

# Colonel Ed Fletcher's National Record Chamber of Commerce Run Across the Continent—San Diego to Savannah, Ga.

By Colonel Ed Fletcher

## FOREWORD

With our all-year national highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific nearing completion, we believe the reader will find Colonel Fletcher's narrative of the building of this great highway, and his record-breaking run across the continent, interesting reading. This remarkable trip was made in his family Cadillac Sedan, San Diego to Savannah, including all stops, in two days, twenty-three hours and fifteen minutes, October, 1926, and breaking the fastest national record across the continent by eleven hours and fifty-six minutes. Only an airplane has ever made faster time, and the Colonel's record breaks that of the fastest passenger train by 28 hours.

The San Diego Chamber of Commerce has had for fifteen years as its chairman of National Highways, Colonel Ed Fletcher, who has given much of his time and money in furthering the national highway aspirations of San Diego and Southern California. In this pamphlet is furnished a partial report of the activities of Colonel Fletcher's committee, that we believe will be of interest to the traveling public.

Colonel Fletcher, as president of the Dixie-Overland Highway, San Diego to Savannah, vice-president of the Lee Highway, San Diego to Washington, as well as the Old Spanish Trail, San Diego to St. Augustine, Florida, we feel has rendered distinguished service to Southern California and the entire country which these highways traverse. San Diego owes a lasting debt of gratitude to him.

This gives the reader some idea of the conditions and possibilities of our Southern All-Year Highway for future transcontinental travel. For further information, write San Diego Chamber of Commerce.

HOWARD F. WORTH, President  
San Diego Chamber of Commerce



The object of the run was to demonstrate the feasibility of the route over the Dixie Overland highway, San Diego to Savannah, Georgia, and returning via the Old Spanish Trail, St. Augustine, Florida, to San Diego, also to report conditions, create renewed interest, and encourage the early completion of the missing links, that we may have all-year national highways from the Atlantic to the Pacific completed at an early date.

By telegraph before leaving, we arranged for permission from state, county and city officials wherever possible to make the run.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, October 19th, the day before we started, our friend, Dean Blake, U. S. Weather Bureau, reported that a cyclone was developing around Porto Rico and would strike Savannah, Georgia, by Saturday noon, the 23rd; that we would get a slight touch of rain in New Mexico from a storm working south from British Columbia on Wednesday afternoon, but that otherwise the weather would be clear.

My son, Ed Fletcher, Jr., had dared me to make the race, and "the old man" had to call him. We made the trip in our family car, a Cadillac sedan, which had been run 17,000 miles. One of our boys, Milton Jackson, was to drive the car to Tucson, and Ed Fletcher, Jr., and La Vern Kingsbury from there to Savannah.

We left the Western Union telegraph office at four a. m. October 20, 1926, certified time. We had red spotlights on our left for signalling at night, and white spotlights on our right. Every arrangement was made in advance by telegraph as to where we were to pick up our different guides, and replenish our supply of gas and oil, as well as food.

The remarkable thing about the trip was that every man was in his place across the continent, and our only delay was five minutes at Vicksburg waiting for a ferry to cross the Mississippi river.

The first two hours through darkness, we crossed a mountain range four thousand feet elevation and reached the Colorado desert. The police patrol met us at Dixie and paced us through El Centro and the renowned Imperial Valley to Yuma at a mile a minute. The Sand Hills in the early morning sun were a thing of beauty never to be forgotten.

We reached Yuma, Arizona, at 7:55 o'clock, three hours and 55 minutes from San Diego. A motor cop showed us through Yuma, and we were off for Phoenix via the Gila Valley. There is nothing more thrilling than a drive across Arizona on a cool Fall day, with its variety of desert growth, gigantic cacti, marvelous colored mountain peaks and wide expanse of irrigated and desert land. We forded the river at Gillespie dam without trouble, where the last bridge between Yuma and Phoenix is now being built, and soon were in the Salt River valley at Hasayampa where speed cops met us and showed the way through forty miles of marvelously irrigated land into Phoenix. We averaged over 50 miles an hour, including all stops, San Diego to Phoenix, making the run in eight hours and two minutes—405 miles. A large crowd met us, but in ten minutes we were off for Tucson, 110 miles away.

The Tucson speed cops were ready to show us the way in, but one of them in making a turn in the road at a mile a minute, missed, and our last glimpse of him was as he went through the sagebrush. Picking up our guide at Tucson, we were forced to go by way of Benson and Wilcox to Lordsburg on account of bridges out (now rebuilt) from recent storms on the Bisbee-Douglas road. We forded the San Pedro River without help.

We arrived at Lordsburg, New Mexico, at 7 p. m., filled up with gas and oil, and headed for our next destination, El Paso, picking up a guide at Deming. True to prediction we ran across some bad weather and muddy roads which slowed us up a little, but at last we reached the paved highway, a straight stretch seventeen miles into El Paso. Ten miles away we received the signal from the El Paso motor cops and gave a welcoming answer that we were on our way. It was with a thrill of delight that we pulled into El Paso three hours and fifteen minutes ahead of our schedule, arriving there at 12:05 a. m. Thursday morning, twenty hours and fifteen minutes from San Diego—832 miles away—averaging nearly 43 miles per hour, including all stops.

With everything in readiness, our car was soon re-fueled. We had a wonderful dinner, and in forty-five minutes were on our way over the Sierra Blanca range of mountains, headed for Fort Worth with a new guide. We arrived at Kent, Texas, the junction

of the Old Spanish Trail and the Dixie Overland highway, at 4:55 a. m., approximately 1000 miles from San Diego.

We struck muddy roads Thursday morning through Texas, had bad detours, stopped an hour to repair two punctures, picked up our guide again at Midland, Texas, and in the early evening passed through Mineral Wells.

Five miles out of Fort Worth, city officials were kind enough to meet us. After a "howdy", three motor cops showed us through Fort Worth at 55 miles an hour without accident. The noise of the sirens we will never forget, but the traffic sure gave us the right of way.

Entering Dallas, motor cops again led the way, and we arrived at our destination for gas and oil at 6:30 p. m. Thursday, Pacific time. The crowds were enormous. Many "darkies" grabbed our car for re-fueling, and three of them rushed us up an elevator for a shower bath and rub-down. A wonderful dinner awaited us below, and after a stop of forty minutes, we were again on our way for Shreveport, Louisiana.

It was a wonderful moonlight night and a delightful run through the forests. Speed cops picked us up a few miles out of Shreveport and showed us the way in, our arrival being at 1:15 a. m. To our utter amazement, 300 people were awaiting us. Another delightful dinner, our car re-fueled, and in 20 minutes we were off again guided by a captain of the police patrol of the Louisiana Highway commission—a dead-game sport.

Never will we forget that 205 mile ride which we made in four hours and twenty minutes through the forests of Louisiana, the Vicksburg—Montgomery morning sunrise, the lights and shadows, Lagoons, the forests and waving moss, and above it all, a thrill that cannot be put in words as we raced toward victory.

We arrived at Vicksburg at 7:55 o'clock, central time, and were only delayed five minutes by the ferry which took us across the Mississippi river. A few moments' stop at Jackson, a new guide, and we were off for Montgomery, Alabama.

It was a hard grind the second day. The boys driving were very tired, but eternal hope of a national record spurred them on. A western T-bone steak at Meridian, where we stopped for an hour, put new life into us all.

We arrived at Montgomery, Alabama, at 6:25 p. m. Friday, Pacific time. We got immediate service, and a new guide showed us the way, in two hours and twenty minutes—93 miles—to Columbus, Georgia, where a mob of several hundred people with tremendous enthusiasm, welcomed our arrival. We still had 278 miles to go—the last leg of our trip. Another good dinner, another guide, and we were off for our destination—Savannah.

As predicted by the weather bureau, the clouds had gathered, and everything indicated rain. We had wonderful dirt roads all the way to Savannah, but if the rain came our situation would have been hopeless for fast driving. La Vera Kingsbury took the wheel, and also had to give it up at another 50 miles. We had had practically no sleep since we left San Diego. We all saw things that were not, and vice versa. Yet the boys, with marvelous determination, stuck to it. We drove for 50 miles through a dense fog at a mile a minute, seemingly cutting off the tail of one pig in the darkness and the snout of another. We also ran around a Ford truck without rights out of Savannah, Georgia, where we were stopped by the city officials of Savannah, and motor cops again showed us the way in. Only one, however, could keep up with us, and we lost him two miles out of Savannah as he rounded a turn. A newsboy showed us the way to the Western Union telegraph office, where we went for our registered time. We had made the last 278 miles in five hours and 25 minutes, or an average of 50 miles per hour, completing the distance across the continent, including all stops—2535 miles—in 71 hours and 15 minutes, breaking the national record, ocean to ocean, by eleven hours and 56 minutes. We had made the run in less than three days, had beaten the fastest passenger train by 28 hours, and only an airplane has to date beaten us across the continent.

Within four hours from the time we arrived at Savannah, Georgia, it commenced to rain, and in 24 hours thereafter, rained 3.14 inches. The Fates were with us!

I cannot thank enough the chambers of commerce, as well as the