

My Experience With Columbia Valley Luxury Cars

Phil Reece, September 3, 2010

So, my story begins on March 23, 2010 with the birth of our daughter Lucy. My wife and I soon after realized that her 2000 VW New Beetle was not going to be an adequate “family vehicle,” nor was my manual transmission and decently-tuned Mazda 3, nor was my lifted and highly modified Jeep Grand Cherokee. So like most new fathers I decided to part with one of my “fun” vehicles, which ended up being the Mazda. While searching for a family vehicle for my wife I realized that my lifted Grand Cherokee was not going to be conducive to work life as a mortgage originator; Mud terrain tires and suits don't blend well together. So started the search for a “cheap” 2nd vehicle for myself.

Over the years I have owned and loved the following BMWs: a 1984 528e, a 1987 325e and a 1995 318ti. All great cars in their own right, they all lacked the “guts” I was looking for in my new Summer-time daily driver. I missed my 528e the most (being my 1st car and all), but I didn't want another E28; I wanted something sportier. The search narrowed down to a 2-door E30, specifically a 325is if I could locate one in good condition, which is very hard to find in the Northeast due to heavy use of salt on our winter roads.



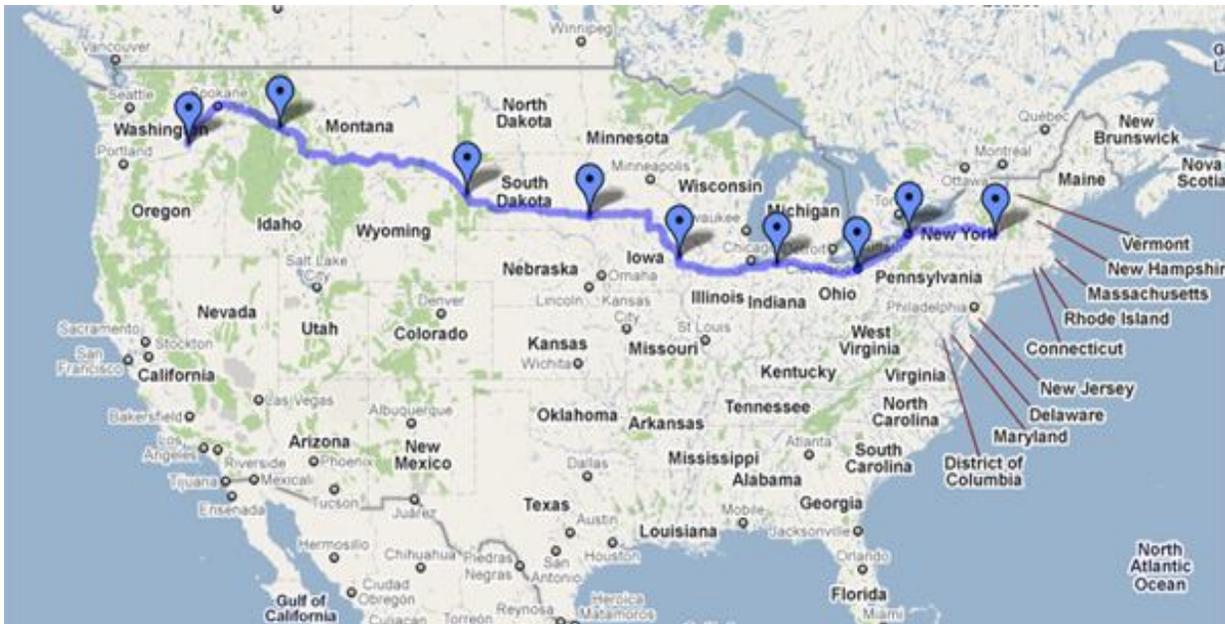
After an exhausted search I spotted an add on Autotrader for a Zinnoberrot 1987 325is, coincidentally the same color as my old 325e. The link provided on the listing forwarded me to the Columbia Valley Luxury Cars website where I found 40-some-odd high resolution photos and a fairly complete mechanical history of the vehicle. I soon realized that I MUST have this car, plus it was priced somewhat close to my expense budget. Fearing it might sell or be sold I contacted the owner of Columbia Valley Luxury Car, Nathan Merz. He confirmed that there was interest in it from other buyers but it had not yet been sold. The only problem was that I had not yet purchased a new car for my wife which was the intent of this game of “Vehicle Shuffle.” Having the most understanding wife in the world, she agreed that I should buy the car now before it sells... and the story begins.

I made arrangements with Nathan to pick up the vehicle in couple of weeks. The plan was to fly out from Albany, NY to Pasco, WA and drive it back across country. In the meantime I had recruited a friend and fellow car enthusiast, Kevin, to help me out as co-pilot on this cross-country trip. You see, I had done a very similar trip with Kevin one year prior where I was the co-pilot, so it wasn't hard to twist his arm.

We arrived at Pasco Airport at on August 13th at about 4:45pm where Nathan was waiting with the car. I'm not even sure I had a chance to shake hands with him before I was pouring over the vehicle. It looked fantastic! We did a quick visual inspection of the car and then boogied on over to his office. Driving it was sensory overload, immediately bringing me back to when I was 18 and owned my 325e. I knew that within the next hour (after the formalities of title and check transfer I was going to be a BMW owner again).



Nathan was great, I could tell I was working with a real BMW fan boy. He had said many times that he was happy the car was being sold to an enthusiast. Around 6pm we began taping the front of the car with a makeshift hood bra made out of blue painters tape (an old car show/road rally trick) and began our road trip East. We shook hands with Nathan, not before he invited me back to Washington next year for the E30 Picnic (the largest gathering of BMW E30s in the U.S.).



I had mapped out an itinerary the week prior and thought that we could make it to Missoula, Montana the first night (approximately a 6 hour drive). It took a little longer than I had estimated, but in large part due to a run in with Missoula's finest. About 15 minutes outside of Missoula my radar detector (which, yes, I did bring with me) started buzzing. I was probably only going about 8 miles over the limit, but it was the middle of the night. Doing his job, the Sheriff's Deputy asked me a whole slew of questions. The first was, "Where are you headed?" I told him "New York by way of Missoula." His next question was, "What's in Missoula?" This was the turning point in the conversation. I had him laughing when I said, "A Super 8 for 75 bucks." After trying to explain the details of how I don't have the car registered yet, it's loosely titled to my name and that I am a New York resident with Washington plates the Sheriff let us go with a warning. By 1am we were sound asleep.



The next 60 hours was comprised of heavy driving, the occasional “pit stop,” food and fuel breaks, a trip to Devil's tower in Wyoming, a visit to Wall Drug, I-90 through South Dakota at 3am, a quick shower at a relative of Kevin's in Chicago and 3 combined hours of sleep. Most of all, the car was mechanically flawless the entire trip.

After this trip I can say that I will never sell this car. I have plans on restoring little things as well as a short list of modifications I intend to do over the years, but I would be happy driving it just the way it is. It is a blast to drive and has SO much style. It's nice to get waves from fellow Bimmer-heads again, especially those in Classic BMWs. This 23 year old car has found a happy place in my heart and my garage.

Thanks Nathan, looking forward to hopefully doing business with you in the future.

Regards,
Phil Reece

Trip Report:

- Pasco, Washington to Schenectady = 2,800 miles
- 66 hours (78 hours including the initial flight to Pasco)
- 8 hours of total sleep over 3 days
- States visited (in order): Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York
- Average driving speed = 65mph
- 24.6mpg
- No tickets
- No accidents or broken bits
- No mechanical problems
- Tons of bugs