

The 2009 AACA Founders Tour in West Texas

By Lou Fritz & Al Lawson

The 21st AACA Founders Tour is now in the books. It was held in Odessa and Midland Texas – May 4th to 9th – just a mere 1,800 miles and a couple of mountain ranges from Maryland. It's real summer-like in west Texas in May.

The host West Texas Region put on an interesting tour. The Region was 50 years old, but had dwindled to twelve members. Enter Sam Austin as president in 2005. They now have over 50 members with Sam as president.

Since the Tour's inception in 1988, five couples and Marty Roth have been on every one. Chesapeake Region's own Margaret and Al Lawson and Mary Jane and Lou Fritz are two of the five couples.

At the pre-tour gathering, Sam promised to "WOW" us during the week. The original planners dropped the tour in Sam's lap last October. Sam and his wife Vickie, and Tour Chair Lynn McLean, along with a handful of other members, picked up the pieces and hosted the whole tour.

Sunday: The evening social was delicious finger food and sandwiches with ice cream for dessert. The entertainment was provided by a group of Spanish dancers. After the social gathering we were invited to Sam's Bird Nest located on the rear of his house, twelve miles from the host hotel.

Monday: This was the longest day covering 190 miles. We toured the town of Andrews. The highlight was the new school. The students demonstrated the wonderful acoustics via the school chorus on stage, and then we toured the Olympic pool, and basketball court. Lunch was Texas Steak fingers. An evening banquet was planned with an Elvis impersonator.

Tuesday: It was an easy day – only 60 miles. A commemorative air museum was the featured morning attraction. Then we went to a large WWII airplane collection and an art collection consisting of 34 panels cut away from the nose section of planes before they were recycled.



From the top: Rodeo demonstration at Odessa College; Mildred & Al Lawson; Mary Jane & Lou Fritz.

We lunched at the Petroleum Museum, where we looked at the exhibits. Also, at the Petroleum Museum we viewed a collection of Jim Hall's Chaparral racing cars. Hall has a background in engineering, and is infatuated with racing and aerodynamics. There is a wing dedicated to his racing career.

That evening we went to a drive-in movie. They had a special showing of *American Graffiti*.

Wednesday: Because west Texas is so vast, there were long drives between Places of interest. This day was 182

miles. We traveled 50 miles to Pyote, Texas. It was a small museum but was filled with a lot of memorabilia. Pyote was the center of a WWII salvaging operation. The B-29 bomber Enola Gay, which dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, was flown there in 1953. Due to its historic significance it was sent to the Smithsonian.

Later we went to Sandhills State Park, which is a beautiful beach, but without any water. Just the wind currents shifting the sand dunes.

In the evening we all drove our cars to downtown Midland to the Yucca Theater to see the Staerkel family. It was a spectacular performance by three very talented musicians. Their range was five octaves and they played many different instruments.

Thursday: We went to Susie's South Forty candy factory. They were featured on the Food Network for their Texas Trash (a white chocolate mix of broken pretzels, cereal, and nuts). In the afternoon we went to Odessa College Rodeo Arena, and had live demonstrations of the roping arts.

The Director of the college presented an award to the car he liked the best – a 1957 Thunderbird.

Friday: We toured to Big Spring and the Webb Air Museum. We then caravanned to our lunch stop at the Town Hall where the local police escorted us through town so that we could drive through the Veterans home, and the senior citizens rest home.

At the end of lunch we were introduced to the mayor and the police chief, who chose their favorite cars. Mary Jane and Lou Fritz's 1957 Porsche Speedster was picked by the mayor, and the chief picked Brenda and Dave Kaiser's Kaiser.

At the wrap-up banquet, the members who have been on all 21 Founders Tours were recognized and given certificates. Tour Chairperson Sam Austin and the West Texas Region members put on a tour to remember.