

AMERICA'S TOP 25 PERFORMANCE ROADS

MAP BY AGUSTIN CHUNG
DATA BY SATIMAGINGCORP

HENRY FORD MAY HAVE put America on wheels, but President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave those wheels somewhere to go when he created the interstate system, 50 years ago this month. (He signed the legislation in June 1956.) These concrete marvels help us drive most anywhere quickly. But sometimes you want to drive no place quickly—simply for the sheer joy of motion, as you try to outrun the song of the exhaust.

We asked people who drive for their livelihood—and for serious fun—what roads they keep returning to when they feel the need for speed. We spoke with Nextel Cup drivers, top auto executives, and our pals and colleagues at other auto magazines. The result: 25 of the best high-performance drives in America. Enjoy.

Popular Mechanics



Kasey Kahne
DRIVER OF THE NO. 9 DODGE DEALERS/UAW CHARGER

1 SCHOOL DAZE
"I used to drive my buddies to school in our old farm truck up Mud Mountain Road, near Enumclaw, Wash. It's narrow with sharp bends. Believe me, we'd all be wide-awake when we got to school."

PACIFIC

2 OREGON MOONSCAPE

Follow the Powder River's headwaters to the John Day River when you want to stretch your car's legs. The smooth, wide and mostly gently curving road is normally uncrowded as it tacks through the lava flats and rich fossil beds. **Baker City to Mitchell:** Rte. 7/U.S. 26/Rtes. 19 & 207—163 miles

3 BARREN BEAUTY
Lose 4000 ft. of elevation in 17 miles through constant Second-gear switchbacks. By the time you level out in the Anza-Borrego Desert, you'll have used a year's worth of brakes. It's worth it. (See page 77.) **Santa Ysabel to Salton City:** Rtes. 79/S22—40 miles

5 RED ROCK DANCE
Once you leave Sedona's tourists, you'll tackle 25

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARI WYN WILLIAMS/ALAMY (TIRE TRACKS); RUSTY JARRETT/GETTY IMAGES (KASEY KAHNE); ROBBY GORDON (PHOTOGRAPHS BY WENDI PEGLE/WPN (RM 1431), DOUG PENNINGER/GETTY IMAGES (MOUNTAIN ROAD), NADAV NEUHAUS/WPN (RTE. 97), CHRIS STANFORD/GETTY IMAGES (KURT BUSCH); DAN HANSEN/ARND BRONKHORST/GETTY IMAGES (RTE. 89A)



Robby Gordon
DRIVER OF THE NO. 7 HARRAH'S CHEVROLET MONTE CARLO

4 MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

"I spend a lot of my spare time driving between my Southern California home and Las Vegas. And there's a small, empty road—Rte. 177—that cuts out through the desert from Desert Center near I-10 and heads toward Parker, Ariz. And I hit it every trip because I love getting airborne on its many dips and bumps."

NO. 5: Rte. 89A loops along Oak Creek Canyon.



miles of too-tight hairpins working out of Arizona's Oak Creek Canyon. Sorry, no time to gawk at the red rock. (See page 80.) **Prescott to Flagstaff:** Rte. 89A—85 miles

6 BEST ROAD TO TAOS
Charging through the foothills of New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Mountains, you may be fooled into going faster than the narrow road allows. You can easily crest a rise and find yourself screaming into a tiny hamlet, like Cundiyo. (See page 82.) **Santa Fe to Taos:** Rtes. 503, 76 & 518—75 miles

7 COLORADO CLIMBING
The ascent from Colorado Springs to Wilkerson

Pass (9502 ft.) may not seem worth it until the descent into Hartsel. The steep downhill curves are entertaining enough to keep you from looking for Pikes Peak across the valley to the east. Cool your brakes, then repeat the fun by climbing Trout Creek Pass (9487 ft.) and hammering back toward the high plains. **Woodland Park to Salida:** U.S. 24 & 285/Rte. 291—89 miles

8 TEXAS HILL COUNTRY
Everyone we spoke to has a favorite road somewhere between San Antonio and Fort Worth. Bottom line: Great roads, but full of bikers, hot-shoes and RVs. We like this less traveled gem. It's narrow and nerve-

MOUNTAIN



Jerry Robertson
DRIVER OF THE NO. 78 FURNITURE ROW/BENCH WARMERS CHEVROLET MONTE CARLO

9 LOOKING OUT OVER DENVER

"Everyone knows about the road up Pikes Peak. But I love Lookout Mountain Road, off U.S. 6, going up the mountain west of Denver. It's like a miniature Pikes Peak with a lot of switchbacks and a great view of the city."

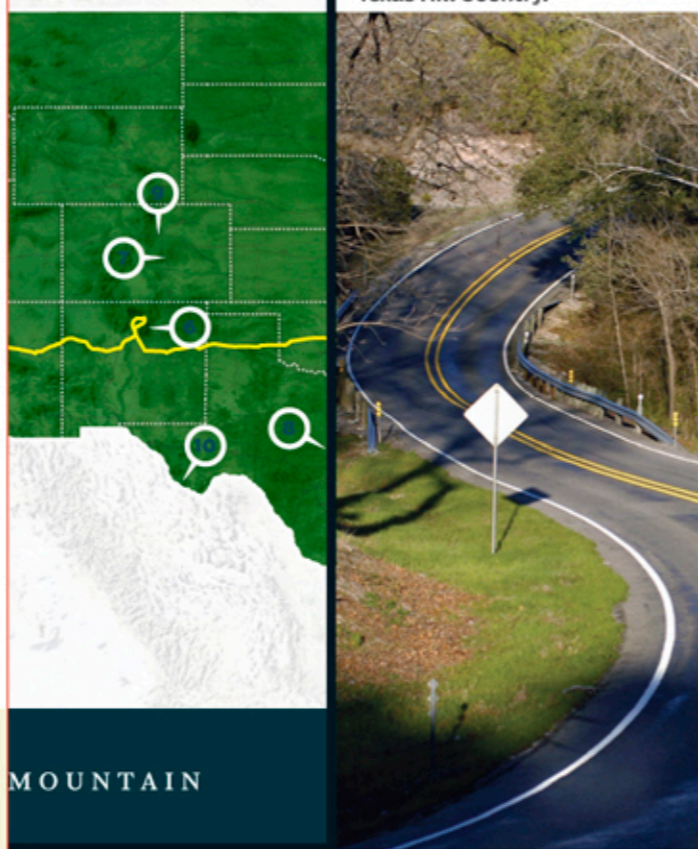
wracking as it winds, rises and plunges through the gorges and rolling hills near Lake Travis. **Marble Falls to Cedar Park:** RM 1431—40 miles

10 EL CAMINO DEL RIO
The Rio Grande separates Mexico from Texas along the edge of Big Bend Ranch State Park. It also defines the path of an adrenaline-charging road.

With few shoulders, little room for error (except into the water) and cattle appearing over the next crest or behind another blind curve, FM 170 must be taken very seriously. Help isn't close by. **Presidio to Terlingua:** FM 170—65 miles

11 ACROSS STATE LINES
You can take a thrill ride leaving Oklahoma for

NO. 8: RM 1431 in the Texas Hill Country.



Arkansas. You'll rise and fall on the ridges of the Ouachita Mountains as this nearly 50-year-old two-lane cuts through deep green forests. Only trouble is, it's a National Scenic Byway, so in the summer, you'll be drafting RVs. Keep an eye out for wildlife pretty much year-round. **Talihina, Okla., to Mena, Ark.:** Rtes. 1 & 88—54 miles

12 TWAIN COUNTRY
Well-maintained, narrow roads with fast, off-camber curves challenge you in southern Missouri, as you cut past the Ozarks' cliffs, creeks and small rivers in the 1.5 million-acre Mark Twain National Forest. You're rolling very close to a piece of highway history: Nearby I-44 was the first section of interstate highway commissioned. **Sparta to Winona:** Rte. 14/U.S. 63/Rte. 19/U.S. 60—140 miles

13 PORK CHOP HILLS
To heck with civil engineering: Here's a road designed by wild hogs—at least according to a prevalent local legend. Just remember that pigs have sharp turning radii and don't need any run-off. This road is supertight. (See page 84.) **Ozark to Eureka Springs:** Rte. 23—65 miles

14 DOOR TO THE BAY
You might think you're on the Oregon coast. Surprise: You're in Door County, Wis., on a finger of land sticking into Lake Michigan. Run the northern edge of the peninsula along Green Bay, before the town of Sturgeon Bay. Then follow either shore. **Green Bay to Gills Rock:** Rtes. 57 & 42—85 miles

15 SUPERIOR ROUTE
The Keweenaw Peninsula is a remote part of the

CENTRAL

state's still rural Upper Peninsula, so there's precious little traffic to slow your progress along Lake Superior's shoreline. **Hancock to Copper Harbor to Houghton:** Rte. 203/U.S. 41/Rte. 26/U.S. 41—60 miles

16 FIVE TIMES THREE
Running along the border of Ohio's Wayne National Forest for much of the way, this road clings to a ridge—often without the benefit of guardrails. Blind surprises abound: Top a hill to find the road immediately goes left or right, rarely straight. A scarcity of signs adds to the challenge. Running this route in the opposite direction is a totally different, but equally exciting, drive. **Zanesville to Little Hocking:** Rtes. 60/555—48 miles

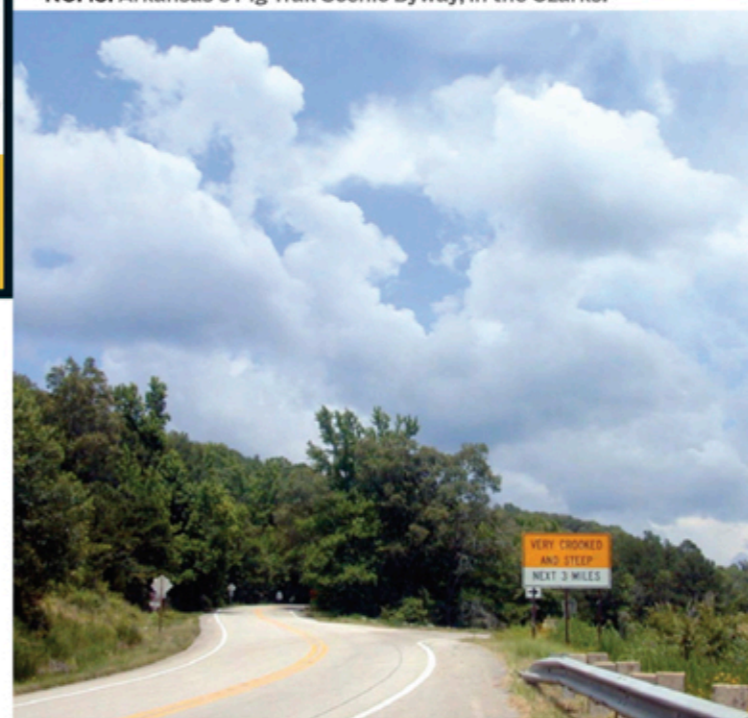
18 HOLLER FOR FUN
West Virginia's mountains are bigger and brawnier—and the roads better maintained—than most people imagine. This route traces a long valley before climbing up and over the Allegheny Highlands, following a highway with one of the highest elevations in the East. **Beverly to Richwood:**

Robert A. Lutz
VICE CHAIRMAN OF GENERAL MOTORS

17 BOB'S PLACE

"I have a 108-mile loop of exceptionally fine two-lane roads with varying surfaces and the highest concentration of curves you'll find in lower Michigan. And I know it like the back of my hand. A nice bonus is that it's so rural that one seldom encounters enforcement. From my front door, outside Ann Arbor, I can go more than 40 miles, make a left turn onto Williamston Road and enjoy some wonderful, fast sweepers. Then it's right onto DeCamp Road, then quickly a left onto South Williams Road."

NO. 13: Arkansas's Pig Trail Scenic Byway, in the Ozarks.



19 BLUE RIDGE ROMP
A demanding stretch over southwest Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains proves you can chew up more tires and brakes over two dozen miles of high-performance road than 1000 miles of interstate. This intense collection of esses broken up by short straights takes

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER VATER/CORBIS (ROBERT A. LUTZ)

EASTERN



Scott Riggs
DRIVER OF THE NO. 10 VALVOLINE/STANLEY TOOLS DODGE CHARGER

21 THE ROAD TO BAHAMA
"Bahama, N.C., is my hometown and Bahama Road runs right through it. It's still my favorite. I drive that road almost every day. It's got some great esses and long, empty straights. And, it's beautiful."

you on a gut-wrining ride. Avoid the crowds in Floyd during the Country Store's Friday night bluegrass jamborees. **Floyd to Stuart:** Rte. 8—26 miles

20 THE BOSS
The king of the thrill roads is also the shortest: Tail of the Dragon. This coiling stretch that sits mostly in North Carolina and slightly in Tennessee is so famous it has a dedicated following and a comprehensive Web site

(tailofthedragon.com). It's also an intense upper-body and inner-ear workout: As you saw the wheel back and forth as fast as you can, your head rocks along in cadence. (See page 84.) **Deals Gap to Robbinsville:** U.S. 129—11 miles

22 RIVER RUN
You may recognize this New York road's stone-wall guardrail and the meandering river far below from countless new-car ads. The spectacu-

NO. 22: New York's Rte. 97 traces the Delaware.



much traffic. But, you can wind up your car's engine and suspension, and test its tires and your nerve along this less crowded stretch, which runs near the eastern border of the Green Mountain National Forest. Blind bends keep you honest. **Waterbury to Killington:** Rte. 100—50 miles

24 ALPINE NEW ENGLAND
The well-kept Kancamagus Highway recalls Europe's mountain roads as it climbs, falls and twists through New Hampshire's rugged White Mountains. While it's an exhilarating summer drive, you get extra credit if you tackle it in the snows of winter. **Lincoln to Conway:** Rte. 112—35 miles



Kurt Busch
DRIVER OF THE NO. 2 MILLER LITE DODGE CHARGER

25 RUNNING TO BRISTOL
"I love driving Highway 421 into Bristol, Tenn., especially when I pass the sign that says, 'For the next 22 miles there are severe switchbacks and this road is not recommended for semis.' Man, that's fun!"

Check our Web site for detailed maps of our routes: popularmechanics.com/greatdrivingroads