

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - Drive a Bricklin 6,300 miles roundtrip across the USA
Or is it

MISSION: POSSIBLE?

By Kevin Hand, B#462

Before we get started...John Worsley, thanks for being a great road trip partner and sharing the driving and other expenses...

My Mission: Attend the 30th Anniversary BI Meet in Horseheads, NY with B#462
Background - On April 1st 1999 (no fooling!), I purchased Bricklin #462, a derelict 4-speed car found in Metuchen New Jersey. Over the last 5+ years I've spent more money than common sense said I should to bring the car back to life and drive it fearlessly anytime or anywhere...

Over time I've attended many Eastern and Western meets and thoroughly enjoyed meeting many owners, seeing their cars, hearing their stories, and making many new friends. Inspired by Norm Canfield's past Brickline stories of driving his Bricklin over great distances to meets, I vowed to bring my Bricklin to at least one Eastern meet as they are where the greatest concentration of owners get together to enjoy their cars and each other.

Mission Objectives:

- Depart July 24th with mission co-pilot John Worsley
- Arrive safely and on time in Horseheads on July 28th
- Enjoy the meet and the company of other B owners
- Depart August 1st with Gold award from meet
- Arrive home safely and on time on August 6th

Pre-mission Preparation:

The last 18 months in particular have been focused on completing the transformation of #462 from a fairly reliable car to one that I could take anywhere in complete confidence and with a reasonable amount of comfort. The comfort comment really addresses the issue of inadequate heat insulation and the basic setup of the drive train that had the engine turning 3,200rpm @70mph. These numbers were making the engine work much too hard and generating a tremendous amount of heat and noise due to the gearing of the 4-speed and rear-end. Clearly, two major changes were in order:

1. Improve heat insulation
2. Change the drive-train

For those folks that believe that it is sacrilege to change the Bricklin from it's stock setup, I can only say that since I had to replace the acrylics and paint the car, I felt more at ease changing out the transmission even though it was one of the relatively rare 4-speeds built (BI puts the number built at 144 or 145). I still have the original hardware (T-10, bell housing, etc.) to go backwards if I ever want to or should I ever sell the car and the buyer want to return it to the original

drive train setup. I replaced the Borg-Warner T-10 with a Tremec T-5 unit that has been placed in Mustangs, Firebirds & Camaros for years. For those that care, Tremec bought out Borg-Warner several years ago and goes by the name of Transmission Technologies Corporation (website url: <http://www.ttcautomotive.com>). With minor modifications the transmission fit and reduced the engine RPM to 2,000 @70mph. This change created three distinct improvements:

1. MPG improved from @10 to 16mpg averaged over the trip (speeds of 75-85 mph)
2. Engine and transmission heat output lowered substantially. Engine temps alone dropped from 210-220 to 185-195 degrees depending on conditions
3. Much quieter inside the car - eliminating the need for foam earplugs on long distance travel

The Trip to NY – Day 1:

The day starts out rough when I can't find my wallet...after an hour of searching I finally find it in my travel bag. Apparently while trying to prepare for departure the night before, I placed it in a zippered compartment that I never use. By the next morning I'd forgotten it and caused myself the grief of a "lost" wallet. This time loss in turn caused a few other timing issues that in total delayed us about 2.5 hours. By the time we leave my house and take the main route to Las Vegas it is mid-morning and temperatures are rising in the desert along Interstate 15.

The desert heat is the first major test of the car on the road trip and we all know the cooling issues some Bricklins face; mine was in this group. Before the car had been taken down for the transmission project I had replaced my radiator with a "high-efficiency" 3-core radiator. This radiator did drop my engine temps but it was still running dangerously high after a few minutes at idle if air temps were anything above 80 degrees. Where I live in southern California, average summer daytime temperatures range from 90-105 degrees. Also changed was the cooling fan. The stock '74 fan was replaced with a stock '75 fan eliminating the flex in the blades thereby pulling a larger amount of air through the radiator at idle. With the 5-speed transmission giving me an overdrive of .68, the engine rpm's stay low and allow me to get through the desert heat and long climbing hills that challenge motorists so consistently that road signs warn drivers to turn off their A/C's for the next 15-20 miles. The B passes this challenge with the A/C on the whole time running 2,000-2,200 rpm with a peak temp of 230. I was getting a bit nervous but keeping the car at 2,000 rpm, it never got higher than that. Once we crested the summit, engine temps dropped to 210 even though were cruising at 80 mph with A/C (2,400 rpm). We got into Las Vegas and it was about 105 degrees in the shade...not nice! The heat was so bad that when I filled the gas tank, the gas came gushing back out of the tank before full and spilled over onto what was my pristine rear bumper. The hot gasoline INSTANTLY ate into the finish of the bumper ruining it all around the license plate area...aaaarrrrggghh! It was then that I also noticed that the passenger side exhaust tip was now a dark caramel brown color...this from the leaking fluid coming from one of the hydraulic

cylinders our rear bumpers are mounted to. Oh well, not much I can do about either while on the trip! Having seen to the needs of the Bricklin, we took the opportunity to stop and eat lunch and to stretch our legs before getting back into the car and continuing to our night's stop in Green River, Utah. Though short of our goal for the day, we choose to stop because of mis-marked gasoline availability on the road that caused us to get into an area with no gasoline available for 50-60 miles and only ¼ tank showing on the gauge. Knowing that we absolutely cannot rely on the gas gauge, we choose to stop at the first available town with lodging. Lesson learned – When in a Brick and presented with two options for gas just a few mile apart – go for the sure thing! Take the FIRST gas stop, as the second one may not be available!

Miles driven for the day – 647

Special note: I make the drive through the desert mostly barefoot and no heat discomfort – Clearly the heat insulation material installed under the car is doing the job!

The Trip to NY – Day 2:

We leave Green River Utah after filling up and continue north and east on Interstate 15 and then pick up I=70. We encountered beautiful country and scenery as we left the desert areas of the southwest and approached the Rockies and Colorado. Along the way John experiences his first “Sonic” burger drive-in. John rates the hamburger as 4-stars and gives an “outstanding” for the peanut butter & fudge shake...

Now that we are in more lightly populated area with friendlier people (trusting?), I nearly leave a gas station without paying for gas. In So.Cal., you can't pump gas without pre-paying, period. I tried to pay for gas but there is no credit card reader on the pump so when I go inside to pay, I get funny looks and am told to go pump first then come in and pay. Out I go – We have the usual questions and answer session from the surrounding locals wondering what we are driving, and by the time we're done talking and gassing up, I almost left without paying for the gas because I'm so programmed to pay first. Fortunately I remember to pay, leaving no chance of being hunted down by the local police. Driving through Denver and eastwards through Genoa CO, John gets stopped by a state trooper. Thankfully I stopped John from opening the driver door as the trooper wasn't clear of it and would have been hit by the door, not the way to make friends! The trooper advises us we were traveling 79 in a 65mph zone and we're puzzled by this “charge” since the speed limits have been mostly 75mph since Las Vegas. When we share this with the trooper, he explains that a 10-mile stretch of the road is posted for 65mph because of a huge truck terminal in the area. We can only assume that we missed a sign because of all of the truck traffic that likely interfered with us seeing the posted lower limit. John gets lucky and does not get a ticket! Onwards to Russell KS, home of former US Senator Bob Dole. Along the way we stop for dinner where John experiences a buffalo steak at Montana Mike's and pronounces it – O.K. I guess he won't order buffalo again...at almost midnight we roll into Russell and experience what seems to be a major issue.

After checking into a motel, we go back to the car and get nothing but silence and darkness when the ignition key is turned. Being exhausted we opt to push the car into a parking space straight ahead and look at it in the morning as we are done for day anyway. After leaving a message for my friend and mechanic (Les), we sack out and get a good night's rest.

Miles driven for the day: 707

The Trip to NY – Day 3:

Next morning John talks to Les while I'm in the shower and gives us a list of things to check. One of the checklist items are the battery cables as Les admitted to not remembering tightening down the cables after he completed major wiring harness work. Sure enough, the cables are not properly attached. Fixing that, the car starts right up but I notice the ammeter is showing a slight discharge, something not noticed the prior day. Going back into the motel we ask the staff at the front desk about a good garage and are referred to Killian's garage just down the road. After breakfast and packing the B, we head to Killian's and pull up to the garage with the exhaust rumble of the B attracting attention. We open the doors to an audience of three guys and can hear them asking each other – What the hell is that? After climbing out and making introductions, we get down to business. All three stopped what they are doing to check out the charging system and battery. Sure enough – no juice getting to the battery and the alternator is deemed to have died. An appropriate alternator is found and put on the car with a little grumbling about the tight quarters and effort to replace the alternator and adding a spacer to properly position the alternator and belt. Apparently I had an issue here and didn't even know it! Our new alternator is a heavy-duty type that they use on their tractors that will serve me well according to Sam. I also mentioned that I thought there was some exhaust noise and when the B is put on the lift, we find missing nuts on the driver side where the exhaust manifold meets the rest of the exhaust pipes. Two brass nuts, one alternator and a total price of almost \$300, we depart Killian's – after taking photos of the guys posed with the B – I swear – Nicer people you will not meet...

Dinner sees us in Kansas City, KS where we stop at KC Masterpiece in downtown Kansas. John enjoys his dinner and I'm not very impressed...but then again, I enjoy a dry spice rub barbeque, not wet (meaning with sauce). We continue our journey to Troy IL with no further incident.

Miles driven for the day: 706

The Trip to NY – Day 4:

We continue our journey with everything running fine and we stop for lunch at a Steak 'N Shake while in Indianapolis IN. This is a first for both of us and we are impressed! We continue on making our way towards southwest Pennsylvania where we stop in Uniontown since our goal for Wednesday morning is to tour Frank Lloyd Wright's most famous residential project – Falling Water. The day was mercifully shorter from a mile driven perspective but Uniontown was a maze

of one-way streets with many of them closed for repair. Not nice for us strangers in the dark with no clue of where the hell we were. Finally we locate our hotel and avoid killing each other due to frustration and sheer tiredness.

Miles driven for the day: 478

The Trip to NY – Day 5:

Located and built over a waterfall at Mill Run PA, Falling Water is truly an architectural treasure. We opt for the in-depth tour and spend the entire morning touring the house, taking many photos and touring a part of the grounds.

Onto to Horseheads NY, the site of our meet! We arrive at the host hotel at about 7pm local time and find about 16 B's already in the lot. I've been to four of the last five Eastern meets and have never seen this many cars on the first night – a good omen for things to come! As we approach and then park the B, many folks note our California license plates. After parking I get out and loudly announce to the crowd that Bricklins are made for driving and enjoyment! Most smiled and heartily greeted us but I'm sure many were questioning our sanity...

Miles driven for the day: 465

The Meet – Days 6 -9:

Had a great time there and we meet several new people that I'd never seen at prior meets. More new friends that I hope to see again. Among the highlights of the meet was the run out to Watkins Glen and the laps we took on the track...great fun but not enough laps and we couldn't go very fast...too bad!

A lot of fun times at the meet, good food and great company. It was nice to meet Malcolm and to see Herb Grasse again! Have they ever been at a meet at the same time? Truly something that many missed... As for the car show and judging, #462 took a Silver missing gold by only a few points. Some of the points off I agree with and others...well...I don't know. I guess we got a REALLY tough judge! Judging is a thankless job and having done it, my hat is off to those that did judge and got through it all even though the rain came down on us to spoil our day. To all of the judges – thank you for your hard work while the rest of us were enjoying the company of other attendees!

The meet was great with the usual little things that always seem to go awry despite the best efforts and hard work by meet hosts and directors. A huge THANK YOU to Suzanne & John Cherba for all of their efforts – it was a great meet.

The Drive Home – Day 9:

Drove from the meet to Bedford VA; Terry Tanner's base of operations for Bricklin Parts & Service. Encountered rain along the way and had a nice dinner with Terry before calling it an evening and experiencing one of the loudest thunderstorms I've ever been through.

Miles driven for the day: 573

The Drive Home – Day 10:

The hatch area of the Bricklin was soaked since my car leaks like a sieve. Stopped for a nice visit at BPS to change the oil sending unit, as well as picking up a replacement bumper cylinder for my leaky one on the passenger side. John picked up a lot of information and advice from Terry while I spoke with John Lodge as he worked on my car. We departed after only 3-4 hours...amazing since John is a big talker and we know how long a conversation with Terry can go on...sorry guys, just kidding!

After leaving Terry & BPS we drove along a portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway but decided after a short period of time that we needed to get back on the Interstate. Had some trouble finding our way back onto the highway and ended up wasting about an hour of time though the drive was very scenic. We were further challenged and got lost for a while around Bristol VA (highways 11/19/23/& 26 very confusing but finally made our way to Ashville NC and a tour of the Biltmore estate the next day. Almost all of our driving will now be on Interstate 40 as we head west.

Miles driven for the day: 510

The Drive Home – Day 11:

Toured the Biltmore and was amazed at what wealth was able to create. Something you should see if ever in the area. On to Bowling Green KY to tour the Corvette Plant on day 12.

Miles driven for the day: @375

The Drive Home – Day 12:

Toured the Corvette assembly plant and National Corvette Museum...Very interesting in the plant and got a lot of stares at the museum...couldn't tell if they were staring at us because we have "the nerve" to park in front of the museum and take pictures or just the usual "what is it" reaction – maybe a bit of both! Drove into Memphis to have barbeque at Corky's. Both of us had a great meal there and John ordered his ribs wet! Oh well, no accounting for some folks...after all, anyone that drinks peanut butter/fudges shakes ...

Ended the day's drive in Ft. Smith AR.

Miles driven for the day: 473

The Drive Home – Day 13:

Having seen the sights we wanted to see and eaten our fill of barbeque we now head home with the goal of covering miles to get home. After all, we've been on the road now for almost two weeks and the Bricklin though nice, is not a luxury car! We depart Arkansas and travel to Albuquerque NM.

Miles driven for the day: 875

The Drive Home – Day 14:

We get up early and cruise between 80-85 mph most of the way. We were screwed in Needles CA for gas when we paid \$3.099/gal. for gas. I should have told John to gas up before we got into California because there is no gas for a stretch of nearly 80 miles. We make great time from Albuquerque to Montclair CA where we enjoy a dinner at a Japanese steak house having our fill of sushi, grilled chicken, shrimp and Japanese beer. It is a good thing that home was only 10 miles more...

Miles driven for the day: 752

In Conclusion:

Bricklins, if well maintained and driven regularly are absolutely dependable. This of course is dependant on how your car has been taken care of since day one, or to what lengths you've gone to restore or resurrect it. I've done my dream trip and vow to take the B on another trip to an Eastern meet within the next few years. I WILL get a Gold for B#462!

I hope you enjoyed reading about this trip as much as we had taking it!