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Motoring For Fun – On the Road Enjoying the Fall (Autumn) in New England, by Rachel Henson

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Author: Rachel Henson

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Touring (Autumnal) Vermont in a Chevrolet Cruze LT...

Rachel Henson reports 'live' from the U.S.A. during an adventure that has seen her driving in north America for the first time.

A visit to the United States of America had been on the horizon for months, so the actual departure almost took me by surprise when it eventually came. The plan was to visit Vermont in New England, from late October to 2016. The drive was over for being a

beautiful place, and in autumn, sorry, in the 'fall', it fills with eager tourists hoping to glimpse the forests changing colour. The timing of our trip looked like it would be ever so slightly wrong on this occasion, thanks to a friend's wedding that couldn't be missed in mid-



October back in the UK. Everybody who knew about these things told us we would miss peak season. We would simply be too late.

Not one to listen to that sort of advice, however sensible, I convinced myself we would join the leaf-peepers (yes, that's the real term!), and get on the road at the first opportunity. It was absolutely pouring with rain when I picked up the rental car from the airport, hardly leaf-peeping weather, so imagine my bewilderment when we awoke to snow the next morning. It looked like we had skipped fall altogether and headed straight into winter.

I have driven all sorts of vehicles, modern and classic, in the UK, and have piloted a tough pick-up truck around the often-challenging roads in Sabah (north Borneo). However, although I had previously been a passenger for thousands of miles in the United States, until now I had never actually driven there... One thing I hadn't taken into consideration when renting a car in the USA is that they tend to drive automatics, something I have little experience of, but it didn't prove to be a problem. The only issue I had with driving comfort in the Chevrolet was that I felt like a child driving a pickup truck; I couldn't see the end of the bonnet, or the back of the car. To counteract the latter, it has a rear camera fitted, but I had to rely on my somewhat taller passenger to keep an eye on the front whilst parking.

Having negotiated our way out of the city of Burlington, we took the road to Stowe, a 19th century village, nestled in the shadow of Vermont's highest peak, Mount Mansfield. The weather at this point was not affording particularly impressive views of the surrounding area, as it had clagged in around the snow, which was starting to settle. There was little sign of fall foliage here, so we took advantage of the cold weather to justify a coffee stop, and look at the map.

Our original plan had been to travel the length of Route 100, the state's longest north-south highway, which would take us down the eastern edge of the Green Mountain National Forest, heading south towards Massachusetts. We decided to stick with that as Plan A, as our research showed it to be one of the most scenic roads in New England during peak fall season.



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The Chevrolet took us southwards, and we took in vistas typical of this region in 'Stick Season', the local term for the period after fall when, you've guessed it, you're just left with grey skies and a lot of sticks. Although disappointing in our leaf-peeping role, the odd orange-coloured tree had maintained its leaves, to give us an idea of what we had missed. Having resigned ourselves to a different sort of trip, I decided to follow a sign indicating a 'historic round barn' near Waitsfield. The historic round barn turned out to be a B&B, but this was actually a good detour, as it not only took us over one of Vermont's famous covered wooden bridges, but it took us to a car park which was still flooded with colour.





One of Vermont's 100 covered wooden bridges.

The rest of Route 100 wasn't promising much in the way of foliage, so we turned west onto Scenic Highway Route 125, keeping our eyes peeled for a lunch spot. We were barely into the Green Mountain National Forest when we spotted a sign for the Texas Falls Recreation Area. This we duly followed, and ate lunch in the snow, under a wooden shelter on the only dry picnic bench. We were surrounded by snow-covered barbeques, long abandoned by the sensible tourists who frequent this part of the state for the wealth of outdoor activities it offers, such as hiking and kayaking.





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Snow-dusted scenery at the Falls...



The view from the wooden walkway over the water.

It didn't take us long to find the falls themselves, with the icy water falling 35 feet down to the pool below, which could be viewed from a boardwalk above the water. A point that I wouldn't usually note here is that there were public toilets available. This sticks in my memory as a woodland critter had taken it upon themselves to eat most of the toilet paper!

With diminishing hours left before returning the Chevrolet to the airport, we reluctantly travelled onwards, leaving the wintry atmosphere of Texas Falls and continuing amidst snowy trees in the Green Mountains. We passed an entrance to The Long Trail, the USA's oldest dedicated walking trail, and started to lose altitude as we came to the western side of the mountains. As we did so, the snow started to melt away, and the trees were taking on



more colour. Perhaps the forest on this side of the mountains is better protected from the strong winds that had taken place over the few days prior to our trip. Whatever the reason, as we drove on the sky transformed from murky grey to a vibrant blue, and the leaves were out in peak colour.



Our first real glimpse of fall...

We stopped in Bristol to admire them properly. The mountain backdrop to the town showed the full spectrum from reds to oranges, through all shades of yellow to the greens. The town is small in comparison to Bristol, England. It has 3,800 residents, and was chartered in 1762 as the town of Pocock. The name later changed, but it still has an old-time charm, and the



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main street has been designated as a National Historic District.



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The High Street in Bristol.

The village green was speckled with bright orange leaves, that were just starting to fall around the band stand. Just as we were about to make tracks, a beautiful Chevrolet Bel Air Sedan (dating from, I believe, 1955) pulled up at the crossroads in the sunshine. It stayed long enough for me to take a photo, to make the team back at Wheels Alive Head Quarters envious.



Another Chevrolet, but around six decades older than our Cruze LT hire car... a wonderful Bel Air Sedan!



The Chevrolet Cruze took us back to Burlington in the afternoon sun with Moose FM country music on the radio. It was the perfect car for a miniature road trip on a Sunday in Vermont, and it knew where to go to find the fall foliage after all.

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Taken from the passenger seat, driving through Middlebury.