



And Miles To Go Before I Sleep... The Tale of A Subaru High Mileage Hero

In the late 1990's my mother moved from New York City to an assisted living facility in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst. I was living in Atlanta at the time and would fly up regularly to visit her and my older brother, who is a professor at the State University at Buffalo.

There was a Subaru dealer near the assisted living facility, so every time I visited I was reminded about this brand, at the time immensely popular in Buffalo but rarely seen in the South. My brother had owned a Subaru a few years previous and seemed pleased with the way it handled the snow and ice of Buffalo winters. I had visited a Subaru dealer in Atlanta but their vehicle selection was very limited and I wasn't impressed with the sales staff. So during one summer visit to Buffalo, when I needed a break from the over-65 set, I wandered into Northtown Subaru to look over the cars.

A salesman, John Betley, came out to greet me and he offered me a test drive. I told him that I was from Atlanta, and therefore not a good prospect. But he said that didn't matter to him and he handed me the keys. He seemingly knew everything about Subaru. I was impressed with the car but more impressed with him. He had gone so far as to create page after page of his own sales literature explaining virtually every feature and advantage of these vehicles in great detail. I frankly told him I was not in a position to purchase a new car and even if I could, why would I buy it so far from my home? He said that he had sold cars to many prospects from out of state, since few dealers could match Northtown's selection, expertise and pricing. He suggested that I not rule out buying from him, distance notwithstanding.

When I returned to Atlanta I wrote him a thank-you note for the time he spent with me and said that if I did decide to purchase a Subaru down the line, I would certainly give him a call.

A few years later, in January 2001, I accepted a position as Eastern Regional Sales manufacturer with Gepco, a Chicago based manufacturer of audio and video wire and cable. Gepco planned to relocate me from Atlanta to Pennsylvania in the fall of 2001, so that I might better serve their clients on the eastern seaboard. They gave me a monthly car allowance and told me to purchase a vehicle well-suited to a heavy sales travel schedule.

When I returned to Buffalo that summer, I went back to visit John at Northtown. I asked if he remembered me. He pointed to his office cubicle wall. There, posted for all to see, was my letter to him from several years previous. He said he'd been waiting for me to return! He showed me all the new features that would grace the soon to be released 2002 models and convinced me to give up my initial interest in a sparsely equipped Forester in favor of the 6 cylinder LL Bean version of the Outback, which he thought would be a much better fit for my type of work. I agreed to return in a few weeks to execute paperwork for the purchase of a 2002.

I moved to Pennsylvania on September 8, 2001 and signed a purchase order at Northtown the following week. On October 6, 2001, I drove to Buffalo with my daughter, Audrey, who was just starting High School. We traded in our Saturn wagon and drove back to Nazareth in a beautiful new 2002 Outback.

I logged about 70,000 miles over the next two years as I settled in and began working my sales territory. In the summer of 2003, feeling very comfortable in my position, I went ahead and purchased a home in Nazareth. But then, just a few months after being assured that my job performance was excellent and my future with Gepco secure, my comfortable routines were turned inside out.

Gepco's owner had decided on a major corporate reorganization. I learned of this while I was travelling in Florida in October 2003. I checked in with the home office on a Friday morning. Everything was business as usual. At about 4:00 that afternoon I received a call informing me that the V.P. of Sales had been fired and that come Monday AM I would be contacted by a new management team that was being brought in from outside the company.

Within a few weeks, several of us realized that our days with Gepco were numbered. The axe fell in February 2004. My job was eliminated with little grace and even less severance pay. I found myself suddenly unemployed, I was now 800 miles removed from the area where I had established my career over some 30 years and, at age 56, my prospects for finding similar work near Nazareth were slim.

To make matters worse, in the weeks just preceding my termination, my wife had become seriously ill and my son (who had stayed behind in Atlanta when we moved) decided to move back in with us and start community college. Audrey was a Junior in high school looking forward to graduation in 2005 and the start of nursing school. So I had a new mortgage, lots of new bills, and no job.

After a few months of unemployment, I tried to work as an outside salesperson for two audio companies that I had enjoyed good relationships with over the years. I started with a company in western Pennsylvania. When that didn't work out, I moved on to a manufacturer's rep firm based in Nevada. Both companies had never employed a salesperson working outside of their offices, and they had difficulties integrating me into their operations. By the summer of 2005, I had given up on both jobs and exhausted most of my savings. My cash flow situation was deteriorating badly and I was beginning to panic.

I had also started my own company importing and distributing European audio cable. Prospects for this business were good since I had great support from the Swiss manufacturer of the cable. The down side was that our brand had lost much of its US market share during the previous ten years. We knew that it would take several years to rebuild the brand to the point where cable sales could provide me with an adequate income to meet my obligations.

So what could I do in the interim that would provide me with a steady flow of income and yet be flexible enough to allow me to work on growing my cable business?

A friend, who knew that I loved driving, suggested that I look into the Courier business. He had been working as an independent contractor delivering computer parts and the job had allowed him to have both a very flexible work schedule and steady income. He introduced me to American Expediting, a Philadelphia based company that had just opened an office in Allentown. At the time, they were swamped with work and were interviewing independent contractors to drive for them.

By August 2005 I was on the road for them, usually six days a week, both day and night. The Subaru went from 88,000 miles to 110,000 miles in four months

I was delivering anything and everything throughout the Middle Atlantic region. They had a contract to retrieve and deliver all sorts of items that DHL had misrouted and misplaced. One day it would be a business's payroll, the next day it would be a store purchase that had been sent to the wrong city. In one instance it was a \$10,000 guitar that had gone astray. We did same day special deliveries for both DHL and UPS and we picked-up and delivered rush air shipments for national freight forwarders. We delivered sandwich platters to pharmaceutical reps and medical offices, legal papers for lawyers and debt collectors, methadone for drug rehab clinics, wine for churches, all sorts of computer and industrial parts and even medical supplies, blood, specimens and body parts. We delivered tennis shoes and golf clubs to executives on vacations, and transported movies from one theater to another in the wee hours of the morning (typically pick-up at one theatre at 1 AM then drive 50, 100 or even 150 miles to meet some weary theater manager at 3AM or 8AM.)

I was typically driving 300+ miles a day but 400 to 600 was not uncommon. I was averaging 5000 to 6000 miles a month and changing my oil every three weeks. Once, after driving for 8 hours locally, I was asked to pick up some medical specimens at 8PM and drive them from Allentown to Toledo, Ohio (500 miles!) for 7AM Saturday delivery. I drove all night, made the drop, got two hours of sleep at a roadside rest stop and then drove back to Nazareth. All in a day's work.

By the end of 2006, the LL Bean had logged over 195,000 miles. There had been only one service problem in those first five years. A freak belt pulley malfunction at 108,000 miles damaged some engine parts and stranded me for two days outside of Washington DC. This happened just three weeks after my 100,000 Mile extended warranty had expired (with no significant claims while it was in effect). Although they had no contractual obligation to me, Subaru graciously paid for half of the \$ 1000+ repair plus half of my hotel and meal bills. That's standing behind your product!

In the second half of 2006, I stopped driving for American and began contracting with Interstate Courier Express in Allentown. They had a good client base of regular industrial and medical customers, so work with them was more predictable as to the what, where and when. My bread and butter runs were delivering industrial parts to plants in Western PA, NY and Ohio. I also did pharmaceutical and computer parts deliveries throughout the Middle Atlantic region. One day I'd be out in the rural areas for hundreds of miles, the next day I could be all over Manhattan, Brooklyn, New Jersey and Philadelphia. We did a lot of deliveries to Air Cargo at Newark and Philadelphia and carried vaccines and virus samples from the Poconos to laboratories in the DC metro area.

Looking back at my logs from 2006 and 2007, there were quite a few weeks when I topped 2000 miles of courier driving.

In the Spring of 2007 the Outback experienced some significant problems at about 225,000 miles. A local dealer in PA said it would need several thousand dollars of repairs and advised trading it in for a new car. They said the cost of repairs couldn't be justified with a vehicle that had so many miles on it. I couldn't bear to part with my trusty Outback and besides my credit was shot and I couldn't afford to replace it. So I decided to seek out a second opinion.

I had seen an advertisement in my local paper for Weddes Auto Center in nearby Bath, PA, which described them as specializing in the sale of used Subaru vehicles and dealer alternative Subaru service. So I set up a meeting with their owner and master mechanic, Craig Truscott.

Craig estimated he could get my vehicle back on the road, in tip-top condition, for well under \$1000. I gave him the opportunity to prove his skills. He replaced a worn out driveshaft with one pulled from a junked Subaru and took care of some bad bearings and a few other items. I experienced no significant problems with the vehicle for the next two years. Weddes Auto Center is now the only place I take my family's vehicles for service.

The Outback was also being used for pick-ups and deliveries of Gotham Audio Cable and as my cable business progressed, this meant more and more trips with loads of 300 to 700 pounds. It handled these without a complaint. The 6 cylinder engine continued to run smoothly and my miles per gallon remained constant year after year. Spark plugs remained clean all the way out to 140,000 miles. To date they have been changed 3 times in ten + years.

As 2007 progressed Audrey graduated from nursing school and began working as an RN at a hospital in Bethlehem. She became engaged to a fine young man who also drove a Subaru and she replaced her Saturn with a new Subaru Impreza. Pictures show that I looked quite a bit older from the driving-induced wear and tear but the Outback still looked great as it neared 250,000 miles.

2008 was a most difficult year. The economy crashed and companies began to cut back on their night shifts. The industrial parts deliveries that had been my best source of income dried up completely, and soon all aspects of the courier business were suffering as business fell off and gas prices began to climb. When things were looking very bleak I was given the opportunity to take up regular deliveries of pharmaceuticals to drug stores and hospitals in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. The traffic would be grueling but it was a chance to get at least 3-4 days a week of scheduled, good paying work. For the next year or so, this allowed us to keep our heads above water and hold onto our home.

Of course, I had expected that within a few years my cable business would develop to the point where I could quit driving. But the rapidly deteriorating economy and mounting medical expenses combined to keep me on the road. It was not quite time to give up the day job!

I topped 300,000 miles in October of 2008 and by the summer of 2009 was at 340,000 miles. By this time there were some significant wear and tear issues that required attention from the shop at Weddes. Wear and tear aside, the basic performance of the engine and transmission remained astonishingly good, I decided to buy a second Subaru in July so as to facilitate needed maintenance and give the Outback an occasional rest. I bought a 2000 Legacy Wagon from Weddes that had only 140,000 miles on – we call it our “new” Subaru.

I don't drive quite as much as a courier these days. My cable business has grown considerably in 2010-2012, so it needs more attention. Rising gas prices and a changing customer base have eroded much of the profitability of the courier business and the 12 hour days of driving began to take a toll on my health as I entered my 60's. I had to take some time off in both 2010 and 2011 and I typically now work as a courier only 3 days a week and only occasionally on nights and weekends. I still drive the long miles and long days, but I need more downtime in between.

I sent a bunch of pictures to Subaru's ad agency in September 2010 when we topped 375,000 miles. Unfortunately, they chose not to publicize our vehicles at that time, nor to do anything when we topped 400,000.

I had taken a few months break from driving in early 2011 and with two Subarus now in use, it took a while for me to log that next 25,000 miles on the Outback. We were at 395,000 miles by July 2011 and finally topped 400,000 in Morristown, New Jersey on August 24th, 2011. It was most appropriate that the miles turned while I was returning from a pharmaceutical delivery. When the 10th Anniversary of our purchase arrived in October 2011, the mileage stood at 404,538.

Thanks to the persistent efforts of **Joe Hurley at Northtown Subaru** in Buffalo, we are pleased to be finally receiving some recognition from Subaru in the summer of 2012.

As we near the end of July 2012, I have logged some 423,000 miles on the Outback. My best estimate is that I have driven a total of over 370,000 commercial miles since 2005. I have been accident free for over 510,000 miles since 2001. Those 500 mile +, 13 hour days on the road are not yet a thing of the past.

As the poet wrote: "...But I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep."



Master Mechanic Craig Truscott, Lewis Frisch & Audrey Lavigna with the 2002 LL Bean Outback at Weddes Auto Center, Bath, PA.



The four Frisch-Lavigna family Subarus at Weddes Auto Center, Bath, PA.

THE BEDFORD CONSULTANCY
PO BOX 111 NAZARETH PA 18064 www.bedcom.com (610) 746-9342