

# Conch Out at Key West

**A Different Perspective on An Annual Key West Event** by Austin Finch



Something is different this time. The suitcase came out and things are being packed. But Momma Donna is taking me to the groomers today. Usually if they are going to leave me at Club Pet, I don't go to the groomers until after they return. They think I stink after a stay at the kennel, but I don't smell anything different. I'm confused.

## Well, I'll Be Dog Gone!

I don't believe it! These stupid people think that I would be happier riding with them in this little red MGA instead of playing with my buddies, checking out the ladies, and getting pampered at Club Pet. I don't know what they are thinking and I wonder where are we going?

It's Friday morning 6:30 a.m. and we are all squeezed into the car. There is not enough room to change your mind. The trunk is full and the suitcase is on the luggage rack in garbage bags. It's raining cats and ... (well, you know). Man this car is small, loud, and scary. I hope I can get comfortable on Momma Donna's lap.



We are hardly down the road when we meet up with Tom Fant and Judy Burton in another one of those little MGAs, this one "baby blue." Nice car. I guess they will be following us to wherever we are going.



## Are We There Yet?

We just keep driving and driving. I saw "Leaving Michigan," Entering and Leaving Ohio and Kentucky, and Entering Tennessee signs. Finally it stopped raining and the sun started to peek out. I guess we're staying at this hotel in a place called Knoxville. I hope it is pet friendly.

Day 2- wheels up at 7:30 a.m. I guess we are driving again today. It's still pretty chilly, overcast but not raining. Steve drives around in circles trying to get us out of Knoxville. He complains that the Garmin wants to take us down I-75, but he wants to go on I-40. Now I see why. The curves on I-40 through the mountains east on I-40 out of Knoxville are pretty intense. Steve is driving like some kind of crazy F1 race driver. He's having fun. Donna and I are scared to death.

So I'm sleeping on Donna's lap and it's kinda okay. Then all of a sudden everything stopped. We came over the crest of a big hill to find a truck in the right lane traveling at 20 mph with flashers going and trying to recover from his climb. Cars are streaming by on the left, three cars are trapped behind the truck and everybody is on the binders trying to stop. Steve locked all four wheels with smoke rising from the wheel wells. Tom realized that he couldn't stop and dove for the right shoulder. Everybody got away without crashing, but Steve and Tom had to get off at the next exit for a change of clothes. When we got back underway, Steve kept complaining about wheel shake and the flat spotted tires.

## So, Are We There Yet?

We just keep driving on and on, through South Carolina, Georgia, and into Florida to St. Augustine. They are going to leave me again in this pet friendly hotel and go off to dinner. Another early to bed, early to rise.

Day 3- wheels up at 7:30 a.m. This is getting old. I wonder how far we are going. At least it's a bit warmer; it's overcast, but not raining. Tom and Judy have the side curtains out. At the first stop, the tops come down. I like riding in a convertible. I get to hold my head out and let my ears blow back in the wind.

Donna is doing this thing with an iPad app called TVFoodMaps where she can find restaurants featured on Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives. She found a chili place in Cincinnati and a dive drive-in burger joint in Newberry, SC, each a great place for their lunch. Today she found the 11th Street Diner in Miami Beach. What a mistake. By now the sun is beating down and it's getting really hot. Getting off the turnpike to get to the diner was a traffic jam of stop and go, and when we get to the diner we are in the middle of South Beach with no place to park. Everybody got sunburned

and Donna had to put a wet towel on my back to keep me cooled down. We never did get to have lunch. Plan aborted. They wound up having lunch at a KFC.

### So Now Are We There?

We arrive at Key Largo at our pet friendly hotel and Tom and Judy carry on to Key West.

Day 4- I hope today will be better than yesterday. We seem to be lounging around the hotel room this morning and boats are going by in the channel. Maybe we are here.

Oops, I guess not. We're back in the car and driving down the Keys. The mile markers are clicking down to zero. We make a few stops for shopping along the way before I see that we are in Key West and cannot go any farther. And then it happens. We pull in at a place called Pampered Pet Kennel. They leave me there and drive off. Wassup wit dat!

I'm left there for four whole days; how mean are these folks? Steve tells me that the Blue Marlin Hotel, where everyone is staying, is not pet friendly. How rude. He also told me that they had a Monday night reception at Fred Skomp's house (Fred is the owner of the 100,000th MGA). Tuesday was the bocce ball tournament, fish fry lunch at the Hurricane Hole, and the Sunset Celebration at Mallory Square. Wednesday morning they went on a catamaran to the reef for snorkeling, had lobster for lunch at the A&B Lobster House, and then, after dinner, went to a drag show at a bar on Duval Street. Thursday was a lazy day, lounging around the pool until the Key West British Car Club participated in the Conch Republic Parade. The MGAs got all decorated and covered with beads to throw to the spectators.



Of course I don't understand a word he says. All I know is that I am in jail, locked up 'til they come bail me out. I guess going along is better than twelve days in a kennel back in Michigan. Now Donna says that I stink. I say too bad, it's your fault, live with it!

### Back on the Road Again

Days 8 & 9- Back on the road again; I don't know to where; maybe home? Things look familiar. It's top down, sunny and hot to The Villages where we check into another pet friendly hotel and they leave me again to go to dinner with Donna's golfing girlfriends. Then it's on to Gainesville GA. By the time we get there it's getting overcast and downright chilly.

Day 10- Sunday at Road Atlanta for the Classic Motorsports Mitty vintage races. But now it's really raining and cold. The hood and side curtains go up, we start driving and they leave me at a doggie day care. At the track the rain is pouring down, Jeff and Jan Zorn are packing up the Little British Car Company tent early, Ozzie and Terry Pillon go to the mall instead, and everything is pretty much washed out for the day. Serves them right for leaving me in jail again!

Day 11- I hope we make it home. The car wouldn't start yesterday afternoon. The battery was dead and they pushed it down the hill to start it. Back in Cincinnati, Steve left the headlights on when they went in for lunch. In 15 minutes the battery was dead and they had to push start it. I guess yesterday the battery and generator couldn't keep up with the lights, wipers, and heater fan. Steve went off to buy a new battery and was gone a long time installing it. I guess a new battery is better than a trailer home and complete engine rebuild. (He's been there, done that!)

Finally we get going. Boy is this getting old. We stop for the night in Lexington to visit Donna's niece and her dog, Buggs. I don't like her (the dog). Then we finally get home on Day 12. Overall, the trip was great. Riding in that small car with two grown adult humans was kinda okay after all. The Keys were pretty nice and the weather there was great (I'm told). Most of all, the people who came to the Key West British Car Club 2013 Conch Out and Conch Republic Festival were the best part (but I didn't meet any of them).

Steve and Donna get to check another item off their bucket list. Summary: 12 days, 3,481 miles.

*About the Author: Austin Finch, age, 30 (in dog years), is an English Cocker Spaniel and companion to Steve and Donna Finch. Although he enjoys riding in Donna's BMW, this was his first (and longest) ride in an MGA. Austin also enjoys swimming in the pool, sleeping, and waking everyone up with big wet kisses. This is his first contribution to MGA! magazine. •*

