

Hot Summer Nights & Dancing In The Streets

by Gary Collings

Although there might not have been many of us dancing in the streets of Lafayette, Indiana, there were 34 Miatas ripping and roaring on the back roads of Tippecanoe County on July 30. About half of the group arrived Friday evening at the Hilton Garden Inn on the Wabash Landing, which is across the street from one of the sound stages for the week-end festivities. Our tour masters had negotiated a group rate that included free parking in the double gated area of the garage reserved for guests.

Members had Friday evening on their own to cross the walking bridge over the Wabash River from West Lafayette (home of Purdue University) to Lafayette (county seat of Tippecanoe) to seek a dining place of their choice. Strolling along the sidewalks, members were welcomed by a display of 65 adventurous amphibians, which were designed as fund raiser frogs for the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette and CASAs for Kids Fund www.frog-follies.com. We were among a group who went to Bea One for Korean cuisine. After dinner, members returned to the lobby of the hotel for spirits, socializing, and a cut-throat card game of 99 for the mere amount of \$0.75 per victim. Prior to the card game, the world's ugliest hat was unveiled after guesses that it was a vase, oil filter, etc.

After partaking at the Hilton breakfast bar on Saturday morning, we had a drivers' meeting and group photo. Six cars from the Indy Miata Club joined us, for the driving tour and most stayed for the evening activities. We then saddled up and headed out for the first leg of our morning route, which began along the east edge of the Purdue campus and sports facilities. We traveled north to the area of the Wolf Park, which was founded over 30 years ago and is dedicated to gray wolf research, and then through the small town of Battleground, passing the site of the November 7, 1811 Tippecanoe Battlefield at which William Henry Harrison fought Tecumseh's Native Americans.

A mid-morning break for a classic car show at a local shopping center was welcomed by all. The array of vehicles was impressive from the traditional 1950s vintages cars to semi-tractors, all of which were painted and shined to high gloss perfection. We would see many of these vehicles in the evening parked on the roped off streets and in the 7:00 PM parade.

From the car show, we hit the road for the second leg of our driving tour over some great country roads. Five cars missed a crucial turn in mid-route and beat the rest of us to the lunch stop! We arrived at the Riehle Brothers Tavern for a buffet with seating along side a full-sized, indoor volley ball sand lot.

After a well-timed lunch break, we took off for the final leg of our day's journey across the southern edge of the county. The hills and curves were a pleasant surprise for those who might have thought of the area as being in the flatlands. Our drive in the south River Road area drive took us past Fort Quiatenon, which was established by the French in 1717 and is the site of the annual Feast of the Hunters Moon (September 24-25, 2005) that includes re-enactments of the Indian battles with the Americans and French.

In mid-afternoon, we arrived at the Hilton exhilarated from a sunny drive and ready for a break in preparation for the evenings' activities at the Fourteenth Annual Dancing in the Streets Festival. Six of our drivers signed up to be in the cruise-in with the classic muscle and vintage cars that we had viewed in the morning. At 7:00 PM the sidewalks, courthouse lawn and steps were lined with people. The street in front of the courthouse proved to be the place to be when the hot rods started heat-



Norm Arbuckle points in the general direction that the tour participants should head towards.

ing up the pavement and smoking their tires to the delight of the crowd.

The food booths and car displays were spread out from the sound stage at Tapawingo Park across the river walking bridge (filled with Corvettes) to Riehle Plaza with the restored train depot and sound stage about a block from the refurbished court house. The bands started at 8:00 PM at both stages with a variety of music and entertainment (including a good impersonator of the "fat Elvis"). In fact, a few of our members with suites on the stage side of the hotel got to listen to the music past midnight whether they wanted to or not. The food vendors lined the streets with a variety of treats to meet all tastes including elephant ears and Dippin Dots ice cream, homemade candies, coney dogs, Cajun chicken, Sgt. Preston's food and some brew house vendors. If you didn't get enough to eat and drink, it was your own fault.

Members had a leisurely breakfast at the Hilton on Sunday AM and bid each other farewell until we meet again. Thanks to our tour masters, Norm and Susie Arbuckle, who are already working on next year's Miata event at the Fifteenth Annual Dancing in the Streets Festival, so mark your calendar for July 29, 2006.