

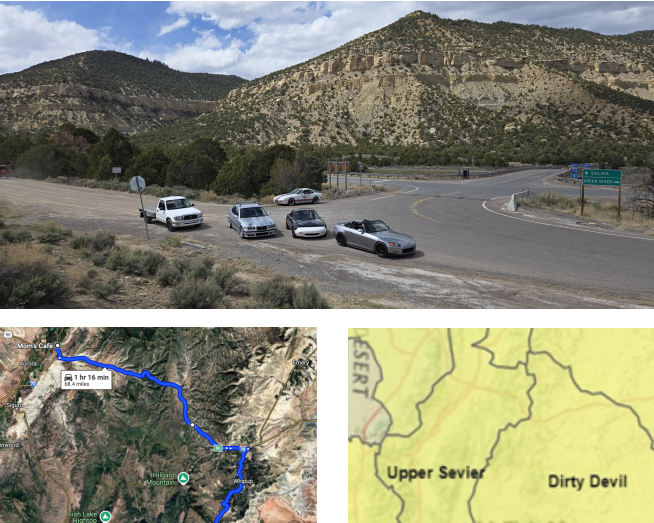
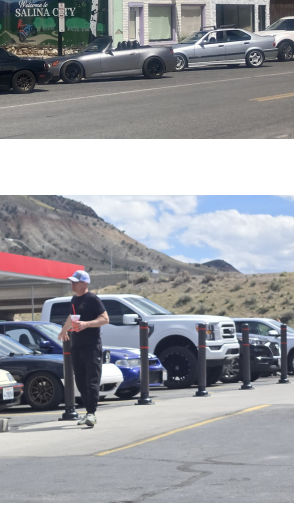
The 2025 Escalante Gathering What Makes a Great Weekend?



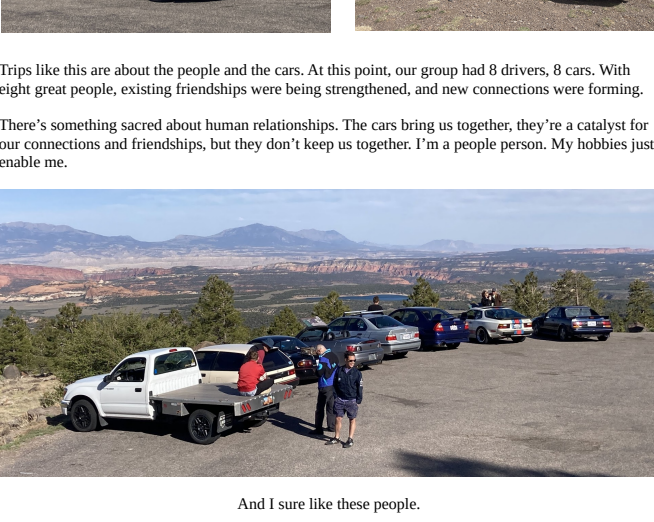
I intended to drive my Honda Beat at this year's Escalante gathering, but due to some headaches with insurance, I wasn't able to. While disappointing, recently completed suspension and braking upgrades on the Tacoma had me excited to drive it in the Beat's stead. I wanted a great weekend of driving, time with friends, beautiful views, and maybe a nice hike. That's what I got, and more.



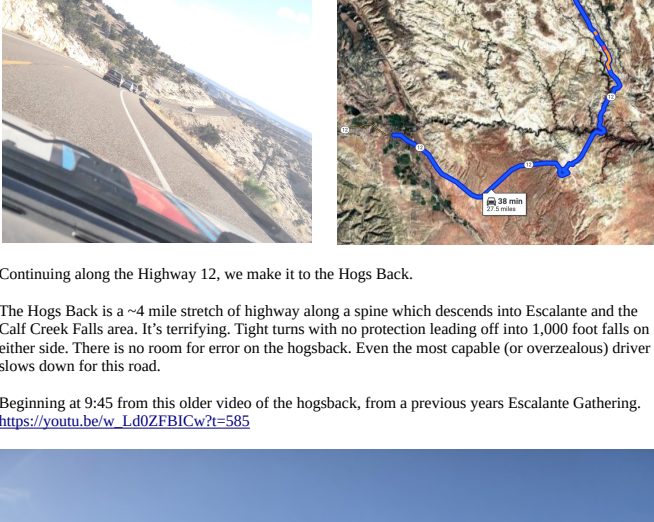
To begin the drive, the majority of our group met at my house. We washed a few of the cars, checked oil levels and tire pressure, and then, after a quick gas-station stop, hit the road.



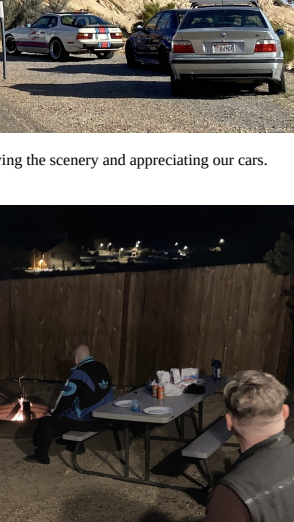
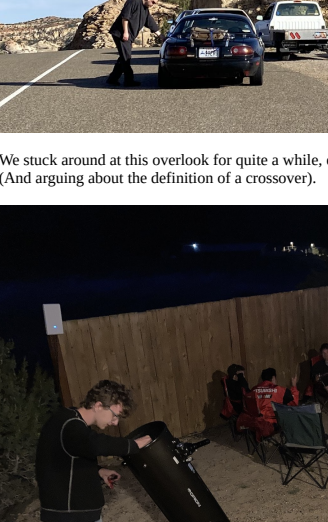
Our first stop was in the small town of Salina, at "Moms Cafe". A quintessentially American diner, with all of the charm and quirkiness you could hope for. Our server was cute, too.



After Salina, the driving begins to get good.



Continuing our route took us along the Interstate-70 to State Route 72, a fast, curvy two-lane road with great views. Looking at the map you begin to see red rock on the east side. The 72 follows along the crest between two basins; the Upper Sevier basin on the west, and the Dirty Devil basin on the east.



Trips like this are about the people and the cars. At this point, our group had 8 drivers, 8 cars. With eight great people, existing friendships were being strengthened, and new connections were forming. There's something sacred about human relationships. The cars bring us together, they're a catalyst for our connections and friendships, but they don't keep us together. I'm a people person. My hobbies just enable me.



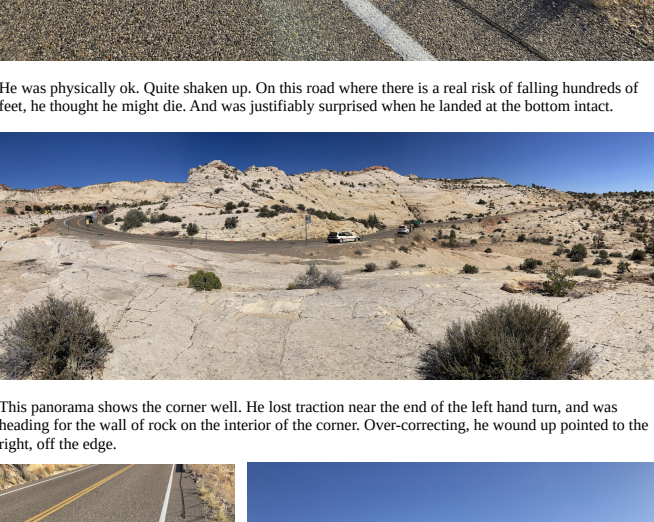
And I sure like these people.



Continuing along the Highway 12, we make it to the Hogs Back.

The Hogs Back is a ~4 mile stretch of highway along a spine which descends into Escalante and the Calf Creek Falls area. It's terrifying. Tight turns with no protection leading off into 1,000 foot falls on either side. There is no room for error on the hogback. Even the most capable (or overzealous) driver slows down for this road.

Beginning at 9:45 from this older video of the hogback, from a previous years Escalante Gathering. https://youtu.be/w_Ld0Z7BUCw?c=562



There aren't many places to pull off on the hogback, and it's very difficult to get a photo which captures the sense of height and risk. This photo is from an overlook very near where the hogback terminates, once it has lost most of its elevation.



It isn't hard to slow down; the views are so compelling that this area is incredible to drive at a crawl.



We stuck around at this overlook for quite a while, enjoying the scenery and appreciating our cars. (And arguing about the definition of a crossover).



And that was day one! Silas set up his telescope while we wrapped up with some pizza at Larry's cabin.



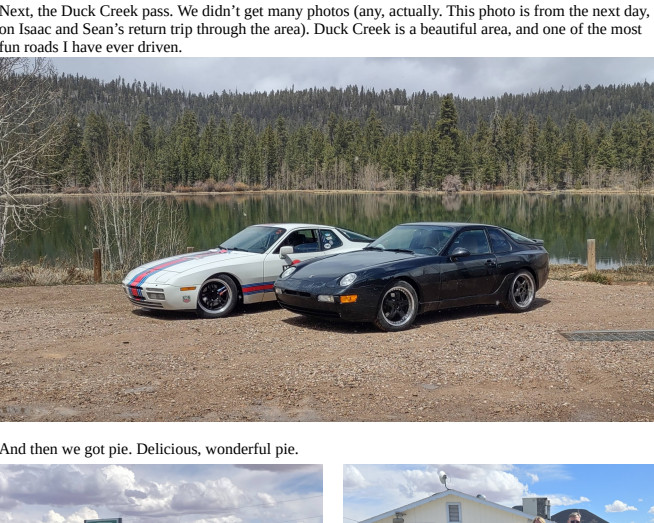
Day Two started out strong. The morning ritual for these Escalante Gatherings is a "Dawn Patrol". Wake up early enough to beat all of the other drivers onto the road. Enjoy the dawn light.



A few moments into the drive, there was an uh... Mishap. Joey drove his Miata off a (small) cliff.



He was physically ok. Quite shaken up. On this road where there is a real risk of falling hundreds of feet, he thought he might die. And was justifiably surprised when he landed at the bottom intact.



This panorama shows the corner Joey hit. He lost traction near the end of the left hand turn, and was heading for the wall of rock on the interior of the corner. Over-correcting, he wound up pointed to the right, off the edge.



I was behind Joey as he went off. As I rounded the corner I saw a small dust cloud at the edge of the road. I thought he may have caught his right rear tire on the gravel, but when I scanned the road ahead and didn't see him, I realized what must have happened.

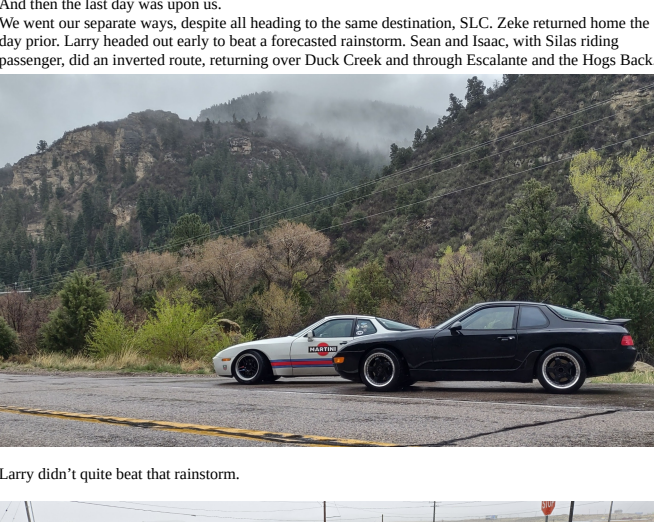
The road here is high enough above the Joey Pit that you can't see the Miata until you've rounded the corner and can look backwards. I didn't make it that far. I parked my truck and ran down to the Miata, which wasn't visible; it was totally surrounded in dust.

My father and Larry arrived moments later. Seeing that I was already checking on Joey, Larry ran back to the overlook where he could call for emergency services. My father ran ahead to grab Andrew (Joey's brother) and the rest of the group.



All's well that ends well, right? The Miata was recovered by Joel of Bryce Canyon Towing, and he did a stellar job. The Utah Highway Patrol officer, Officer Neighbor (what a great name), was grateful that no-one was seriously injured, and didn't issue a citation. From the other emergency service people we heard some nasty stories of crashed motorcycles, flipped Sprinter vans, and a Jeep which had crashed the day prior, killing it's occupant.

Needless to say, this sobered us up. A little bit. We still drove hard.



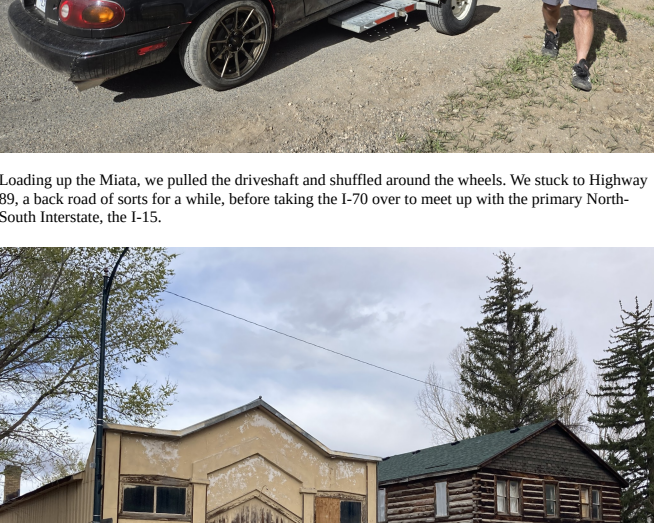
Late the previous night, we had an additional car and driver join us. Sean, in a Porsche 928, pictured here on the right. This was a surprise for everyone but Isaac. Sean had finished rebuilding the engine late on Friday afternoon and, confident in his work, drove five hours to Escalante that night.



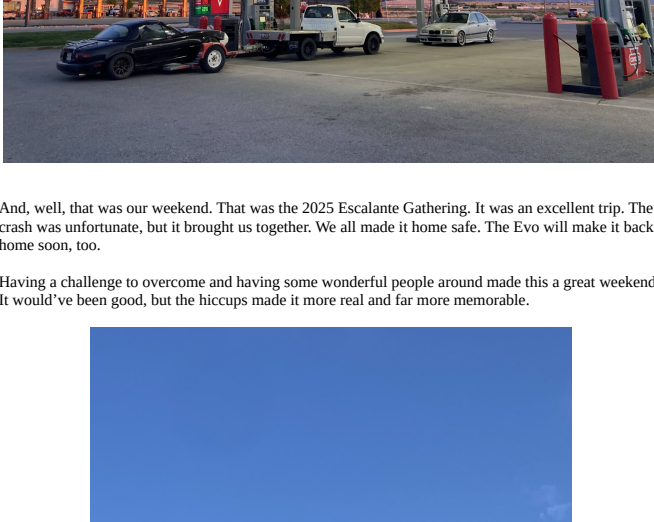
Color me impressed. Great work, Sean.



Our next stop was the Burr Trail, a ~25 mile bumpy paved out-and-back. The suspension upgrades on my truck really shined on this road.



A few of us went for a hike to Calf Creek Falls. We did a cold plunge and Zeke got chased by a horse soon, too.



I found a neat tree. Joey found a neat Toyota.



And that was day two! Eventful, but nonetheless, wonderful.

Day Three had us driving into Saint George. We drove through the area outside of Bryce Canyon National Park. A few years back I rode my bicycle through this area, it was quite rewarding to finally drive it.

Next, the Duck Creek pass. We didn't get many photos (any, actually. This photo is from the next day, on Isaac and Sean's return trip through the area). Duck Creek is a beautiful area, and one of the most fun roads I have ever driven.

And then we got pie. Delicious, wonderful pie.

The last night was at my parents' townhome in St. George.

We went for groceries and found a funny little Saab.

I got drunk, made burgers, and hung out in the hot tub.

Silas stayed sober, ate burgers, and ripped the oil filter off of his car with a big rock.

Poor Evo. It's stuck in St. George until he can tow it back.

And then the last day was upon us.

We went our separate ways, despite all heading to the same destination, SLZC returned home the day prior. Larry headed out early to beat a forecasted rainstorm. Sean and Isaac, with Silas riding passenger, did an inverted route, returning over Duck Creek and through Escalante and the Hogs Back.

Larry didn't quite beat that rainstorm.

Duane had a great time.

Joey, Andrew, and I had the responsibility of towing the Miata back home. We made a run down to Littlefield Arizona to pick up a Tow Dolly and split up to drive back to Panguitch, where the Miata was resting in a tow yard.

Loading up the Miata, we pulled the driveshaft and shuffled around the wheels. We stuck to Highway 89, a back road of sorts for a while, before taking the I-70 over to meet up with the primary North-South Interstate, the I-15.

The Tacoma towed incredibly well. It was a little slow coming over the aggressive I-70 climb, but I was holding around 82mph on the I-15, and had no issue passing when I needed to. I got ~15.5mpg!

And, well, that was our weekend. That was the 2025 Escalante Gathering. It was an excellent trip. The crash was unfortunate, but it brought us together. We all made it home safe. The Evo will make it back home soon, too.

Having a challenge to overcome and having some wonderful people around made this a great weekend. The Evo will be good, but the hijinks made it more real and far more memorable.

