

Coda: Driving Habits

Here I am in a little red convertible in a world of white pick-up trucks. Many of these pick-ups sport thick extra bumpers in case they hit a crossing deer at night. Me? I'd be demolished. In Idaho I passed alone through an area with deer dashing about. I decided to slow down.

Little red convertibles also require you to keep to the speed limit. Little red sport cars are magnets for police and the highway patrol. Always keep to the speed limit, especially when the signs indicate slowing down from 70 to 35 in a hundred yards as you pass by the small towns.

Cruise control is a good correction
Red Miatas draw police attention

Any other advice for traveling the road?

Fill up your water bottle from the motel tap. You won't need to buy a new bottle at the gas station. Save the oceans.

Eat light. Waffles have a way of backing up on you two hours later. Drink just one cup of coffee. Maybe nibble at a pastry. Grab an apple for your lunch. Eat light.

Ask the desk clerk where the nearest supermarket is located. Instead of eating at restaurants, shop at the Piggly Wiggly – get a sandwich, a small container of broccoli salad, and a cheap bottle of wine. Be sure you pack silverware. It helps if you checked ahead of your trip what are the liquor laws for each state.

If you feel the need for conversation and a break from supermarket meals, eat at the bar. If there are no other customers you can always chat up the bartender.

Don't be a jerk on the road. Be polite. You might need the help of those you were tempted to cut off when construction forced you to merge. Manners matter.

When booking a room, always ask for a room where you can park in front of the window so you can keep a watch on it during the night.

If you want to be polite for the benefit of the motel maid (whom you will tip of course), rinse down the drain the fur you deposited in the shower after toweling off.

For your clothes the trunk makes a dandy laundry basket and the duffle bag shoved on top of the dirty laundry a decent closet. Fill up the front seat backpack up with a only few days of clothing so you can avoid lugging the duffle around at each stop.

If you need to do laundry, most motels have a place where you can wash your clothes. Just make sure you have plenty of quarters.

Always fill up the gas tank when it is half full. Squeeze in about 20 cents more. You might need it. If you really want gasoline insurance, carry a small gas container in your trunk.

With all the gear you have accessible in the passenger seat (maps, micro-cassette recorder for notes on the road, go back, backpack, laptop, apple, water bottle), you can forget about picking up hitch-hikers even if you wanted to (which I never wanted to). Hitch-hiking has changed over my years. I saw fewer than a dozen on my 9,200 mile drive. Those I saw sat against a sign at entrance ramps with a cardboard sign on their laps. Changes, changes. Circuses, soda fountain counters, deposit bottles in wagon, typewriters, dial phones, television dials, cranks for the car window. Changes, changes. I knew I had become a stranger in a strange land when I returned to Princeton Theological Seminary to attend a Writer's Workshop. During a lull, I wandered downstairs to tour through the bookshelves of the book store. Couldn't find the old bookstore. Asked where had it moved? Hadn't moved. There is no bookstore anymore at Princeton Theological Seminary. In my own valiant attempt, I still use fountain pens.

Always triple check your wallet and credit card. You don't want to lose them on the road or leave your credit card in the gas pump. Wallets can fall out of back pockets when going to the bathroom at Welcome Centers.

Last: keep an extra car key in your pocket. You don't want to get locked out by accident.