

# The Last Sunset Key West 2009

by Bill Marshall

The Last Sunset began with an early sunrise departure for many of those attending the fifth and final NAMGAR Regional GT in Key West Florida in April. NAMGAR members from twenty two states, Canada and Germany converged on the Florida Keys for the start of the event in Key Largo. While many traveled great distances, Jim Danielson took long distance honors driving his MGC 1,817 miles from Lincoln, Nebraska to Key West.

This year's event started in Key Largo as a Poker Run through the Keys to our destination of the Blue Marlin Hotel in Key West. Tuesday morning began with a beautiful Florida sunrise but with the threat of rain forecasted for the 10:00 am start of Run. Sure enough, as the start time approached, the rain came in a deluge and the parking lot was soon flooded with inches of standing water. NAMGAR Chairman George Mer-



Anchors Aweigh

ryweather is of course no stranger to rain at GT events and has developed unannounced ways to thwart bad weather. Under his leadership, the rain quickly moved out, and we were able to begin our hundred mile drive with tops down and sunscreen lathered on, stopping for playing cards at Islamorada Key, Marathon Key, Big Pine Key and Bay Point Key. At each stop we were met by an enthusiastic couple who took plenty of pictures of our cars. They were Robert and Gabrielle Muller, NAMGAR members from Germany who were determined not to miss this final Key West event.

After settling in at the Blue Marlin, we once again were on the road Tuesday evening to the Key West Yacht Club for the NAMGAR-hosted reception and the first of our three car shows. Cumulative voting by the public would determine the overall winner. With sixty one cars registered for the

GT, this was a fine opportunity to renew friendships with past Key West attendees and to meet many of the First Timers that heeded the call of "you must attend a Key West Regional GT" at least once in your MGA career.

Wednesday morning we gathered for our second event which was the Competitive Island Rally. Each participant had received a map of Key West in the registration package. The rules of the Rally were simple: Use the map to find the locations corresponding with the clues provided, note your answer and return as quickly as possible to the Check-In point of Smathers Beach. First team back with the correct answers won. Simple, except a number of the roads corresponding with the clues were *not* on the map provided. It quickly became necessary to enlist the help of the "locals" to find the smaller streets. It was not unexpected that Key West GT veterans and Florida residents Ray and Jean Gambini were the first to return to Smathers Beach with the correct answers.

Parched by the challenge of the Rally, the next stop was the Hurricane Hole Marina on Stock Island for our second car show and the welcomed cold refreshments at neighboring Hurricane Joe's Bar & Restaurant.

One request from those attending Key West in 2008 was a little more down time to allow some exploring of the many shops, historical sites and other points of interest within walking distance of our hotel. Thus after the car show we were treated to Wednesday afternoon "off" and all day Thursday until the start of the parade Thursday evening. The pool at the Blue Marlin became the social center with many of us taking the opportunity to soak up some Florida sun while enjoying our vacation time.

After a full day of sight-seeing and relaxing, Thursday evening we gathered as a group to caravan the few short blocks to the starting point of the Conch Re-

public Independence Celebration Parade. The parade is always the highlight of our week in Key West and this year was no exception. Veteran participants brought along bags of beads to supplement the increased number of beads provided by George Mer-ryweather. Fred and Cindy Skomp, with their gold 100,000<sup>th</sup> MGA in the parade for the first time, had creatively selected all gold-colored beads to adorn their car. As in



Readying For The Rallye

past years, the side challenge was to reach parade spectators on the second floor balconies with beads, near impossible while seated in an A. Taking advantage of the slow pace, it was possible to step out of the car and make controlled throws to reach those in the good seats – to great applause when the toss was successfully caught.

Duval Street is proclaimed by Ripley's *Believe it or Not* as the longest street in the world, as one can drive the entire distance from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico on its path. This distance, combined with the April temperatures and slow pace of the parade always provides a test of



Photography by: Bill Marshall, Robert H. Mueller & Elizabeth Ten Eyck

the MGA cooling system. As in past years we lost a few participants early as the temperature gauges climbed, but most finished the parade with no ill effects, proving the dependability of the MGA. Fred announced we have a standing offer from the parade organizers to participate in the parade in future years regardless if NAMGAR returns to Key West or seeks a new Regional location.

With the parade route completed, bead supply exhausted, we returned to the Blue Marlin to recap the event and relax before Friday's main event – the Bocce Ball tournament. With fourteen teams of four, each game was an elimination round for one of



Where's My Mashie-Niblick?

the teams. Cheered on by spectators and fortified by the burgers and dogs prepared by Chef Fred on the grill, the competition was intense. Final eliminations had the team of Bruce and Bert Rauch, Carol Shamonsky and Jeff Zorn narrowly defeating the team of Sandy Hickman, Jim Bottomley, Sue Lyon and Mitzi Pittman for NAMGAR Bocce Ball honors.

Friday evening we once again mustered at the Blue Marlin to caravan to Mallory Square for our final car show and to witness the Naval Battle of the Great Conch Republic Independence Day celebrations. Mallory Square is right on the boardwalk and becomes somewhat of a circus at night with a collection of vaudevillians competing for the attention of the crowd. With our collection of British beauties, we had no problems attracting our share of spectators. But even

the car show took second place during the reenactment of the Great Conch Naval Battle during the fight for the independence of the Conch Republic.

The Florida Keys became the Conch Republic in 1982 as they declared their independence from the United States. It seems at some point the US Government Border Patrol decided it would be wise to check the identification of those leaving the Keys. With outrage over their treatment by the Border Patrol as foreigners when entering mainland Florida, the mayor of Key West declared independence from the USA in protest. The newly formed Conch Republic then declared war on the US, immediately surrendered and quickly requested foreign aid as a battle-torn nation. The annual reenactment of the Great Naval Battle of the Conch Republic that never took place is an event that strengthens the Conch Republic's claim as an independent Sovereign State of Mind.

Saturday dawned bright as another free day for sunning, sporting or shopping until we gathered in Mallory Square to board the *Party Cat* for our Sunset Cruise and Awards Banquet. The sunsets in Key West are spectacular as the sun disappears over the horizon in the Gulf of Mexico and even more so from the deck of a party boat. The cruise was to be a three hour cruise – hum, a three hour cruise? You guessed it, the group from Richmond Virginia, led by NAMGAR Vice Chairman Bruce Woodson showed up on board dressed as the cast from *Gilligan's Island!* With Kyle Leatherwood as Gilligan, Dennis Urick was filling the role as the Skipper, our millionaire and his wife Mike and Jennifer Ash, Katie Leatherwood as a movie star with Bruce and Carol Woodson playing the parts of the Professor and Mary Ann, complete with proper NAMGAR nametags for all. Of course the evening could not end without a rousing chorus of the theme song from *Gilligan's Island* by our intrepid



♪ ...Gilligan, The Skipper too, The millionaire and his wife, The movie star, The Professor, and Mary Ann ...

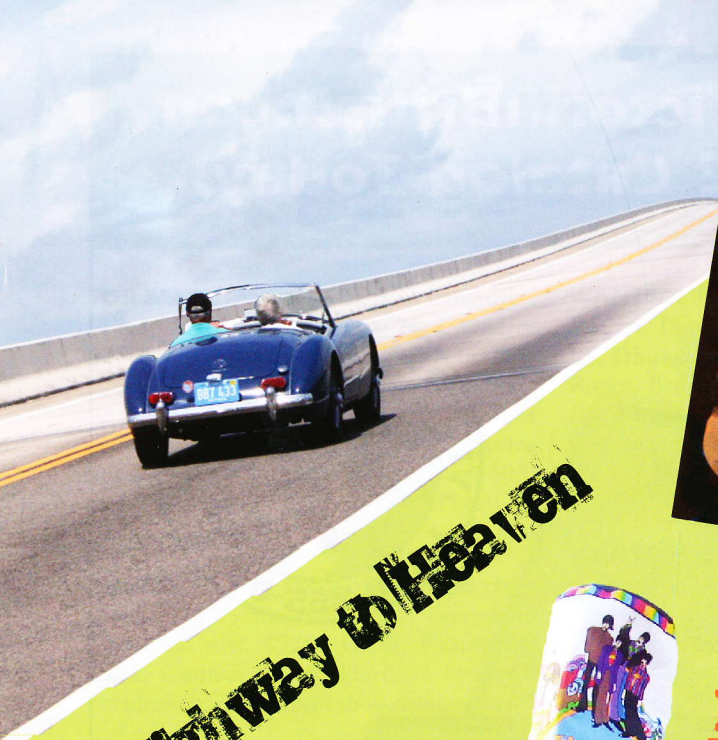
castaways.

After the final sunset of our week, it was time for the awards to be presented. The winner of the Poker Run with four aces was Jim Danielson of Nebraska, to go along with his Long Distance Award. The People's Choice Vote for MGA went to Barbara and Jerry Andres of Richmond, Virginia with Best Other British going to Hank Rippert of North Carolina for his MG TD. Before we reached the pier, there was one last award to present. In recognition of their commitment over these past five years in making the Key West Regional GT a success, Chairman George presented Fred and Cindy Skomp with a digital remembrance capturing the highlights of each Key West GT on behalf of NAMGAR and its members. Fred and Cindy are simply wonderful hosts and enthusiastic ambassadors of Key West and NAMGAR.

Despite being declared the Last Sunset, we know the sun will come up tomorrow – and that peek of sun on the horizon may just be a *Sunrise in Key West* in 2010 if there is enough clamor from the NAMGAR membership for a return to the Florida Keys and if our hosts Fred and Cindy are willing to have us back for a visit! ✨



Duval Street Debauchery!



Highway to Heaven

NAMGAR in Key West

# THE LAST SUNSET

Oh my!



He must be famous!  
He's signing her MGA! magazine.

