

# Rock 'n' roll tour of America



Wishing to be a king of the road is an American obsession, writes **Mary Bolling**

**T**HE words on the page are scribbled, hectic, a note left as the writer was running out the door.

On the big screen above me, an enthusiastic Bruce Springsteen tells the story of his classic *Born to Run*.

An album meant to capture a long hot summer night, the title track is blaring through level five of the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame.

The past three hours, delving into the most treasured relics of my most favourite musicians, are completely forgotten.

*Runaway American Dream* screams from the single glass-cased sheet of the Boss's lyrics, and suddenly, desperately, I want to be on the open road.

And believe me, I'm not alone. Deep down in their rock 'n' roll hearts, every American seems to feel it.

They too were born to run. Meant to be free fallin'.

Completely unable to wait to get on the road again.

A strange national obsession — but it only takes a map to explain it.

More than 3.9 million miles of road network criss-cross the United States. (That's 6.3 million kilometres in our terms and, for perspective, Australia has a comparatively tiny 815,000km of the same.)

With so much road, then, the desire to be king of it is unrelenting. Little wonder that harking the call of the highway is synonymous with being American.

And after six months in the States, I can hear it too — it's just a pity I don't own a car.

Luckily, rock 'n' roll also tells me that cars aren't necessary for all those born under a wandering star.

According to the Allman Brothers, becoming a ramblin' man is as easy as being born in the back of a Greyhound bus, specifically on Highway 41.

(For some reason, the possibility of on-bus childbirth makes the infamously unreliable national bus network, usually run out of particularly seedy bus stations, seem even less attractive.)

Instead, sharing rides is my rock 'n' roll solution.

And since January, I've clocked more than 10,000 miles of interstate highways, riding shotgun with whoever happens to have been going my way.



## links

**take the long way home:** Plan a US road trip with advice from the throngs who have gone before, [www.roadtripamerica.com](http://www.roadtripamerica.com)

**going my way:** The rideshare section of community listings website Craigslist can put you in touch with a ride in any city in America, and most drivers are happy to meet up before a long haul, or provide character references, [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)

**hello Cleveland:** The Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland is the perfect road trip destination, and bound to inspire plenty more — but make sure you set aside a day to take in the huge history collection, [www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com)

**highway to hell:** Every music website has a list of favourite road trip albums, but any Australian knows the ultimate is Bon Scott-era AC/DC, [www.acdc.com](http://www.acdc.com)

Clockwise from left: Mary and Annalise find a hire car helps the road trip along in California; Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame claims to mark the birthplace of genre; Country queen Loretta Lynn's ranch between Memphis and Nashville; rock-themed, Christian message t-shirts at a gas station in New Mexico.

The preferred travel mode of thousands of cash-flow-conscious Americans, in theory it's a simple exchange where road trippers, who actually have a car, split fuel costs with those who don't and everyone gets where they're going.

But like any good road trip, nothing is that simple.

Like a ride from Los Angeles to Dallas.

A seemingly endless stretch where the Arizona desert replaces the Cali desert, which shifts into the New Mexico desert, which rolls into the Texas desert; flat plains to flat cacti-spotted plains to flat nodding donkey oil well plains, for more than 20 hours of unswerving Interstate 10.

I could see why my driver, a former punk drummer, would need company to keep him awake on the only-stop-for-petrol long haul.

Less predictably, I also come in helpful as a captive sounding-board, as he guides me unwaveringly through his just-completed memoirs, of groupie conquests, failed marriages, and in-band screaming matches.

But knocking over 1500 miles straight is going to give anyone cabin fever.

Half the charm of the highway is finally pulling off it — and every exit offers another adventure.

Like the truck stop in New Mexico, where my two teenage rideshares stretch their legs.

While one invests in a \$20 T-shirt emblazoned with a guitar pick and the message Pick Jesus, the other, unbeknownst to me, shoplifts a \$4 energy drink.

The shop assistant, however, is not so unenlightened, and chases

our car as we pull out, not stopping. All becomes clear a couple miles down the road, when blue lights flash behind us.

Half a day later, I have learnt that bail for getting arrested in New Mexico is minimum \$1000; that bail bonds stores don't take cars with interstate number plates; and that there really is no reason anyone would want to visit Las Cruces.

While the shoplifter pays for his non-consumed energy drink with three days in the clink, his Jesus-picking mate plays Good Samaritan, and drives me on to my Arizona destination without further incident.

When not clashing with the law, however, the freedom offered by America's open road is indisputable. Spectacular countryside rolls for mile after mile.

Through Utah, the snow-capped

blue mountains keep my camera permanently on the dashboard.

And with the skies wide open, the road usually the same, and traffic cameras a rare sighting, the freedom also seems to extend to pick your speed, over and above the 70mph limit, like you own the road.

Back in Cleveland, I walk out of the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame to see the car I arrived in.

The sun is shining, and my Boston to Chicago rideshare, Dan (who happily detoured here for my rock 'n' roll purposes) hasn't driven off with the entirety of my on-road possessions.

Why would anyone wait to get on the road again?

**Next week: Peace, love and rock and roll at Bonnaroo Music Festival**

**YOUR SAY** What's your favourite road trip? Share your experience with readers. Email [shstravel@heraldsun.com.au](mailto:shstravel@heraldsun.com.au)

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