

# Winter 2000-2001

## A tough year...

Well, last year, I got a better response from the recipients of my letter than I expected, so I'll do it again this year. Not to mention that it's one of the few times I get to use my desktop publishing equipment for something other than business or administrative stuff.

This is what I'd call a tough year. This is the year I finally realized that I can't do it all, and shouldn't even try. This was the year that I had to decide what I'm going to do, and what I need to stop doing. This was also the year I had to realize that I can't do it all at the *same time*, that I need to take my time.

There were some major accomplishments in my life, which I'm trying to focus on, rather than what I did not get accomplished. The year started out by being made a permanent position offer with Delphi Automotive. That was a rather easy choice to make, since with all of the benefits of being a contract employee, being a permanent employee is still a better deal. I have begun to realize how much I do enjoy where I work. True, as the workload has increased, so has my responsibility and stress level, but I have come to the realization that the people that I work with are all committed to working as a team, and quite a camaraderie has developed in the last 4-1/2 years. It feels good to know that I work with many that I consider friends.

June was the month that my brother Kris and Rachel Houser were married. I was honored to be asked to be Kris' best man, and although I was not in the best of spirits at the time due to external circumstances, I was still very happy to attend his wedding in Port Townsend, Washington. Members of the Port Townsend Orchestra performed string quartet music, and combined with the views from the lawn of the Old Alcohol Plant over the harbor, it was the perfect setting.

A big part of my life are the trucks that I love to work on and restore. Unfortunately, I began to realize that I have taken on more than I can accomplish in a reasonable amount of time. The only vehicle that I could really work on was the 1959 Willys Jeep CJ-5. I was able to convert the original steering system to a modern GM Saginaw power steering system, as well as convert the drum brake system to a disc brake system. The final "project" was to install 35" mud tires, which I was able to try out in late July near Traverse City and St. Ignace, Michigan. After that, I was overloaded, and stuck to essential repairs and oil changes on my commuter car.

August brought a unique experience – I was able to travel with a few members of the Wolverine Four-Wheelers to Ouray, Telluride and Silverton, Colorado. Certainly the high point of the year. As familiar as I have been with mountain scenery in Washington, I was still stunned by what we saw. Plenty of high-altitude driving, to be sure. The minimum altitude was 7,000 feet, and we had ventured up to over

13,500 feet as we crested the pass summits. Many old mining towns dotted the terrain, remnants of an era that ended over a century ago. My good friend Rick accompanied me on the trip, and helped do some of the driving, which was about a day and a half each way between southeast Michigan and Ouray, Colorado. We set up camp at the Ouray KOA campground, which turned out to be the perfect place for the group to stay during the week-long trip. Hopefully, we can do



*Stopping for pictures at Yankee Boy Basin*

the trip again in the next few years. Being such a major undertaking for most, we'll probably stay closer to home next year.

Other trips I took this year were the usual trip to West Branch, Michigan in February and the trip to the Smoky Mountains in North



*Bridal Veil Falls, Telluride (left) and posing with the Wrangler*



Carolina and Tennessee. Both are highly anticipated events, and I look forward to them every year. Maybe next year, I'll include more on these trips.

Finally, speaking of trucks, one project I have embarked on is creating an internet shopping site for a business, whose owner is painting my Suburban. Unfortunately, I think that neither one of us had imagined how much work this was going to be, and we both hope to be done with the other's project in the next few weeks. I hope that Craig likes the web site as much as I like how the Suburban is coming out!

Back to February, I had located on the internet an old organ for sale in Akron, Ohio. I had been looking for an instrument to practice on, and this particular organ seemed like it would be perfect. It is an instrument built in 1880 by Hinners Organ Company in Pekin, Illinois. It is an interesting specimen, being one of the few reed organs built with two manuals and a full pedal board. Its previous owner took a lot of time restoring it, and with only a few minor adjustments and only 5 missing reeds left to take care of, it is already proving to be the perfect practice instrument.

With already too much to handle, I decided in August that I was going to search for another motor coach to replace the Blue Bird that I sold in 1998. Looking back, I could really have done without the extra hassle, but I'm still glad I found one. Again, it was another example of something for sale on the internet, which has become a powerful tool for keeping my automotive hobby alive (and my bank account distressed). I lo-

located a 1972 Blue Bird which had been professionally converted to a motorhome in 1987, and so far, I am very pleased with it. It has had a little engine trouble, which was not a surprise, but my springtime project will be to replace the gasoline engine with an International diesel. Again, I don't need the additional stress and hassle, but I guess I live for this sort of stuff. I suppose it keeps me out of trouble.

Finally, I'll get into the last event of the year – the snow storm a few weeks ago which totally immobilized me for quite a while. Around Thanksgiving, I had caught pneumonia, which was exacerbated by me ignoring it until it turned into chest pain. Before I had recovered, we had around 18 inches of snow one night, and I was unable to clear my own driveway to get to work for several days. When I finally tried to



clear it by hand, it made me sick for another week. Since my 59 Jeep hasn't had its plow installed yet, I didn't have too many options. After being given an old, broken snow blower by a friend, I'm good to go, back in business. For this reason, I haven't been able to get Christmas cards out until now. Better late than never!

I must admit, however, that the scenery around here has been fantastic. I've taken many photos of the property in the last week, and posted them on the internet for all to enjoy. Once the driveway and sidewalk had been cleared, I was able to enjoy the snow.

So, next year, I hope to write about how I was able to relax a bit more, and how I've become less ambitious, concentrating on projects that need to be finished rather than starting new ones. Of course, I would like to thank all of you who have helped me throughout the year, whether you know it or not, and whether I know it or not. I hope to be able to return the favor whenever possible. I wish all of you a happy and safe holiday season, and a prosperous year in 2001.

Peace,

Mark

