Motoring Memory

Room, Board and Fan Belt

WE HAD very little money when my wife, our 6-month-old daughter and I set out from West Virginia in our 1941 Cadillac to seek our fortune in California.

We took Route 66 most of the way. Once we reached desert roads and drove many miles in the heat, the car was steaming. We pulled into an oasis with a service station and tourist cabins. I opened the hood to let the car cool off.

The station owner came over, looked under the hood and pointed out that our fan belt was badly frayed. He said we'd never make it to Los Angeles before the belt broke.

I told him to replace it, whereupon he pulled out his pocketknife and cut off the old belt. Then he went into the station.

After a little while, the owner returned to us, red-faced and empty-handed. He didn't have a belt to fit our car.

It worked out all right, though. He put us up free in a cabin and supplied us with bowls of hot Southwestern chili for 3 days until a new belt arrived. He then sent us on our way with a free bag of water.

—Melvin H., Dunbar, West Virginia