



A driver pulls up to a stoplight Nov. 17, 2025, in Galena, Kan. AP FILE

Centennial year drives traffic to experience the Mother Road

Route 66 centennial lures visitors from around the world

BY JOHN HACKER AND ANDY OSTMEYER

JOPLIN, Mo. — The centennial of Route 66 had just kicked off when a convoy of 10 classic cars rolled east along the Mother Road, the first of untold thousands that would follow in their wake. Jonathan Klinger, from Allentown, Pennsylvania, rambled Route 66 in a 1934 Buick Series 60 sedan. “What we do is we preserve and celebrate and drive American-built cars from the 1920s to the 1950s because we believe that was a golden era of American

automobiles that were built to be afforded by the masses,” Klinger said during a stop in Missouri. “It was built for people to take long trips in a comfortable, reliable, well-built, well-designed car. That absolutely speaks to Route 66.... Route 66 symbolizes the best of American optimism, so we’re happy to be a part of it.” According to the National Park Service, which helps preserve the highway and the unique and often quirky architecture that sprang up along it, Route 66 was more than a road. It was “an agent of social transformation, and a remnant of America’s past.” “It stretches 2,400 miles across two-thirds of the continent. The highway winds from the shores of Lake Michigan across the agricultural fields of Illinois, to the rolling hills of the

Missouri Ozarks, through the mining towns of Kansas, across Oklahoma where the woodlands of the East meet the open plains of the West, to the open ranch lands of Texas, the enchanted mesa lands of New Mexico and Arizona, to the Mojave Desert, and finally to the ‘land of milk and honey’ — the metropolis of Los Angeles and the shores of the Pacific Ocean.” The iconic highway had its beginnings in 1926, cobbled together from a series of already existing local, state and national roads, according to NPS. Although it wouldn’t be decommissioned until 1985, its fate was sealed when, in 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower endorsed the creation of a new interstate highway system that would bypass the last stretch of Route 66

three decades later. But it didn’t begin as a symbol of American confidence, bright days and the freedom of the open road. It emerged in the national consciousness with John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath,” where it is less the road of optimism than of desperation as choked-out farm families in the 1930s fled the Dust Bowl for the promised land in California. “66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert’s slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all of these the people are in flight, and they come into

66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight.” But after the Dust Bowl, the Depression and World War II, Route 66 became the symbol of better days. It was the golden age of automobiles that Klinger mentioned, of road trips and family vacations, neon-lit diners and Heartland charm. It was the era when Bobby Troup wrote and Nat King Cole sang a cheery, fun-loving tune that made Route 66 even more famous. “If you ever plan to motor west Travel my way, take the highway that’s the best Get your kicks on Route 66.” — “Route 66” by Bobby Troupe Michael Wallis, author

of “Route 66, the Mother Road,” said of Route 66 not long ago: “This venerable old road stays alive because we truly realize it’s one long village ... starting in Chicago, stretching from Lake Michigan across two-thirds of the continent until it finally ends at the Pacific, the beaches of Santa Monica ... a diverse and distinctive neighborhood that make up this linear village called 66.” That is why Route 66 also was known by yet another name, America’s Main Street. This year, they’re rolling along it again, some in convertibles like Tod and Buz from the “Route 66” television series, some on motorcycles, some on bicycles, all searching not just for remnants of the road, but a portal to an earlier America.



TOP: A puddle from a midday storm surrounds vehicles at the setting sun peeks through on Nov. 20, 2025, at Cadillac Ranch along Route 66 in Amarillo, Texas. AP FILE ABOVE: Terry and Christie Partee visit Route 66 Neon Park inside George M. Reed Roadside Park along Route 66 on Nov. 18, 2025 in St. Robert, Mo. AP FILE

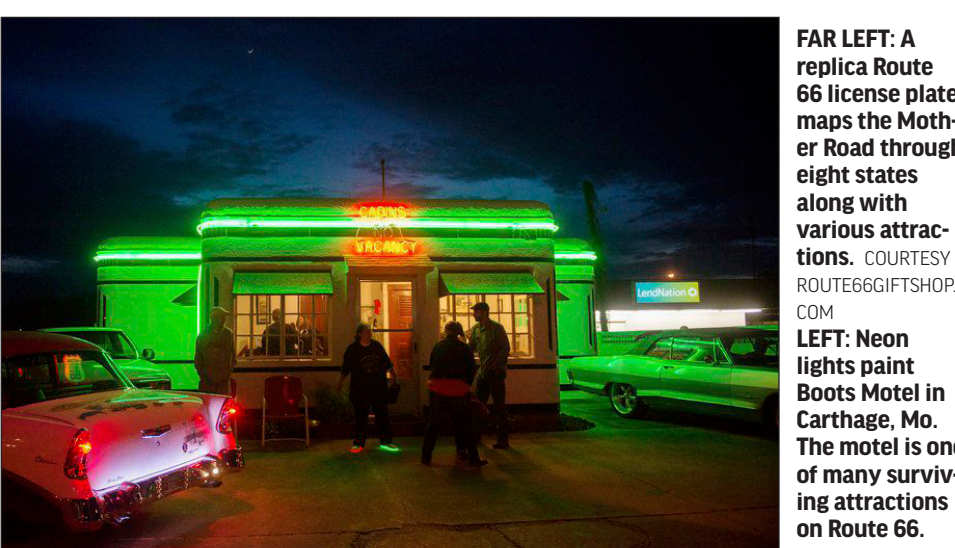


Everyone sings about Route 66
Nat King Cole did it best, according to a survey a few years ago by Route 66 News, but he’s not the only one to record a version of “(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66,” the song written by Bobby Troup in 1946 celebrating the Mother Road. Here are 10 other favorites:

- THE ROLLING STONES.
- BING CROSBY AND THE ANDREW SISTERS.
- CHUCK BERRY.
- PERRY COMO.
- MANHATTAN TRANSFER.
- ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL.
- DEPECHE MODE.
- MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY.
- JOHN MAYER.
- GLENN FREY.



TOP: Oakley Wooten, 2, follows a crack painted to resemble Route 66 on Nov. 18, 2025, inside Nelson’s Old Riverton Store. The Mother Road passes by outside the store Riverton, Kan. AP FILE ABOVE: People gather for the ribbon cutting May 2, 2025, at the Route 66 Rainbow Bridge in Baxter Springs, Kan. JOPLIN GLOBE FILE



FAR LEFT: A replica Route 66 license plate maps the Mother Road through eight states along with various attractions. COURTESY | ROUTE66GIFTSHOP.COM LEFT: Neon lights paint Boots Motel in Carthage, Mo. The motel is one of many surviving attractions on Route 66. GLOBE FILE