

You have to admit, when someone tells you, "We are taking the Long Way Home" then they say, "we are going to run the Tail-Of-The-Dragon (TOD)," it does spark your interest, if nothing else to know what the heck they are talking about - is it an amusement ride, a road, or what? Then they go on to tell you it is an 11 mile stretch of highway stretching between Southern Tennessee and North Carolina, you then say "Oh" and the excitement shrinks a little. But, when you hear that it has 318 curves in that 11 miles, the excitement returns, especially for those of us that LOVE to DRIVE "America's Sports Car," the Corvette.



That is how it all started early last May, as we were preparing for our Trip to Corvette's 50th Anniversary Celebration in Nashville & Bowling Green. As a registered participant in the National Corvette Museum's 50th Caravan, we were enrolled in the email Caravan Chat, where lots of communications, plans for side trips, and many friends were met. There was some talk about a group of Vettes going to run the TOD after the celebration. Bill Williamson, the Caravan Leader from Florida and I then hooked up as I started asking about it, which turned into planning the route and getting things organized. I threw a quick web page up with our plans for the trip and the emails and discussion of the trip started building. The rules of the trip were very simple, "this trip has nothing to do with anyone, not sponsored by anyone and there is no one to complain to if you don't enjoy the drive or have fun". Additionally, we said "NO Interstates," we will only take the curvy scenic bi-ways to enjoy our Vettes. Bill even had several vinyl decals made and displayed on his C5 Vette, about the 50th Caravan and the Tail-of-the-Dragon.



Bill contacted the Mayor of Lafayette, TN, before our trip, to establish that as a common meeting point - being about an hour outside of Bowling Green, KY and Nashville, TN. The Mayor offered to set aside the downtown city park for us to meet, along with calling in the radio, TV and publicizing a mini-car show. We had met some of the Caravan participants from the email Chat Line but we finally were able to meet the owners of the 27 Caravanning Vettes in person that came for this run. The largest majority of the Vettes were from Florida, since this was actually just a long way home for them and even longer for those of us in Louisiana and Texas. There was a great turnout of towns people for this to be at 10 AM on a Monday morning - but then again, we were also in a small town in Tennessee, where this might have been one of biggest things to happen in a while.



After a short drivers meeting, a quick group photo, we then pulled out from Lafayette with our Police escort, heading east out of town on the scenic bi-way of Hwy 52. This un-official Caravan was much more organized on the road than our 50th Caravan that left Dallas; Bill really kept the group informed and together on this trip. It was so closely grouped that even with the FRS radios, one wrong turn up front ended up with 26 Vettes following him, circling a BP gas station to make a U-Turn. Along the way, we did stop and enjoy some break time at various restaurants, gas stations, ice cream parlors and such, enabling us to stretch our legs, feed our stomachs and our Vettes and get to know our new friends better.



The end of the road for the first day was the Holiday Inn in Pigeon Forge, TN. We checked in, some smaller groups headed different directions for Supper, and then back for a good nights sleep. Since Bill had established special pricing at the hotel and we had published our meeting point for heading out on Tuesday, July 1st, we found that 6 more Vettes had joined us overnight – there would have been even more without the rain. The next morning, a quick drivers meeting was held at the hotel, getting everyone in sync with our route for the day. Bill asked everyone to have fun but to also be cautious today, since it was drizzling rain.



Just prior to intersecting with Hwy 129, we invaded a BP station, some topping off their gas tanks, while others stretched and took care of other necessities. When time came to leave, the last Vette in the Caravan, as always, pulled up on the highway to block traffic, allowing us to exit the BP station in one group, keeping our Caravan together for these highly anticipated 11-miles and 318 curves of highway.

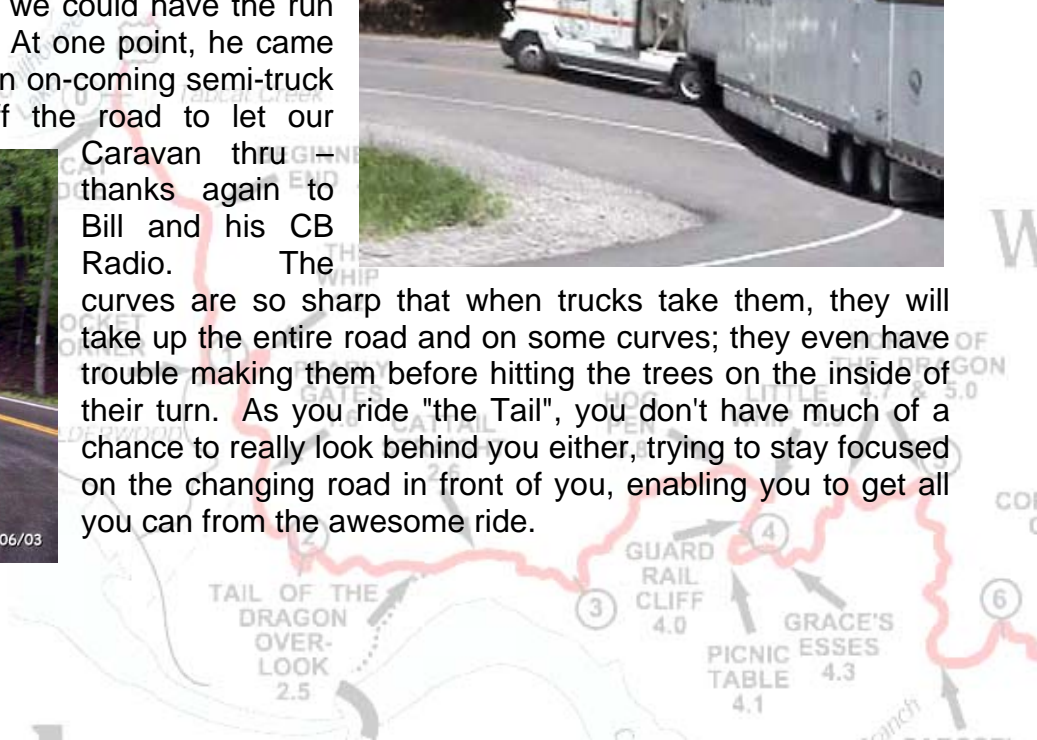


As we rounded the end of Calderwood Lake, you get to the last turn-around before entering "the Tail" and a warning sign stating "WARNING TO TRUCKS switchback curves ahead, consider alternate route." After viewing some of the pictures on the Internet, we had seen why that sign was important, not only to trucks but to the vehicles heading the opposite direction.

As you passed the sign and headed into the first turn, there was no mistaking that we were on "the Tail"... the curves had started, going back and forth, left and right, then right and right again, then up and left then down and right, engines revving up then backing off - AWESOME!!! Hwy 129 was freshly paved and most of the curves were banked, enabling you to REALLY enjoy the drive. During the ride, Bill kept us aware of on-coming traffic so that we could have the run of the road as much as possible. At one point, he came on the radio telling us there was an on-coming semi-truck ahead; which offered to pull off the road to let our



Caravan thru – thanks again to Bill and his CB Radio. The curves are so sharp that when trucks take them, they will take up the entire road and on some curves; they even have trouble making them before hitting the trees on the inside of their turn. As you ride "the Tail", you don't have much of a chance to really look behind you either, trying to stay focused on the changing road in front of you, enabling you to get all you can from the awesome ride.



It was also great to see a pair of C1 Vettes in our Caravan that were hooking it up and taking the curves nicely, along with all the other Vette generations. After about 9 miles of "the Tail" and fun, you come to Deal's Gap and "the Tree of Shame" where wrecked motorcycle parts hang. After a buying few souvenirs and such at Deal's Gap, we headed on down to the end of "the Tail", below the Cheoah Dam to eat lunch at the Tapoco Lodge. This was the last time to visit with many of the "dragon slayers," taking more pictures, buying more souvenirs, including the big TOD Map. We bought and all signed a copy of the TOD Map as a Souvenir for Bill, which was given to him along with a special TOD Stein, for coordinating and leading us for this great ride.



After lunch was over, the Florida group headed back to their cut-off on Hwy 28, while those of us heading back West, headed on our way home and guess which way we had to go? Yep, BACK UP THE TOD... This time, it was ONLY US on the road and the rain had slacked off - we enjoyed this run even more. Maybe it was because there wasn't anyone in front of us, maybe it was because we were going up hill, or was it because we already had 11 miles of previous experience? Regardless, this was a truly awesome run, even though you couldn't watch a parade of Vettes taking the curves in front of you. Being solo enabled us to be totally at the mercy of your own comfort zone, while enjoying the curves and hills, on the Tail-of-the-Dragon.



This fun stretch of highway is very well known, not only to the Vettes Clubs, but to Porsche, Ferrari and lots of motorcycle clubs. The highway extends from Tennessee down into Northern North Carolina and even has its own website: <http://www.tailofthedragon.com> - showing off photos of the groups which have enjoyed along with photos of those that didn't. There are articles of how to ride the TOD, when to ride it and, the history of "the Tail," numerous topographical and even elevation maps and of course tons and tons of photos – enough you could view for days on end.

If you are interested in finding out more and looking at more photos, you can view photos and information about our trip at:

<http://www.dmauto.0catch.com/50thVette/TOD.htm>

Additionally, if you are going to attend the National Corvette Museum's 10th Anniversary this coming September, there is a group of Vettters being organized to make a Tail-of-the-Dragon run afterwards. With everything on our Club & personal calendars this year, we are yet undecided if we are going to attend the event or not - but, if we do attend, *WE WILL take the long way home and RIDE "THE TAIL" AGAIN!!!*

Doug & Glenda McMahan – on July 1st 2003, we slew the Dragon!!!



Tail of the Dragon Map



TAIL of the **DRAGON.com**
at Deal's Gap, NC

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