the bottom of the Tail called, for some unknown reason, "The Crossroads of Time" where Martha took the wheel and we started our run. About five minutes into the run, Martha had the tires barking like a poodle and we rounded a bend to find a tree blown down by Thursday night storms, across the road. There was just enough room in the other lane to make a high speed squeeze by. Almost immediately we passed a DOT truck coming the other way and sure enough, on our return, the tree was gone leaving only a pile of saw dust.

Before we reached the end, Martha dodged again to avoid a turtle sitting in the middle of the road. We stopped in a pull over and I ran back picked it up and released it in the woods. The Dragon's Tail was no place to play Tortoise and the Hare.

Friday evening we drove over to Tellico (Tell-Lee-Co) Plains to eat at Cardin's Restaurant (AKA The Bistro by the River) via SR143 and Cherohala Skyway. SR143 was a great drive with Dragon's Tail like curves and zero traffic. The Skyway was almost deserted with only another car or bike coming the other way about every 5 minutes. Cool night, deserted road, Miata... priceless. The food was excellent as everyone says with Martha having the Pecan crusted Catfish and I had the Buffalo Meatloaf. We shared a Blackberry cobbler which was wonderful. Eat at Cardin's when you are at the Gap. They even had a sign that said "Welcome Miatas."

Saturday there were over 160 Miatas at Fontana Dam for the annual picture session. The Grass wasn't mowed as in past years to cars were strung out all along the road on the clear areas. It was really great to see so many cars and owners in one place. We stayed and visited for an hour until the heat got us and we drove over to check out the action at Tapoco. There weren't as many vendors in the area as last year but the Knobmeister got our money. Tapoco was packed with their lot full and cars parked up and down 129. Every open hood was an automotive Christmas present waiting to be opened. After about an hour of looking we had lunch in the blessed air conditioning of the Tapoco Lodge.

By Saturday afternoon the men in blue or I should say brown, settled on the Tail with officers at every pull off, both ends and at the state boarder. Before that speed had ruled the weekend. We made a last run at 3 p.m. and found a large group of officers at the state boarder and at the end near the turn around at Tabcat Bridge with a couple of cars pulled over. No way to have fun. I guess the police have a job to do and it all becomes part of the experience. The natural beauty is stunning and the roads are wonderful to drive. I plan to return every year until my kids take my car keys away.



Photo by Doug Bartlow