



Big Apple to Big Easy

Three whack-jobs, one photographer, and a very nasty old Cadillac limousine hit the long road.
By Jean Jennings, Jason Cammisa, and Sam Smith

There are rallies, and then there are rallies. The 2007 BABE Rally—short for Big Apple to Big Easy—is in that dubious second camp, the first being actual events of driving skill. BABE is a crap-car rally, an exercise in ridiculousness involving cars with temporarily commuted death sentences. The requirements: Be in the parking lot of the drab Staten Island Hotel at the appointed hour with a car that cost less than \$250, armed with registration and insurance. And then attempt to schlep your chosen chariot to New Orleans under its own power.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
REGIS LEFEBURE

“They could not be allowed to sail into the unknown without a minder carrying bail money.”

Breakdown #1
It is no surprise that our crappy, twenty-four-year-old, \$250 stretch limo stalls. We just don't expect it in the first half hour of our trip.



We can thank a group of lunatic Brits for dragging this rolling circus across the Atlantic last year. The event includes challenges (license-plate scavenger hunts, absurd photo contests, costume competitions) for those who take such things far too seriously, but the reality is sad, dear readers. This is a dumbass event for screw-offs, without even a charity recipient at the end of the oil-soaked road.

Naturally, we signed up, thanks to associate editor Sam Smith and senior online editor Jason Cammisa, the two most serious drama queens at AUTOMOBILE MAGAZINE. The nail-chewing Jew from Louisville meets the Italian on Xanax from Brooklyn. They ramped up for this insanity for two months, their auras merging and growing geometrically until they had almost spun themselves into pools of butter. They could not be allowed to sail off into the unknown, driving the junker 1983 Cadillac stretch limo they had bought and were now obsessing over, without a minder carrying bail money. I agreed to fly in with Elvis costumes if they agreed to deliver the hand-painted white limo with the spray-painted gold underbite and tucked-red-velvet upholstery to Staten Island. Our fate was sealed. The 1983 Ann Arbor High School Prom Team was on its way to New York. —Jean Jennings

HEADQUARTERS: STATEN ISLAND HOTEL

I arrive at our hotel by taxi, exiting between a row of hand-painted junkers and a line of incoming soldiers in camouflage. The Conservative Party of Staten Island is meeting in the Harbor Room off the lobby, says the sign. I'm sure this is a joke and that this must be the room where

all the BABE loonies will be registering and drinking. It is not a joke. Guys in polyester with bad hair are in there, *meeting*. I go outside.

“Are you with the conservatives or the rally?” asks a Brit out in the parking lot. He's puffing on a hookah and standing next to an Oldsmobile Aurora that's missing its roof.

“I'm a conservative *with* the rally,” I reply.
“Brush or roller?” someone mingling in the crowd asks a heavily tattooed woman leaning against a pink convertible covered with plastic pigs.
“Brush.”
“Oil or latex?”
“Latex.” —JJ

Somewhere between Ann Arbor and Staten Island, one of our trailer's ramps went missing. We are left to get the limo off the trailer with whatever we can scrounge up in the aisles of the local Home Depot. “You'll be fine,” Jean yells, as I back it out of the straps. “Go *faster*,” Jason yells, as the two-by-eight plank snaps and the bottle jack holding it shoots sideways under the limo's weight. There's a giant *WHUMP*, I hear the rear doors groan, and the limo is suddenly sitting on the pavement, the plank and the jack a good ten feet away. The Caddy's fan belt starts to squeal. —Sam Smith

Jason scores a pair of pink, wide-lapel tuxedos for the 1983 Ann



“A van covered with rubber duckies is playing something that sounds like porn music through a giant speaker. It's a freak show.”

BABE and The Man
If you were a cop, wouldn't you stop us? Of course you would. But would you stop us because you thought we were hot?



Arbor High School Prom Team from a junk store en route. Inexplicably, he has also brought along a wig for himself. I have an entire suitcase stuffed by Monica Ladd from Fantasy Attic in Ann Arbor with my prom outfit and full Elvis regalia for us all. We try on everything, decide to wear the prom outfits at the start and end of the rally, and get them ready. Meanwhile, our team photographer, Regis Lefebure, has set up his artist nephew Vincent Szarek in the parking lot with a can of pink paint. He spends the night getting wasted and painting “OFF LIKE A PROM DRESS” on the limo's trunk. —JJ

DAY 1 STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK, TO HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

We roll through the parking lot to the starting line, Jean on the roof in her tutu and Jason hanging out the sunroof in that Weird-Al-meets-underarm-hair wig of his, and the crowd goes wild. Two potbellied, shirtless Brits—the ones with the roofless Olds Aurora—have been flying the Union Jack from their trunk since dawn. A van covered with rubber duckies is playing something that sounds like porn music through the giant speaker mounted on its roof. It's a freak show. A huge, smelly, oil-burning freak show. Someone shoots off a confetti gun. *Glorious*. —SS

We wouldn't have gotten more attention if the Cadillac—or Jean herself—were on fire. Crap cars are scattered all over, so it takes a true rat to get this twisted crowd's attention. Face it: a \$250 car is one thing. A \$250 stretch limo is another story entirely. —Jason Cammisa

We know this car is a total junker. Anything can happen. But I am the last of the great optimists. Plus, both Sam and Jason are mechanically inclined. Plus, I have the corporate credit card. I say a little prayer: if it's gonna break, please break today. As it turns out, it breaks and breaks and breaks and, well, I'm getting ahead of myself. Our prom car needs help in exactly thirty-four miles. The duct-taped vinyl roof is already getting puffy, which is kind of cute, and the vents are blasting heat. Bad enough we have no A/C as we steam south. —JJ

Hot? So much heat is pouring out of the dashboard that the rubber on the brake pedal is melting. My foot is sticking to it. The scavenger-hunt challenges for the rally are superfluous—the real challenge will be hauling this heap to the Big Easy under its own power. We haven't even made it out of Staten Island before the engine is starving for fuel. Any more than the weight of my big toe on the accelerator pedal causes the big V-8 to shudder, cough, and perform a magnificent, flaming backfire through the intake as it stalls. An air filter might have muffled the explosions, but we threw it out because it was so dirty. And besides, the backfires are mostly drowned out by the squealing fan belt. —JC

A buzz-cutted state trooper is eyeing us a little funny at a rest area on the Jersey turnpike. We slap another yard or two of duct tape on the roof, trying to act normal, but he nevertheless walks over to ask if we're OK. I try to stand in front of the humongous crack in the windshield;

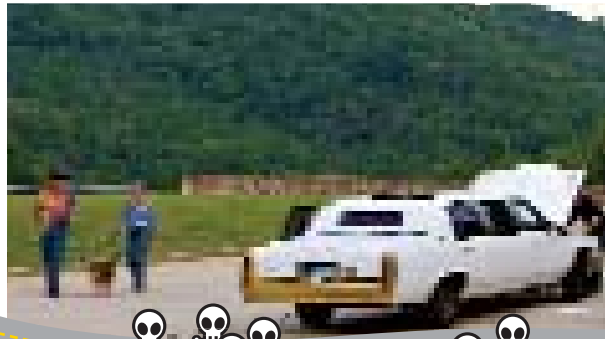


**Big
Apple
to Big
Easy**



“We decide to go for a fat right foot, which produces a couple of exhaust farts. Then we’re dead.”

Breakdowns #49 through #278
This is getting just a little bit ridiculous. It's broken. It's not broken. It's dead, oh no, it's going again. JUST BREAK, DAMN IT!!!



Cammissa drops into his Brooklyn accent and starts pumping out the backstory, aiming for distraction.

“No, no,” the cop says, waving his hands, “You guys aren’t in trouble. This thing is fuckin’ awesome. Who woulda thought two hundred and fifty bucks could buy something this crazy?” We have officially been welcomed by the state of New Jersey, and that welcome wagon just dropped the F-bomb. Wow. —SS

We’re on the surface streets in Baltimore in search of a place where the limo can at least break down with dignity. I confess to my teammates that I’m agoraphobic, explaining that, in general, agoraphobia is a panic disorder characterized by the fear of not being able to get home. More specifically, it’s the fear of dying in this filthy limo on this stupid rally. It’s going to be a two-Xanax day. —JC

It’s hot as blazes, but we’re stranded on the harbor with a great breeze blowing off the Chesapeake Bay. We get a can of gas, then fill up. And then stall again. This time, it’s Connecticut Avenue in Bethesda. We start up and off, but there’s clearly a fuel-starvation problem. It’s the worst feeling, swinging from “Hey, it’s working!” to dead and coasting. We have an ongoing discussion about probable causes, arguing like *House*’s medical team, but without the all-knowing Dr. House to say, “Wrong, Lame-O.” Three hours later—during which time we’ve managed to travel just twelve miles—we cross the Potomac into Virginia.

Another group of rally participants, Team UggTruck, has attached its camo van to us as backup. A spunky little chick inside the van is shrieking out the window, “It’s your exhaust!!!” Jason wants her to put a cork in it. I just want her to simmer down that voice an octave and maybe twenty decibels. —JJ

The limo lurches forward on its own while sitting at a red light. Damn. The transmission just dropped into gear. When it does it again at the next light, I realize that we forgot to check the fluid level. My concern for the transmission is quickly rendered irrelevant when the engine dies and refuses to restart. —JC

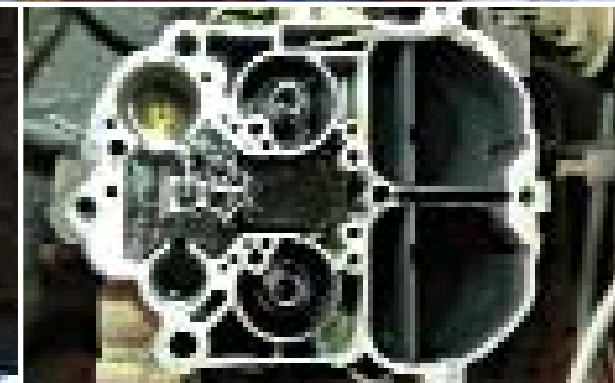
There’s duct tape all over the car. We are nothing so much as a rolling testament to the glory of 3M. More than twenty rolls of tape cover the roof, hold the mirrors on, close off all the blasting heater and defrost vents, and tie the car together. The red velvet? It’s painfully warm, and things seem to be living in it; even though it’s been vacuumed, you can smack the seat and a dust cloud of nastiness will float up from the cushion. The sweat on Jason’s leg has mixed with the airborne seat gunk and started to turn black. The rear floor is littered with plastic bags and empty soda bottles. Frustrated by Washington Beltway traffic, Jason leans on the horn but is met with only a lethargic *ehhhh* from the limo’s nose and a burning smell. So much for that. Jean is asleep. Regis throws a powdered doughnut at my head, misses, and starts chucking pretzels instead. One lane over, a soccer mom in a minivan looks at me like I am Hitler. —SS

We’ve limped through the District and decide to go for a fat right foot, which produces a couple of exhaust farts. Then we’re dead, coasting in rush-hour traffic. Please, please, please, then, Yes! We’re rolling at 50 mph. Jason is cocky. We are masters of the universe. We are stumbling toward our goal—Harrisonburg, Virginia. And then we are dead on a bridge fifty miles later. We get started once more and limp into a gas station. It’s 6:30 p.m. Sam crawls up under the hood, jerks on a few things, then calls his friend Jeff. Jeff says we’re screwed. At 7:00, we’re

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“He can't send our bizarre little band anywhere without looking crazy himself.”



Breakdown #307
I have complete faith that Jason and Sam can fix this problem. Whatever it is. Because they talk a lot and use carburetor words.

Breakdown #457
Jason and Sam don't know jack. Thank God for Richard the Mechanic. Or as Elvis would say, "Thank you. Thankyouverymuch."



back on the road, and the good news is that it's downhill from here. Meanwhile, I get on the phone to the brotherhood—Yellow Cab in Harrisonburg. The dispatcher is all over it. "You need Merchant's Auto Center. They open at 7 a.m., and if they can't help you, they'll refer you," she says.

Meanwhile, back at the steering wheel, Jason is coasting, looking at his NO CHARGE light. He pulls over, expecting a thrown fan belt. The car starts up again. Jason stands on it, throwing a bag full of Regis's camera gear through the air and into my kneecap. Thirteen minutes later, we are dying at Exit 13, just to underline our bad luck. We're dead on the shoulder. Sam: "I don't want to be alone in the dark." —JJ

After pulling over for a quick underhood check, Cammisa floors it onto the freeway. The on-ramp is damn near vertical, and it's all the limo can do not to lose speed. At 20 mph.

"How much farther do we have to go?" asks Jean.

"Sixty-eight miles," says Regis.

"Sixty-eight miles," Cammisa says, tapping the speedo, "is a long time at twenty miles per hour."

Regis pitches another doughnut at my head. —SS

We discuss possible home remedies. Pack ice on the carb. Dismantle the choke. Build a giant tinfoil hat. *HaHaHaHaHa*. Put clothespins on the fuel line. Seriously, the boys have kept it rolling, and we're finally on I-81 South and still rolling. I don't want to even write that in our notebook, lest it jinx us!

Too late. We're dying one mile from our exit. It's 8:45 p.m., and it has taken eleven hours to limp 347 miles. Team Ugg Truck is still dogging us, now with their hazards on.

"Did you try changing the vacuum bags?" someone says. I call my husband. "It would be a shame if you have to call in Sherman. You'll never live it down," he says. At the mere suggestion of our technical editor's intervention, the limo, in terror, fires up.

The Union Jack is flying from its car-mounted flagpole in the parking lot of the hotel. Jason leaps from the car and shouts, "We failed to proceed—no lie—probably 300 times!" His Xanax has worn off. —JJ

DAY 2 HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA, TO ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

We start the day at Merchant's Tire & Auto Center, looking, I suppose, like an older woman and her two highly excitable twentysomething sons with an ancient, hand-painted white limo. All three of us are talking at once.

"The key word is 'right away,'" says Merchant's manager Jim Niarhos, only slightly fazed by our unexpected visit. In the middle of making a call to palm us off on some other shop, he realizes that he can't send our bizarre little band anywhere without looking crazy himself, hangs up, and writes a work order.

We spend the next five hours watching his carburetor man, Richard, crouch under the hood and dismantle and clean the crusty four-barrel. He pokes his finger on a wet spot on the underside of the fuel tank, and

Big Apple to Big Easy

Our \$250 Limo

The car was cheap. Making it (and us) look respectable and humping it from New York to New Orleans was another thing entirely. (Thanks to the Ford Motor Company for helping us get to New York in the first place.)



ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

- 1983 Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham Limousine, black on red velour, 100,000-plus miles \$250.00
- Repair headlights, leaking brakes, broken steering column, battery \$550.00
- Replacement road wheel, used \$26.50
- Tires (including mounting and balancing) \$300.00
- Cosmetics: eight rolls white duct tape, two rolls masking tape, two disposable paint trays, two gallons Rust-Oleum latex white, three paint rollers, two foam brushes, two spray cans Rust-Oleum gold \$114.86
- Ford F-350 diesel dualie tow vehicle, aluminum flatbed trailer Free (from Ford)
- Rental: three Elvis costumes, one woman's tutu, feather boa \$343.39
- One pair pink Converse high-tops, two peach tuxedos \$202.00

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

- One box rubber gloves, one bottle Windex, one jack, one two-by-eight plank, two heavy-duty jack stands \$85.07
- Scaring the hell out of your associate editor by making him three-wheel a twenty-two-foot-long limo off a three-foot-high trailer using one skinny ramp, a two-by-eight plank, and a jack stand Priceless

EN ROUTE

- Eight bottles carburetor cleaner \$25.35
- One can Fix-A-Flat \$5.48
- One small bottle brake fluid, one spare fuel filter \$10.70
- One gallon antifreeze \$10.58
- Five bottles automatic transmission fluid \$10.32
- Parts and labor to bypass heater core, rebuild carburetor, adjust fan belt, replace undercar fuel filter, replace air filter \$354.66
- One aftermarket stick-on rearview mirror \$6.45
- One pine-tree-shaped air freshener \$2.53
- One gas cap (original lost or stolen) \$7.41
- One fuel pump for Oldsmobile 307-cubic-inch V-8 \$35.99
- Fourteen more rolls of duct tape in assorted fashionable colors \$29.54
- Total: \$2370.83**



Very Bad British Elvises
Hide the women and children.
Could the Brits show a little more respect for our icons? Really now.
A plastic forehead!?!?



the metal pushes in. He suggests that we slow down for railroad tracks. He points to the fact that there is no frame (no frame!) and that the whole car could easily break in half. He finds another fuel filter hidden by two decades of grime and sees that it is jammed with chunks of rust. He empties sludge into a bucket. He flushes more sludge from the fuel line into the bucket.

I forgot to mention that today is Elvis Day. I forgot to mention that, while Richard is working on the car, we have changed into our jeweled Elvis jumpsuits, complete with wigs and Taking Care of Business sunglasses. It'll be some time before the guys at Merchant's forget that we ever darkened their door. —JJ

Five hours after we first arrive at the shop, four already tired Elvises pile into the Limo of Death and hit the road for the day's 300-mile jaunt. As Richard the mechanic pointed out, the coachbuilder who stretched this particular Fleetwood neglected to weld in a new frame section. I can't stop thinking that the front and the rear halves of the limo are held together by only the driveshaft, the rotted brake lines, and the red shag carpet. Neither the floor pan nor the side body panels offer structural assistance, composed as they are of compressed rust, road grime, and Rust-Oleum enamel. —JC

Overly Polite Southern Woman at the Chick-fil-A: "Are y'all Elvis impersonators?"

Jean: "We *are* Elvis."

Overly Polite Southern Woman at the Chick-fil-A: "Well . . . OK then. Would you like some ketchup?" —SS

I'm startled by the sound of a police siren behind us. The cop may have been following us for ten miles—with no mirrors, how was I to know? I ask the officer if I was speeding. My teammates start giggling; we were going only 51 mph—fourteen less than the speed limit but fifty faster than was probably safe.

"You were weaving back there."

"Oh, see, officer, this is a \$250 stretch limousine," I explain as I saw the wheel back and forth through ninety degrees of play. "The steering is barely connected to the front wheels. If I were drunk, we would have never even made it onto the highway. We would have veered off the entrance ramp and hit a tree."

"Is that so?" the cop responds as he turns his head to locate a distinctly Elvis-like "Uh-huh uh-huh" emanating from the back seat. Jean, the only one among us still wearing her Elvis costume, lowers her window and asks him if he'll pose for a picture. The officer cracks a smile as I respond, "I cannot begin to imagine what this must look like, but I promise we're just trying to get to New Orleans safely." I have just, for the first time in my life, told the truth to a cop on the side of the road. —JC

There's something to be said for crossing America in a car where every mile is a blessing. It makes you appreciate the fact that the motion isn't magic—you're actually moving by the good grace of pistons pumping and spark plugs sparking and wheels rolling. There's also something to be said for crossing the country in a long-wheelbase piece of pimped-out living room trash. It's strangely comfortable. A big, groaning, rattling, flexing, squeaking kind of comfortable, but comfortable nonetheless.



“For all we know, the big engine could be glowing red and nearing meltdown.”

Breakdown #1
Not us, silly! We're running like a top. We stop to help everyone else who breaks. Jason and Sam still don't know jack.

less. Maybe it's the heat, but I'm actually starting to feel *good*. —SS

Riding in the back is very bizarre. Regis and I are almost totally disconnected from the front. We can't hear what Jason and Sam are saying, and they can't hear us. We have created a little cocoon of camera bags and coolers that bolster our legs. I read the tabloids, work the Blackberry, and conduct business, and Regis shoots and naps. Every now and then, we suffer from a crack-the-whip effect in the back, when Jason is driving 50 mph and it feels like the rear is going 95 mph as we flip over road bumps. —JJ

With no tachometer to disagree with my math skills, I calculate that the lazy V-8 under the hood is turning only 1400 rpm in fourth gear at our 50-mph interstate cruising speed. At these speeds, we feel nothing, and we begin to realize why old people think it's a compliment to say that a car "rides like a Cadillac." The incessant bouncing has obviously interrupted normal synaptic firing.

The late-afternoon sun is glistening beautifully through the cracks in the windshield as we start to ascend the mountains. At two-thirds throttle, the carb's secondaries open up, emitting that glorious intake snarl that comes only from a big American V-8. It's too bad it's all bark and no bite—we're struggling to maintain 35 mph. The kickdown linkage is attached to the throttle cable via an old key chain, and perhaps it's maladjusted—I have to manually downshift into second gear just to keep moving. There is no temperature gauge and the idiot light is burned out, so for all we know, the big engine could be glowing red and nearing meltdown. We pull over and open the hood at a scenic overlook, and the heat kills every mosquito in the parking lot.

The Caddy starts bouncing higher and higher as we hit pavement with undulations that match the natural frequency of the Caddy's blown

suspension. The Boss-Hogg-cum-pogo-stick slams into the bump stops and then becomes airborne repeatedly as Jean screams "Slow down!" We're doing 42 mph. —JC

Asheville is ours just as night is falling. Jubilant, we stop for gas before we check in. There's a car show in town, and we race off for the last group Elvis shot we need. The Brits have beaten us! They are the worst-looking Elvises I've ever seen. A group of local matrons agrees, but they have now unfortunately latched on to Jason and Sam, and I can't seem to pry them loose.

"Those are two of the finest-looking men we've ever seen," they keep cooing. Yikes!

Meanwhile, I have my own problems. The group shot is turning into a group grope. One old geezer is patting my ass while another one is latched onto my waist rather tightly. Did I say we're in our Elvis costumes? The women are draped on Jason and Sam and suddenly this photo session has become a delicate exercise in extricating ourselves, as the theme song from *Deliverance* twangs away in my head. —JJ

At dinner, I state my intent to avoid the 318 turns of U.S. 129—the infamous Tail of the Dragon—tomorrow. If the Caddy's double-stretch, 160-plus-inch wheelbase doesn't get it high-centered over a rise, the fuse-lage will break in half around a corner. Felix, one of the members of Team UggTruck, having downed three margaritas, musters the courage to inform me that the transmission didn't drop itself into first gear at those two red lights in Baltimore yesterday—he bumped us from behind with his van. I never saw him, of course. You'd need mirrors for that. —JC



Big Apple to Big Easy

Breakdown Ad Nauseum
Never mind Jason and Sam.
Katherine on Team Ugg knows her way around around a toolbox. We stay just to buy them lunch.



“Cammisa cues up his Bee Gees stash and does the Electric Slide over and over in the deserted parking lot.”



“I’m text-messaging my hysterical Italian mother, telling her she can stop planning my funeral.”



Big Easy, Baby!
Jason is banging the curb trying to wave and drive at once. He needs glory. He pulls over, hands off to Sam, and climbs on the roof. Yes!

DAY THREE ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA, TO GADSDEN, ALABAMA

Team UggTruck, our angels in the van, have a crack in their oil pan. It’s only right that we stay in the hotel lot to help. Besides, we don’t have a choice; our fuel pump is shot. We replace it while the attentive crowd watches. Then we all watch them. The crazy chick from Team UggTruck turns out to be their mechanic. She J-B Welds the pan while we pick up breakfast at the Waffle House across the street. —JJ

As the morning wears on, cars limp out of the parking lot—cars that didn’t make the start on time, cars that had to be repaired, cars that are just now arriving from yesterday’s journey and are a whole day late. One team has lost the center support bearing from its driveshaft and is wandering around looking for a ride. Another team, in a red Renault Encore, is doing endless 10-mph, leaky-exhaust-filled laps of the parking lot, trying in vain to make their brake system behave. Shouts out the back window of the Renault after every lap: “Whee! I wanna go again!”

While we’re sitting in the parking lot, waiting for the UggTruck team to finish fixing their oil pan, Jason decides that we need a song for our entry to New Orleans. He cues up his entire Bee Gees stash on his iPod and, while we’re all sweating in the hundred-degree heat, proceeds to do the Electric Slide over and over in the deserted parking lot. —SS

The J-B Weld is almost dry when our handheld nav system informs me that we’re one mile away from the country’s largest home. Seven people pile into the limo for a field trip to the Biltmore, and as I walk toward the driver’s door, I notice that the center section (you know, the section without a frame) is sagging visibly. I get in gently and sug-

gest that everyone don protective eyewear because the side windows are about to blow out. I’m not willing to go faster than 30 mph on the interstate, because the chassis is so bowed that the driveshaft is making nasty ratcheting noises.

We sing songs to drown out the noise. As we scrape around a corner in a neighborhood of dilapidated houses, our dimwitted Harman Kardon navigation system flashes “Biltmore Estate and Winery” on its screen and happily proclaims, “You have arrived at your destination!” We suspect that the device has a sophisticated sensor that calculates the value of the car in which it’s installed and has determined that we have no business at the real Biltmore Estate, nine unattainable miles away. —JC

We roll into Gadsden, Alabama, at the reasonable hour of 6:30 p.m. We’ve gone 200 miles on thirteen gallons of gas. The cops roll through our parking lot. Ted Boudalis, of Team 48 from Hoboken, New Jersey, is about to Sawzall the roof of his station wagon. “Uh-oh,” he says. “They can’t stop us from making a convertible, can they?” Later, after nailing Roman candles to the side panels and lighting them while he works, he shouts, “Awesome! Now we have ventilation!” —JJ

An AMC Gremlin idles for a few seconds and fills the parking lot with an impenetrable fog of oil. More beer comes out. It is a circus, sideshow, cruise-in, commune, festivale d’freak, and just a bunch of dudes fixing cars. Look left: shitbox. Look right: shitbox. Shitbox pulling up to the stop sign; shitbox leaving the gas pumps; shitbox waiting at a red light. It’s like some perverted theme park. It’s a Disney ride: it’s a crap world after all!

(Singing! “It’s a world of laughter, a world of tears; it’s a world of leakage, a world of beers. There’s no further we can sink, so just have another drink, it’s a crap world after all . . .”) —SS

DAY 4 GADSDEN, ALABAMA, TO NEW ORLÉANS, LOUISIANA

You don’t usually notice the Cadillac’s lack of structural rigidity, because its frame and its suspension flex in fluid concert. It’s only when you hit the suspension’s bump stops that the chassis flex becomes apparent. My foot, which is resting on the floor, goes in one direction while my ass, which is sitting on the seat, goes the other. Other teams notice a similar lack of wholeness to their heaps. Felix says the UggTruck is made of “dandelion dust and unicorn farts.”

We see a sign indicating that New Orleans is only 100 miles away, and suddenly I no longer care about breaking down. As we hit 90 mph, I realize that we could have cut at least ten hours out of our trip by traveling this fast the whole way. Of course, that doesn’t include the time that we’d have spent in the hospital recovering from the resultant fiery crash. —JC

The goal is to have the limo running long enough to get to New Orleans, deliver it to our eBay suck—winner, and never see it again. We have made it across Lake Ponchartrain and head immediately for the French Quarter to celebrate our triumphant entry into town. On go the prom dress and the tuxes, as a guy with an iguana on his head walks by. —JJ

We change into our tuxes—our peach-colored, polyester tuxes—on the corner of Saint Louis and Royal streets in New Orleans. By this point, the limo’s roof has completely come loose and a flowing, floppy, duct-tape cape is trailing the driver’s door and flapping in the breeze. As we idle down the street, Jean and Jason perched on the roof, the car is surrounded by a sea of people. Drinks are tossed. High fives are thrown. Cheers erupt up from street corners.

“What,” one girl asks Jean, after seeing her tiara, “are you the queen of, honey?”

“Everything,” says Jean, without flinching. More cheers. A random dude comes to my window and leans in, drunkenly. “I cannot explain why,” he grins, swilling his drink, “but I’m strangely turned on by all this.”

Regis, trailing us on foot for a few blocks to take pictures, climbs back into the car, shaking his head and laughing. He futzes around in his bag, looking for something. He finds it, laughs again, and sticks it in my face. “Dude!” he says. “Want a pretzel?” —SS

As we pull up to our New Orleans hotel at 5:16 p.m., I’m typing a text message to my hysterical Italian mother, telling her that she can stop planning my funeral. My typing is interrupted by an incoming text message from eBay—the limo’s auction ended literally the minute we parked the car. Someone paid \$394 for our shitbox! —JC

The auction is over, and we have a winner! It is us! Some fool child from across the lake in Covington has bid \$394 too much to be the proud owner, and he is waiting at our hotel with his high-school friends and cash to take delivery. I break the news that we’ve lost the hood ornament, among other things. “We actually have a Mercedes-Benz hood ornament to replace it with,” he says good-naturedly. I take his money with the same feeling.

Then we conscientiously remember to remove the live ammo we found in the rear ashtray and disappear into the French Quarter. —JJ

The next day, I find out that the limo’s new owner is only seventeen years old when his angry father calls and demands that I buy back the car. I decline the offer but manage to convince him that his son got a great deal. After all, by the time we arrived in the Big Easy, we’d worked out all the bugs.

“But,” I said, “you might want to have his school’s metal shop weld in a center frame section.” —JC ■