

CROSS-COUNTRY THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP

850 nautical miles in two small but mighty vehicles

BY JULIE SUMMERS WALKER

CLARK GRISWOLD, the central character in National Lampoon's *Vacation* movie series, may not be the brightest bulb in the room, but he knows and exemplifies one thing we all appreciate—a good old-fashioned, take-your-time, and see-the-sights road trip. We embarked on a four-day motor/aircraft trip down the eastern seaboard from AOPA headquarters in Frederick, Maryland, to the Sun 'n Fun International Fly-In and Expo in Lakeland, Florida, in the Road and Runway Rally, to showcase the fun and utility of two small but mighty vehicles—the Remos GX and smart fortwo car. Along the way we had the chance to engage both members and those not familiar with general aviation in our outreach. What a long, strange trip it turned out to be.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROSE AND JASON PAUR



Our pilot/drivers weren't entirely thrilled with the idea of wearing jumpsuits—but somehow they were able to get their *Top Gun* style on for photos (at left, left to right) Ian Twombly, Steve Chupnick, Alyssa Miller, and Jason Paur (they did, however, love their Red Canoe bomber jackets!). The route by car (green) and airplane (blue) along the eastern seaboard (below).

DAY ONE

Saturday, April 10, dawned bright and sunny but chilly as Team Wilbur (*Flight Training* Deputy Editor Ian Twombly and *Motor-Week* writer and producer Steve Chupnick) and Team Orville (AOPA eMedia Managing Editor Alyssa J. Miller and *Wired.com* correspondent Jason Paur) prepared to depart AOPA headquarters in Frederick, Maryland, for the first leg of the rally. In the Remos—Team Wilbur. In the smart fortwo—Team Orville. Accompanying the teams were Photographer Chris Rose and eMedia Web Developer Dan Pixton in Chase Car 2 and AOPA Director of Public Relations Jennifer Storm and me in Chase Car 1 (contrasting nicely with the fuel-efficient rally vehicles, our Hertz-donated GMC SUVs carried additional baggage, signage, and camera equipment—and slurped gas like the big and comfortable but greedy beasts they are).

From Frederick, our first planned stop and overnight destination was Williamsburg, Virginia. There we would stop and tie down at Williamsburg-Jamestown Airport (JGG) and stay at Wedmore Place at the Williamsburg Winery, a great GA destination just minutes from JGG (see “Overnight Stops,” page 77). After a great send-off at Frederick (FDK) from friends and family, all vehicles set off to the south... and so went the best-laid plans.

The smart fortwo eased away gracefully, but its occupants had adventure on their minds. The Remos headed for the taxiway, but the aircraft had other ideas. Team Orville set out on the first of its unscheduled stops and Team Wilbur faced a flat tire. The chase cars sped merrily down Interstate 95, unaware that things were not as they seemed.

Team Orville said later that they “gave into nearly every whim along the way” and the first day proved that statement. Stopping first at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum’s Udvar-Hazy Center at Washington-Dulles International Airport, Miller and Paur saw the space shuttle *Enterprise*, SR-71, Hiller helicopter, and other aircraft, plus a display that invited children to climb in and around a Cessna to get a feel of what it’s like to be a pilot. Then the pair stopped again at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia, where the smart fortwo compared its looks with a line of vintage Chevrolets.

Back at FDK, Team Wilbur scrambled to find a new tire, found two in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (thanks John Rathmell!), made the switch, and finally took off for JGG at 6 p.m. The 90-minute flight found all teams at JGG by 7:30 p.m.—too late for the many people who had shown up to greet the vehicles—we’re sorry, Williamsburg. Some

people did stay, including airport owner Larry Waltrip (distantly related to the racecar driver), who took a spin in the smart fortwo (see “Airports Along the Way,” page 76). Because of the delay at FDK, and even with its detours, Team Orville in the smart fortwo took the lead in our unofficial race.

DAY TWO

Determined to rein in the adventurous Team Orville and hopeful that Team Wilbur would experience a better day, on Sunday the chase car teams attempted to provide guidance and direction to each of the teams. Ha! When competition is involved (Team Wilbur had not only been bested in time, but they’d seen little except the runway at FDK and a quick, albeit beautiful flight at dusk—and Team Orville had been dreaming up more adventures in the soft, comfy beds at Wedmore Place) there’s no stopping two pairs of Type-A personalities. Plus, in the short flight from FDK to JGG, flight



instructor Twombly had introduced GA flight to Chupnick, our only nonpilot. Aside from 10 to 15 minutes in the Special Flight Rules Area near Washington, D.C., Twombly had given the airplane over to Chupnick, who had until that time flown only 25 minutes back in FDK. "He's a natural," said Twombly.



Team Wilbur took off from JGG and headed to First Flight Airport (FFA) in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. They hugged the coast and Chupnick piloted the Remos. They flew low and traveled around 122 mph, counting dolphins in the ocean (100-plus). At FFA Twombly presented this newest convert to GA with his first logbook. "There's no better place to give you this," Twombly told Chupnick, adding, "The fact that we're able to land an airplane at this place little more than 100 years later with the knowledge of all the incredible advances we've made in that time is really inspiring."

Leaving FFA and heading farther down the coast, Team Wilbur landed at an interim stop at Wilmington International Airport (ILM) as scheduled, where the rest of us met with AOPA Airport Support Network volunteer Ralph Fox. We had pizza at the beach, joined the spring breakers enjoying the mild April weather, and returned to ILM where a circus tent was set up on the grounds. Lions, tigers, and bears, oh, my, and some camels, zebras, and a painted lady!

Team Orville was off on its own adventures. The team in the smart fortwo took a ferry from Jamestown, talking GA and car talk with people they met; kept pace with a group of Harley-Davidson riders; took the track at the home of mon-

With a spirit of *joie de vivre*, who knows what you'll find as you fly/drive your trip. Ian Twombly and Steve Chupnick discovered the circus after landing at Wilmington International Airport in North Carolina (left), and Team Orville in the smart fortwo crossed the Jamestown ferry in Virginia with a group of bikers (below).



Airports along the way

Williamsburg-Jamestown Airport (JGG)—This charming GA airport is tucked off a residential road southwest of the city of Williamsburg, Virginia, on Marclay Road. Privately owned and founded in 1970 by Larry and Jean Waltrip, its on-site restaurant, Charly's, features homemade breads and desserts and was voted the number one \$100 hamburger stop on the East Coast by 100hamburger.com. The AOPA Airport Support Network volunteer is Paul Volk. Visit the Web site (www.williamsburgairport.com).

Wilmington International Airport (ILM)—This full-service international airport in Wilmington, North Carolina, features 7,000-foot and 8,000-foot runways. Three FBOs serve the airport—we visited Aero Service North. The ASN volunteer is Ralph Fox. Visit the Web site (www.flyilm.com).

Dillon County Airport (DLC)—The 3,000-foot Runway 25 is cracked with grass overgrowth; it's surrounded by empty fields and a very small residential area. We saw a bunch of cats that were so not used to traffic, they wouldn't get out of the road—but no cats were harmed for this story.

St. Augustine Airport (SGJ)—The airport is rich in history and dedication from its many pioneers and supporters. Started as early as 1911, the airport was the site of the silent movie *The Perils of Pauline* and many local people appeared as extras. Its first flight school opened in 1916. The Fairchild Engine and Airplane Co. was located here and facilitated the airport's 8,000-foot runway. Thanks to Galaxy Aviation and Michael Slinghoff for helping host our pilots' gathering with the St. Augustine Pilots Association. The ASN volunteer is Mike Thompson. Visit the Web site (www.staugustineairport.com).



ster truck "Grave Digger" in Poplar Branch, North Carolina; and eventually stopped, too, at First Flight Airport. But while a flight to FFA gives one time to make other scheduled destinations, a car trip does

not. First Flight on the Outer Banks of North Carolina is not easily accessible by car—and Team Orville did not join us at ILM and did not get to our second overnight stop until nearly 11 p.m. And what an overnight stop it was—travelers on I-95 know the big black billboards that announce "South of the Border" hundreds of miles before this tourist attraction, and we felt it our duty to discover what the hoopla was all about. Clark Griswold would be proud.

That evening Team Wilbur set down at the remote and unattended Dillon County Airport at dusk, but not before Chupnick executed his first takeoff and landing. "We flared a bit high, but he brought it closer to the runway, and with that I put two fingers on the front of the stick to make sure we kept the nose off," relates Twombly. "We touched down with a soft plunk. He had flown a takeoff and about 90 percent of the landing. As soon as we got out he called his wife and excitedly told her what he had just done. It was a great moment, and I was happy to have been part of it."

DAY THREE

Now for the switcheroo. Would we be able to keep closer tabs on Team Orville now that they had the aircraft? Sigh, no. Out to the quiet and desolate Dillon County Airport went Team Orville and into the air, not heard from again until several hours later when they stopped for lunch at the Plantation Café in Hilton Head (HXD). But the adventuresome and competitive spirit infected Team Wilbur in the car, too, and they left early in the morning to drive to Savannah along with Chase Car 2. There, Chupnick used his *MotorWeek* contacts to secure a spot on the Roebing Road racetrack. The smart fortwo took to the two-mile, nine-turn track well, and both Twombly and Chupnick took a turn—no one is saying who "won."

Day three and we finally had everyone together at St. Augustine Airport (SGJ) in north Florida. The airport is home to Extra Aircraft and aerobatic pilot Patty Wagstaff. We'd hoped to get some time in an Extra, but weather crept in and we hosted our pilots' gathering at Galaxy Aviation in the rain. We enjoyed an old-fashioned hamburger-and-hot-dog dinner with members of the St. Augustine



Galaxy Aviation hosted our pilot party in St. Augustine, Florida.





Overnight stops

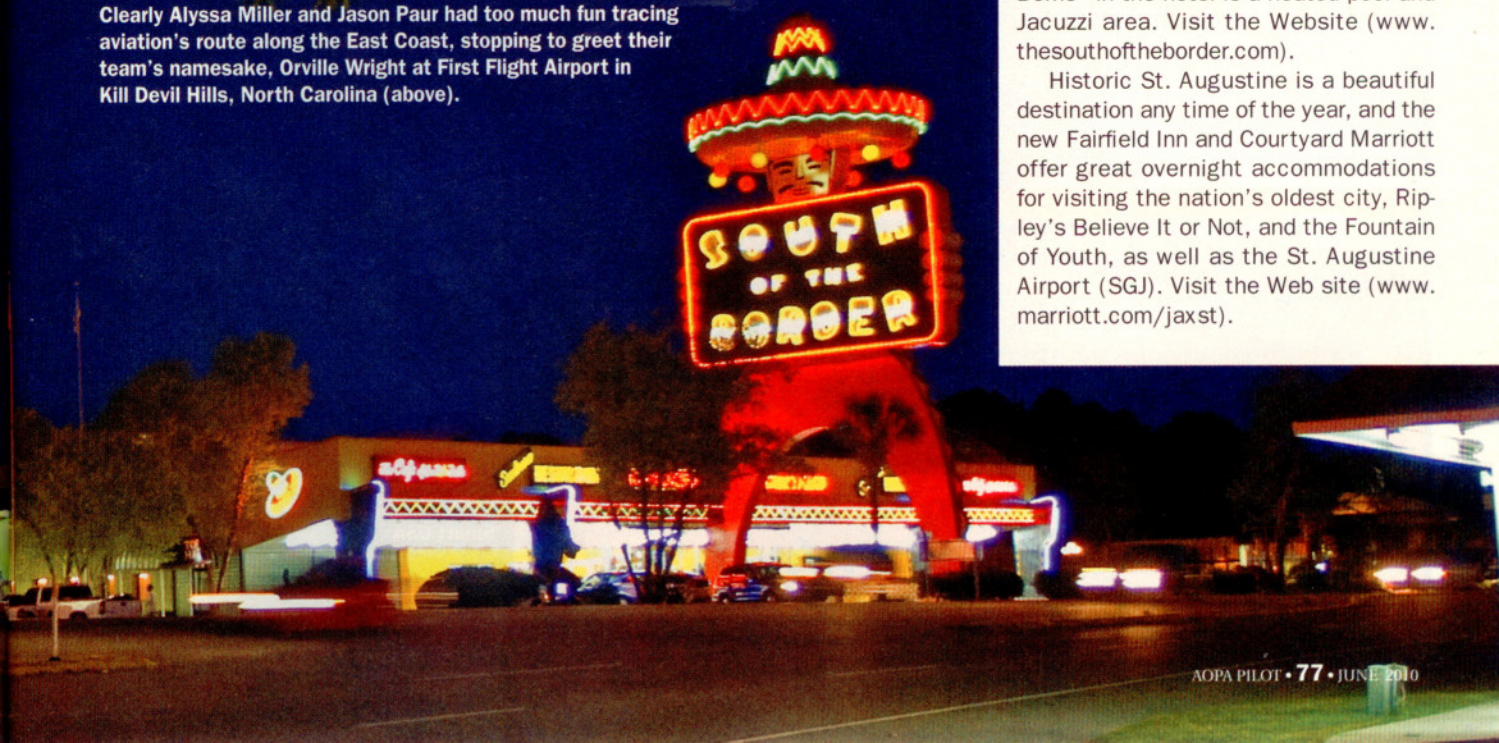
Knowing you have a soft bed and a good meal at the end of a road trip or cross-country adds to the pleasure. No complaints from our teams on any of our stops, although they ranged from opulent to kitschy to mainstream.

First stop: Wedmore Place at the Williamsburg Winery. A quick drive from the airport (JGG), the Williamsburg Winery (not affiliated with Colonial Williamsburg) is the largest winery in Virginia, responsible for one-quarter of all wine production in the state. Set on 50-plus acres, the site was established in 1985 by the Duffeler family. In addition to an Old World-style village where tours and tastings take place is Wedmore Place, a 28-room European country hotel. Surprising is how authentic the hotel appears, yet it was constructed just three years ago. Dinner at the Café Provençal featured farm-fresh ingredients from local farms and gardens. Visit the Web site (www.williamsburgwinery.com).

South of the Border in Dillon, South Carolina, was established in 1949 by Alan Schafer who first envisioned a simple beer stand. But when building supplies came delivered to “Schafer project: south of the (NC) border,” an idea was hatched. Hiring two Mexican boys to help with his project, the theme of the area emerged, and Schafer started importing Mexican souvenirs—today all employees are called Pedro. Towered over by a 200-foot sombrero that one can see for miles (although somehow we missed it from the air) and a 97-foot entrance—a Pedro straddling the road—South of the Border offers 300 rooms in its motor hotel. The “Pleasure Dome” in the hotel is a heated pool and Jacuzzi area. Visit the Website (www.thesouthoftheborder.com).

Historic St. Augustine is a beautiful destination any time of the year, and the new Fairfield Inn and Courtyard Marriott offer great overnight accommodations for visiting the nation’s oldest city, Ripley’s Believe It or Not, and the Fountain of Youth, as well as the St. Augustine Airport (SGJ). Visit the Web site (www.marriott.com/jaxst).

South of the Border in Dillon, South Carolina, truly offered a step back in time—there wasn’t an Internet connection to be found, so Ian Twombly filed his stories in a McDonald’s off I-95 (above left). Clearly Alyssa Miller and Jason Paur had too much fun tracing aviation’s route along the East Coast, stopping to greet their team’s namesake, Orville Wright at First Flight Airport in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina (above).





MAKING COMPARISONS

- **Smart fortwo:** average 40 miles per gallon
- **Remos GX:** 5,200 rpm=5.5 gph fuel flow=24 mpg, 130 mph 4,000 rpm=3 gph fuel flow, less than 90 mph=30 mpg
- **Real time**—Remos in nine hours; smart fortwo 20 hours
- **Mileage**—900 miles by smart fortwo; 850 nm Remos GX
- **Remos GX:** 22 gallons fuel, 400-mile range
- **Smart fortwo:** two times the size of a Monster truck tire; same size as Mercury space capsule and a Harley Davidson motorcycle—how do we know? We compared... these are the random things you do on a road trip!

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Pilots Association, ASN volunteer Mike Thompson, and the great folks at Galaxy Aviation.

AND NOW THE END IS NEAR

After a relaxing evening in St. Augustine, we were ready for our grand finale—a race onto the runway at Lakeland Linder Regional Airport (LAL), home of Sun 'n Fun. But first Team Wilbur had to ante up its fun factor in competition with Team Orville's experiences—they drove to Daytona Beach in the wee hours of the morning, watched the sunrise (road trips really bond folks), drove on the beach (getting the smart fortwo stuck in the sand—and out), took photos at the entrance to the Daytona International Speedway, and then headed to Kennedy Space Center. After touring the center they emerged to cheers and clapping from a school group—our jump-suited pair was mistaken for astronauts.

Team Orville staged for the runway finale at Plant City Airport, 8 nm west of Lakeland. Team Wilbur arrived in Lakeland with time to spare so they hit a drag strip and then set up on the flight line. From the staging tower I announced the race in front of the airshow crowd. There was the smart fortwo kicking it down the runway, and in swooped the Remos with Miller at the controls. The two vehicles were momentarily neck and neck, and then the Remos overtook the car and ended our rally with finesse.

"I celebrated one of the most important moments in my 10 years of piloting—opening the show at Sun 'n Fun," says Miller. "We were wheels up by 2:30 p.m., orbiting five miles to the west of Lakeland waiting to be cleared to make the pass at 2:45 p.m. The air boss cleared us for the low pass, confirming that the smart fortwo was at the end of the runway and we began our descent. But we couldn't see the car—it was so tiny that it fit perfectly within the circle of the 9 for Runway 9! Jason cued the car for its run and we flew by at about 50 feet, catching up and passing the car in front of the spectators. This last leg of the rally was truly a privilege and an honor, and it's something I'll never forget."

AOPA

See the video of the Road and Runway Rally and view an extended gallery of photos as well as the participants' blogs on AOPA online (www.aopa.org/rally).

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