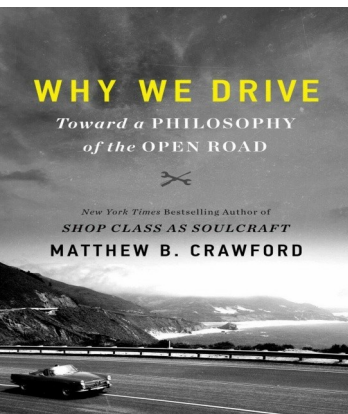

The President's Letter

First the Covid part. I'll make it short. There will be no Rambler Rama this year. We held out hope, but the situation still precludes our gathering. Mind you, as this is written, in mid August, the other news is pretty good.

"Ontario down to reporting 33 new cases today, no deaths," the Toronto Star's Shawn Micallef posted on August 12. "Keep it up!"



We know club members will understand.

As we are no longer shut into our homes, some of us have set aside *Moby Dick*, or in my dad's case Oswald Spengler's 518,000-word, 1040-page *Decline of the West*, and gone for drives.

But summer reading is a happy tradition. As spring gave way this pandemic year, my attention was snagged by a new title, *Why We Drive*, by Matthew B. Crawford. The book is subtitled "Toward a philosophy of the open road," hinting that it is no lite review but deep-think during a transitional time, what with self-driving cars on the horizon.

"I want to explore this one domain of skill and freedom — driving — before it is too late, and make a case for defending it," writes Crawford, a gearhead with a PhD whose other title, *Shop Class as Soul Craft*, is an homage to manual work.

Why We Drive became the talk of the car world this summer. On June 10 an excerpt relevant to us popped up on Hemmings, "How old cars help find meaning in a world of progress and represent a thorn in the side of the future" (an online search brings the story right up). Meanwhile my 87-year-old uncle — one of those great uncles, he had a

1965 Mustang in 1965 — mailed me a copy and called to say, "Alf, you've got to read this."

Crawford is a patina kind of guy, not inclined to revere cars that are "removed from circulation and over-restored." He is not overly impressed by high-end marques or even — blasphemy — horsepower.

His people's car outlook will be appreciated by us AMC fans.

Nashes, Ramblers, Hudsons, even the now-revered American Motors muscle machines, were working cars for their owners, and bread-and-butter products for their maker, not conceived to be classics.

It is our appreciation that now makes them so. Crawford writes of the oddness of this, of how modest working cars earn cred as hindsight reveals their accomplishments and memory makes hearts grow fond.

And, as a new generation finds freshness in the solutions of old. The author writes of "the Vietnamese immigrant with his early '90s Civic . . . he [or she] too is likely to tell you, 'they don't make them like that, anymore.'"

Crawford is a Libertarian, but one with a heart. He doesn't much like photo radar but hopes drivers will be responsible. He is okay with inconvenient truths being told. I was glad to see him take aim at the infamous 1990s era U.S. cash-for-clunkers programs, which sought to goose new car sales by destroying old cars in great numbers, which makes you shiver.

Since Jeeps are our cover story in this AM Spirit, we will give a timely synopsis of the author's own Jeep story. Crawford's coming-of-age tale involves a "1972 Jeepster Com-mando" with "a manual four-speed mated to a straight six," though he neglects to mention which six.

After getting his beater Jeep the young man had to swap out the engine, which he did on the street in front of his parents' house. He missed something, and on the road to Santa Barbara the radiator fell off its mount.

“Coolant was everywhere, to judge from the sweet smell and slippery wetness.” In darkness the author scrambles off into the bush, with whatever containers he has. Against the odds he finds a good Samaritan, who gives him water and points out he just hiked over “tank tracks . . . used for tank training and live-fire exercises.”

Wedged back into place the rad, not surprisingly, still leaks. The AMC six — a 232? 258? — finally seems to run without coolant, the driver stopping every few miles to give it a rest. It gets him to a diner where he trades the Jeep for a train ticket home, where he soon takes up with a basket-case Volkswagen bus.

His later Volkswagen story is eternal, a restoration ongoing, for years and years. Many of us can identify.

-ALF

