

# THE BEST OF THE

No question it's cliché, but it has to be said: There are so many roads but there is so little time. How can we find just the great ones? As Ed McMahon would say on *The Johnny Carson Show*, "Everything you ever wanted to know about the best roads is in the following list. Everything. You couldn't ask for a more complete list of the best American roads to drive."

And Johnny's response, said with his impish smirk, would be, "You are wrong, carbon monoxide breath!"

How is anyone able to choose the best five, 15, or 20 or even 50 roads in a country as large as the United States where there are thousands of miles of roads and thousands of acres of beautiful countryside? Sitting in urban traffic, one might become disoriented and forget that, nestled among the trees, hills and valleys, lie some of the world's most amazing roads just begging to be explored.

It is not an easy task to go out in a new Audi R8 or a classic Alfa Romeo 8C or even a vintage Ducati, and explore different states discover what is considered the ultimate road. Already I can see the wheels turning in your head with the question, "Will *American Driver Magazine* feature my favorite route?"

Discovering nirvana behind the steering wheel or handlebars of your favorite motoring device is very subjective. It is very similar to the skiing arguments about finding the perfect line on the slopes in Telluride: "It's too steep, it's not steep enough, there are too many bumps or not enough bumps, my legs hurt, my hat itches, the snow is too deep, it's too icy, my goggles are foggy!"

With roads, you will always hear: "It's too straight, it's too curvy, it's too flat, it's too treacherous, it's too slow to enjoy, it's too fast to enjoy and I can't even begin to think about seeing the scenery because my eyes are focused on the road and my hands are squeezing the life out of my steering wheel!"

Is there such a thing as a "perfect road?" As a seasoned driving traveler, I've created a litmus test to facilitate an efficient decision-making process.

There are always questions I ask whenever exploring new roads, of driving roads that already have a reputation. And, yes, some roads do come with a reputation.

The most important questions that lead me to any decision are: Is the road challenging, is the scenery captivating, is the history of the region interesting, are there nice places to eat and sleep and, mostly, will

it be fun? All highly subjective, of course, but what is an opinion without the rationale to back it up? Keep reading...

What follows is a selection of my favorite driving roads in North America. Some of these have been featured in past issues of *American Driver* and some are a preview of what's to come. So buckle your seatbelt or your helmet and hang on – as always, it's going to be a great drive.

## Arkansas: King Snake and the Arkansas Dragon

If you are a regular reader of *ADM*, you will know that I think Arkansas, the self-proclaimed "Natural State," has some of the most challenging roads of any state. Scenic Highway 7 has already been featured on these pages (Issue 407), and while Scenic 7 is a very good road indeed, it only whets the appetite as to the potential within Arkansas.

The roads have curves, elevation changes, beautiful geological variation and, just as important, they are impeccably maintained. Smoother, better-marked roads are difficult to find in any state. Two such roads are the 25-mile Highway 341 (King Snake) between Highway 14 to the south and Highway 5 to the north and the 30 mile Highway 9 (the Arkansas Dragon) between Mountain View and Melbourne.

## California: The Coast Road from San Luis Obispo to Oregon

This road has many different names as it snakes north from San Luis Obispo, such as Big Sur Highway, Pacific Coast Highway, Highway 1 and, when it joins Highway 101, the Redwood Highway.

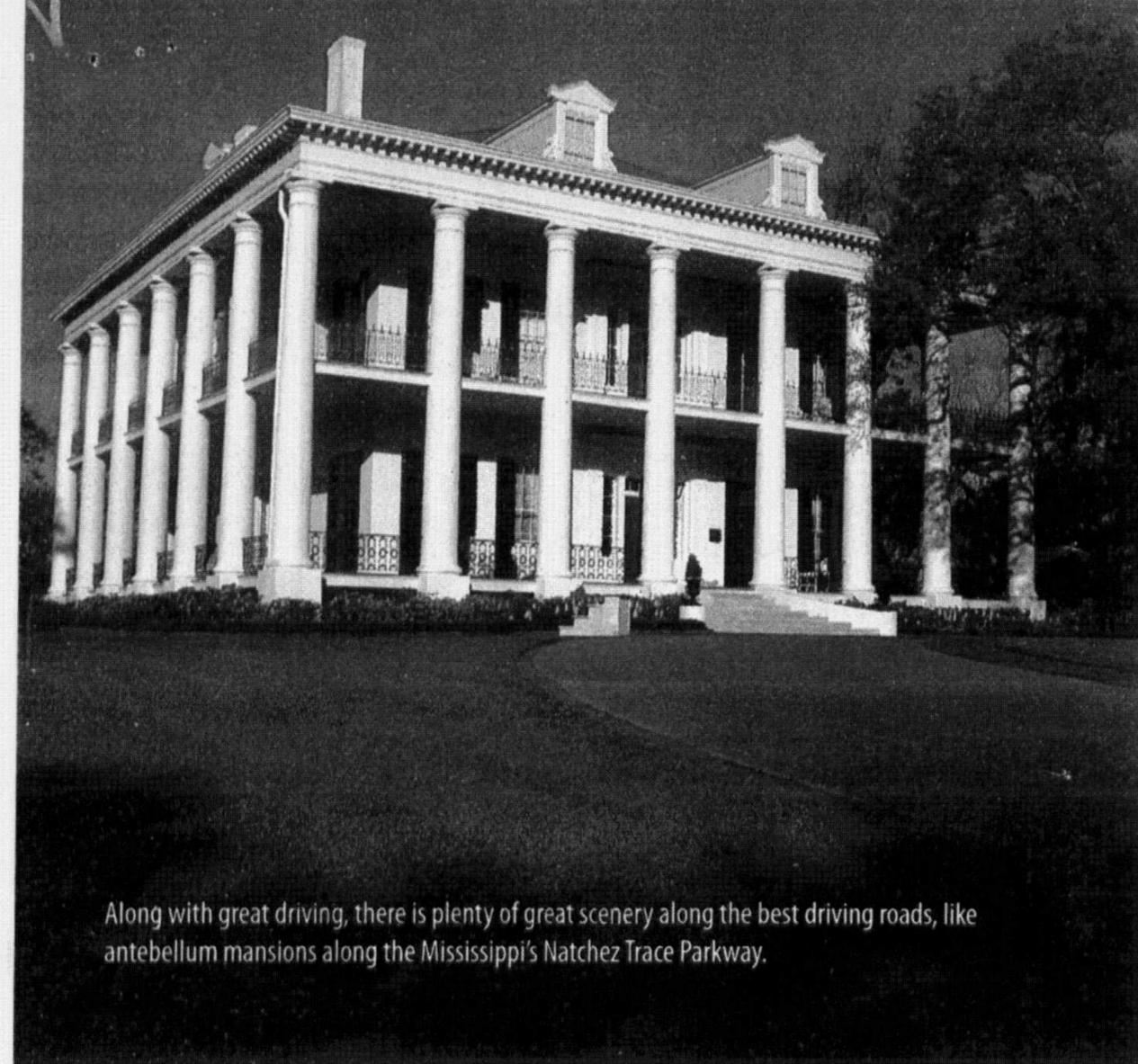
Another well-maintained road, this route passes along what is probably the greatest tourist mecca of any road in any state. Aside from being a great scenic drive, must-see stops are San Simeon, Monterey, Carmel Valley Loop, San Francisco, Muir Woods,

# BEST

*Tourmaster Ted Glover's List of Roads to Drive in 2008*

WORDS & PHOTOS TED GLOVER





Along with great driving, there is plenty of great scenery along the best driving roads, like antebellum mansions along the Mississippi's Natchez Trace Parkway.

and the gigantic redwoods growing along the coastal cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean as you approach the border with Oregon.

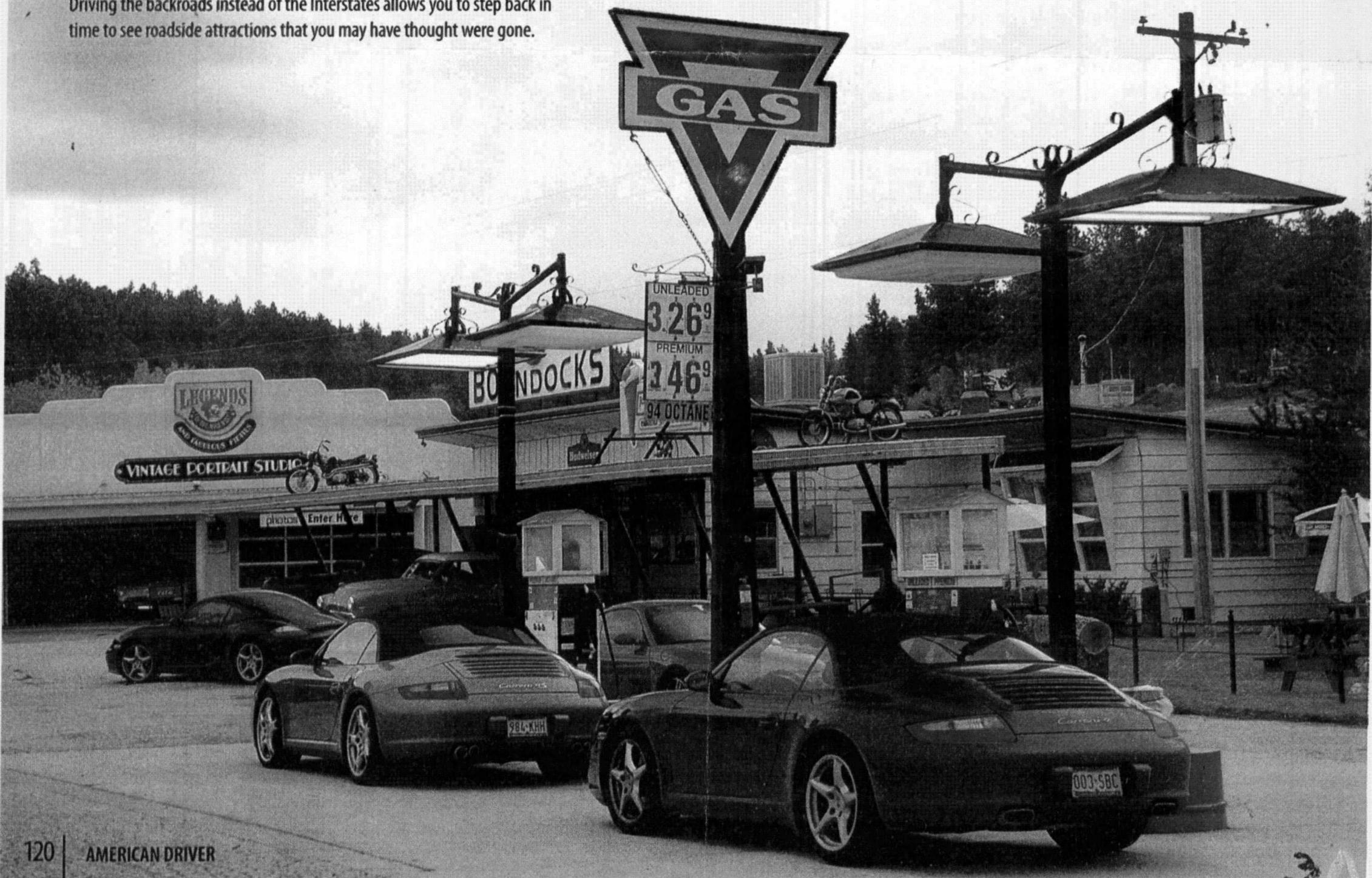
### Colorado: The San Juan Skyway

Located in the southwest corner of Colorado, this loop features over 200 miles of curves, elevation changes, fabulous vistas, with wonderful places to sleep and eat through the San Juan and Umcompahgre National Forests. For sports car and bike enthusiasts, this is as good as it gets. The loop consists of Highway 550 north from Durango to Ridgway, passing through Silverton and Oray. Highway 62 west from Ridgway to Placerville. Highway 145 south from Placerville to Cortez, and then Highway 160 east back to Durango. A worthwhile historical diversion is the Mesa Verda Cliff Dwellings near Cortez.

### Georgia: Russell-Brasstown Scenic Byway

This byway is not only a wonderful road to drive, it is in a whimsical region of Georgia where it borders North Carolina at the foot of the Appalachian Mountain range. If there's one thing we can say about mountains, it's that they

Driving the backroads instead of the Interstates allows you to step back in time to see roadside attractions that you may have thought were gone.



Arkansas has the perfect natural terrain to create great driving roads thanks to a wide variety of elevation changes.

mean challenging roads and picturesque autumn foliage. This scenic loop is near the town of Helen (Alpine Helen), which has been transformed into an authentic style Bavarian Village with strong German beer and wiener schnitzel. It's a nice hub for a number of additional scenic routes.

### **Mississippi: The Natchez Trace Parkway**

One of the longest and most serene National Parks in the U.S. Thumb through your past issues of *ADM* for Issue 207 and you'll see that we've already been down this road, so to speak.

### **Montana/Wyoming: The Beartooth Highway**

Charles Kuralt called The Beartooth Highway the most beautiful highway in America. Route 212 travels from Red Lodge, Montana south into Wyoming and then north back into Wyoming ending in Yellowstone National Park. The road out of Red Lodge immediately initiates you with a series of switchbacks, and then climbs through rugged terrain gouged out by glaciers as you travel to Beartooth Pass. At 10,947 feet above sea level, this section of road is one of the world's highest roads.

### **New Hampshire: Kancamagus Highway to Mount Washington Auto Road**

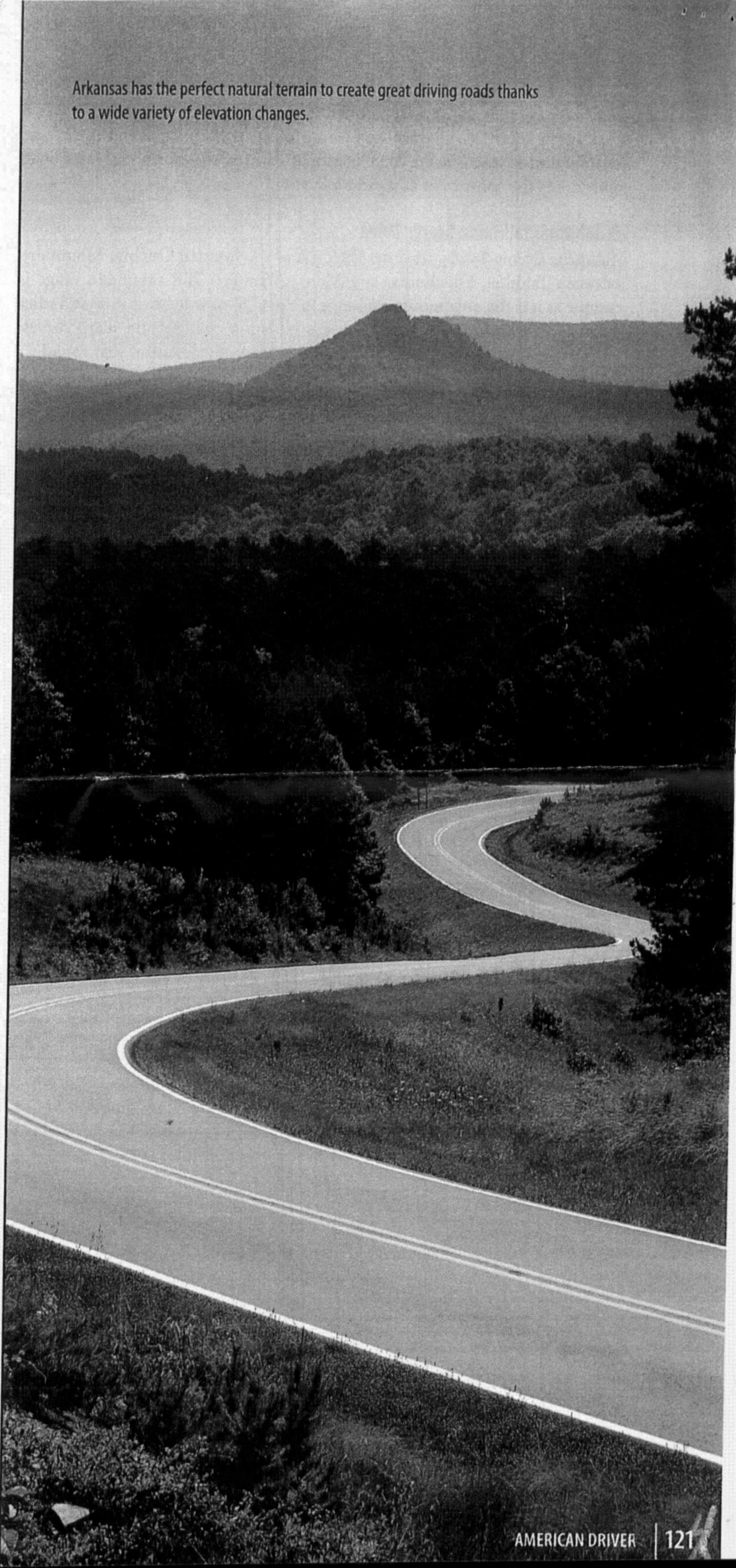
Known as "the Kanc" to locals, this is one of the highest roadways in the Northeast. Corkscrewing roads passing dozens of waterfalls shrouded in blazing autumn colors, Route 112 in the middle of New Hampshire is a little known drivers' wonderland. North of "the Kanc" is Mt. Washington, "the most dangerous small mountain in the world," due to its fierce weather conditions. The first auto race up this mountain occurred in 1904 and continues to this day with hill climb events. One record holder for this race is Carroll Shelby.

### **New Mexico: Enchanted Circle**

This area is about 70 miles northeast of Santa Fe and passes through the town of Taos, which could be used as the beginning and the end of the loop. The road climbs the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, winds through picturesque valleys and along streams and deep blue lakes and meanders through the Carson National Forest. Two roads which warrant drives inside and outside the loop are 150 into Taos Ski Valley, and Highway 64 west to Chama. Driving 64 with friends a few years ago brought the response from a Porsche 911 Turbo driver I met while exploring the area around the Enchanted Circle: "That is the best road I have ever driven!"

### **North Carolina/Virginia: Blue Ridge Parkway**

This is the quintessential scenic byway. Born out of The Great Depression as a project to get people working again, it has become one of America's most famous and beloved



highways. Winding 469 miles from the Great Smokey Mountains National Park in the south, along the crest of some of the highest peaks in the east and terminating in the Shenandoah National Park to the north east, this road epitomizes the concept of a "panoramic vista."

### **Oklahoma: Talimena Scenic Drive**

Talimena Scenic Byway traverses the crest of the forested Ouchita Mountains between Talihina, Oklahoma, and Mena, Arkansas. This mountain range is unique as it is the only mountain range in the U.S. running east to west, rather than north to south. The road has great elevation changes and sharp curves, with panoramic views of the surrounding wilderness. Beautiful year round.

### **Tennessee/North Carolina: Cherohala Skyway and Tail of the Dragon**

The Cherohala Skyway wanders through the mountains, valleys and forests of the Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests, from Tellico Plains, Tennessee, to Robinsville, North Carolina. It follows TN 165 and NC 143 from west to east and eventually intersects with Highway 129, The Tail of the Dragon. The Tail of the Dragon is probably the most written-up road in the U.S., with almost every automotive magazine doing an article about it, and its mecca-like attraction. When a road is 11 miles long and has 318 curves, one does not have to think very long to reason out the attraction that draws both bikers and automobile enthusiasts.

### **Texas: El Camino del Rio**

Highway 170 from Lajitas to Presidio, The River Road, it could arguably be called the best road in Texas. It snakes within yards of the Rio Grande, then winds its way up into the cliffs before it shoots back to the rivers edge. It satisfies the basic requirements for a great road. Scenic, elevation changes, curves, and very challenging. This road is especially challenging because road markings are non-existent and as you crest a hill you have no idea which direction the road is going to continue – right, left or straight. 170 also passes through Terlingua, which for years was the location of Carroll Shelby's famous Chili Cook Off.

### **Utah: Canyon Country**

The lower quarter of Utah has some of the best roads through rugged terrain that any driver can hope to find. Thousands of years of erosion by wind and

water have sculpted this region into irregular multicolored canyons and plateaus in one of the more remote regions of the U.S. This remoteness and the lack of the multitudes of tourists make these roads ideal for the adventurous who want good roads and no crowds. No fancy names for roads or loops here, just plain challenging driving through landscapes of surprising transitions and an abundance of scenery. The roads to seek out: Highways 24, 95, 211, 191, 12, 14, 9. Connect these roads and you can make your own scenic drive.

### **Vermont: Green Mountain Highway**

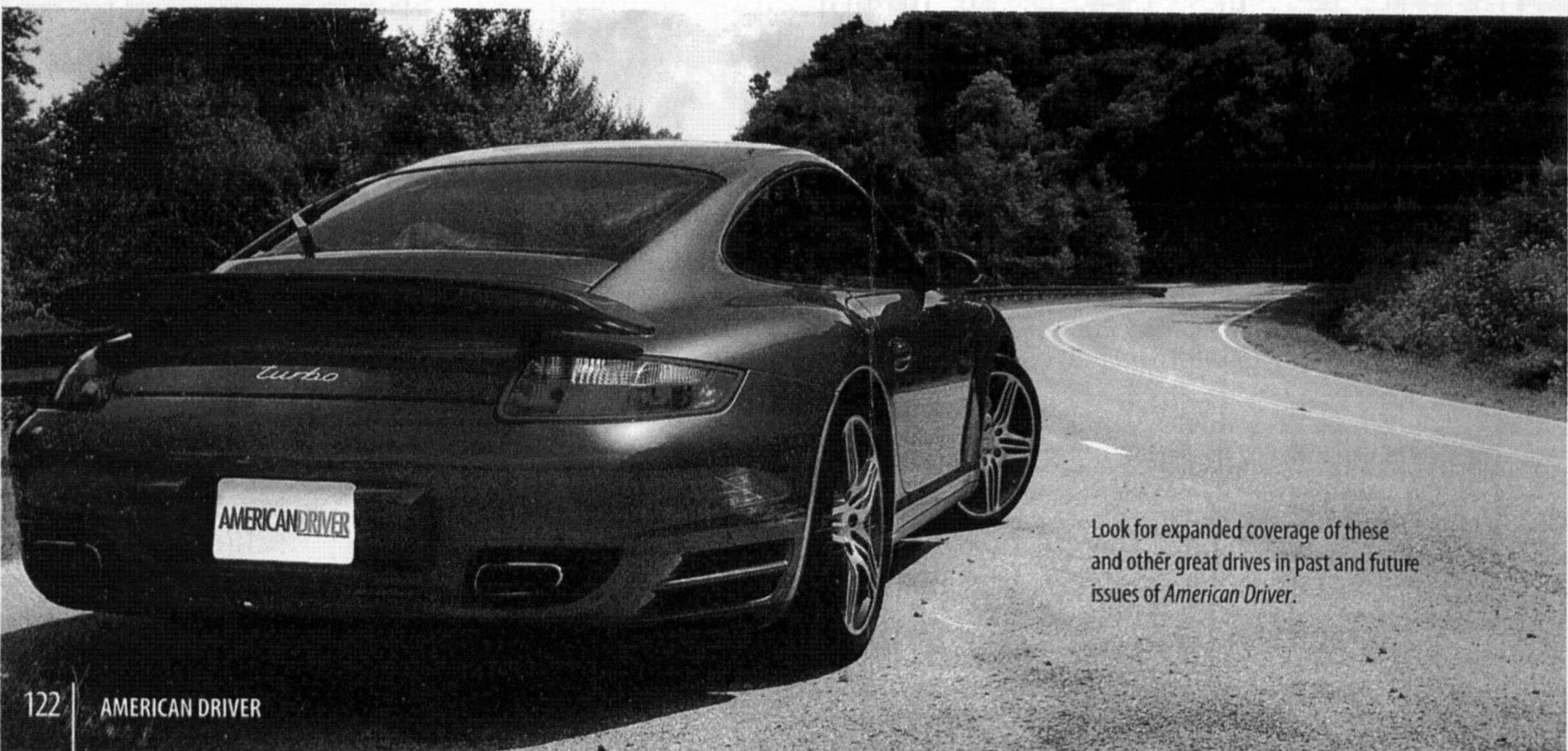
Route 100 runs almost border-to-border between Massachusetts and Canada. Over 200 miles of elevation changes, twists, valleys, mountaintops, forests of hardwoods and evergreens. Along this entire route will be quaint villages dating back to a time before America won its independence. Whenever you think of fall foliage and autumns changing of the colors, this road should be the centerpiece. This is where it all happens.

### **Virginia: Skyline Drive**

This northern extension of the Blue Ridge Parkway runs from Waynesboro north to Front Royal, providing a 100 mile encore along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains through the Shenandoah National Park. This is a magnificent road with many similarities of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

After you have read this list, plan your next trip. Get off that boring expressway with its limited access and high speed limits and point your automobile onto the scenic back roads of the United States. After all, we know that driving shouldn't just be about getting from point A to point B.

Enjoy the ride and look forward to the next automotive journey installation.



Look for expanded coverage of these and other great drives in past and future issues of *American Driver*.