

THE TRUCKERS GUIDE TO AMERICA



THE TRUCKER'S GUIDE TO AMERICA

A 6 episode tour of the other side of America, as narrated by the inimitable Steve Malone - long-haul trucker and blue collar philosopher extraordinaire.

'Prologue: I have a dream...'

For as long as he can remember Steve Malone wanted to travel. As a child growing up he was able to name all of the world's capital cities and other cultures, or rather the idea of visiting other cultures, always fascinated him.

Noble as they were, making his aspirations to travel the world a reality would have to wait until he was an adult. He lived with his mother on welfare in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant, one of America's poorest inner city neighborhoods. For the most part it was all they could do to pay the bills on time, let alone save for a TV, couch or anything as extravagant as a holiday.

At the age of 22, the blue-collar New Yorker decided that it was time to see the world. Before venturing outside America however, he would start with his own country first. That way when he traveled the seven seas and saw the seven wonders he would at least have something to say about his homeland to the people he met along the way. The big question was, 'How was he going to do it?'

As someone from a low income background and without any qualifications, his options were limited. There was one possibility that appealed to him though - long haul trucking. This is a job that would essentially pay him to follow his passion – travel. In a few short months he had obtained his 18-wheeler licence and signed up for every pan-American haulage company he could find.

It was a stroke of genius. The perfect plan. An ideal way to kill two birds with one stone: earn a living wage to save for his worldly travels and at the same time see everything his own country could possibly have to offer. The idea seemed flawless.

As would quickly become apparent, the reality of this supposedly idyllic situation was quite different. The average American trucker is paid a salary of 33 cents a mile, before tax, and Stevie was no exception. The work of cross country trucking itself also involves only one thing - grinding out miles on one interstate after another. It is a job with a singular purpose - the destination - which confines its executor to an endless stretch of self-perpetuating American highway. A job without colleagues or office gossip or even a commute home at the end of the day to the family.

It is, in short, a lonely and soulless existence.



"Steve 'the Trucker' Malone"

THE TRUCKERS GUIDE TO AMERICA

It is also utterly exhausting. When not driving, most truckers take the opportunity to sleep. Saving money is an impossibility because haulage companies pay a pittance. Besides prostitutes, referred to colloquially as 'lot lizards', truck stops have little to offer in the way of distractions and are often dangerous and dirty places.

For almost 2 decades Stevie lived like this, stuck in a rut that involved criss-crossing the U.S.A. hundreds, maybe even thousands of times – only barely catching a glimpse of what it had to offer and never quite managing to save enough money to go see it. His noble dream of visiting his country and experiencing what it had to offer lay in tatters.

In "The Trucker's Guide To America", a 6-part series, Steve Malone is finally going to visit some of those places he always dreamt about visiting but never had the time or the money to.

On his continual journeys he would often fantasize about other lifestyles and experiences – anything to take him away from the mind-numbing and monotonous grind to which he was for years subjected. The six destinations he has chosen reflect that experience, as each in some way sits slightly outside the norm of what is commonly considered 'American' ideology.

The Destinations

The destinations for "The Trucker's Guide" range from the Nevada desert to the forests of Wyoming. Although widely dispersed and on the surface very different, all of them have one thing in common: they each encourage and embrace a lifestyle completely different from, sometimes even at odds with, mainstream American culture. This is perhaps partially a reflection of Stevie's own disenchantment with the American 'system', a result no doubt, of the way he lived for so many years.

Whether it is a place where money and all forms of transactions are outlawed (Burning Man), the no holds barred rough and ready home of America's last vagabonds - the motorcycle gangs (Sturgis Bike Rally) or people living as if they had been taken back in time 300 years (The Renaissance Fair), "The Trucker's Guide" is Stevie exploring different ideologies and ways of life and experiencing them first hand in his own country.

This is an ordinary man's look, in his own quest for identity and understanding, at some very extraordinary places.



"Episode 1 (Pilot) – Burning Man, Nevada"

1. Burning Man (pilot episode - completed)

'Burning Man' is often mistakenly described as a festival, something its organisers take exception to. A more accurate description would be that it is an event or an experience.

Every year, deep in the Nevada desert, some 45,000 RV and motor homes come together for an eight day social experiment called 'Burning Man'. The vehicles are arranged in makeshift streets in a crescent shape large enough to be seen from space. This is Black Rock City, Nevada and there is only one rule by which it is governed – money and commercial transactions of any kind are prohibited. You cannot buy, sell or trade anything.

Citizens of Black Rock are expected to bring everything they need to survive the baking days and chilly nights with them. This is an event designed to create community and radical self-reliance. With its huge interactive artworks, theme camps and radically modified mutant cars, you could be forgiven for thinking you had mistakenly stepped onto the set of 'Mad Max'.

The organisers build an 80ft wooden man - the significance of which is something of an enigma even to those that regularly attend - which is burnt on the penultimate night of the event. There is also 'The Temple', where attendees write down memories, events and anything else they would like to forget from their past and then place inside. In a profoundly cathartic ceremony, this is burnt on the final night.

2. The Texas Renaissance Fair

Knights in shining amour, barbarians and wenches – America tries to be British, Texan style...

In the U.S. spring, thousands of Americans flock to British Renaissance Fairs throughout the States. One of the largest of these is held in Austin, Texas where over the course of 5-10 weekends America goes British - as best it can.

Court jesters roam the countryside entertaining kids, jousting knights battle till dusk and busty wench serve mead from wooden mugs. Attendees here also lap up English accent affectations so ridiculous they would even put Dick Van Dyke to shame.

The only articles for sale are those that could be found in medieval times and everything is hand made the same way it was in that period. The fair runs mainly at the weekend, but during the week just as much fun can be had behind the scenes.

This is not only a fascinating insight into the American national identity, it is also a journey back to renaissance Britain, strangely enough via the middle of the American south-west.

3. Mission to Mars – No spaceship required

Twenty minutes north of the tiny town of Hanksville sits a lone cylindrical building tucked into the craggy red surface of Utah's San Rafael Swell. This spaceship-like structure, the brainchild of the non-profit, privately funded Mars Society is the Mars Desert Research Station or 'Mars Analog'.

The location, chosen for its resemblance to Mars provides researchers with an opportunity to live and work in an environment as close to The Red Planet as earthly possible. Its inhabitants live in complete 'sim' - wearing spacesuits when they venture outside, consuming only dehydrated, shelf-stable food and militantly conserving their very limited water supplies.

Besides its lofty celestial aspirations, 'Mars Analog' also highlights some pertinent and contemporary earthly questions. The simulation's emphasis on the conservation of resources and minimal impact on the external environment are an environmental activist's dream come true.

The station also provides fascinating examples of how humans create routines and behaviours to negotiate living in small places on limited resources for extended periods.

4. The American Hobo Convention

The days of Kerouac and 'On The Road' may seem long gone but there are still an estimated 30,000 hobos in the U.S. hopping freights, scrapping metal and outsmarting the railroad cops as they go.

Every year, this little understood and often misjudged subculture meet in the undisputed home away from the tracks for rail riders - Britt, Iowa - for the American Hobo Convention. Here the men and women of the tracks sit around a constantly burning campfire in the hobo jungle, swapping stories and reminiscing about days gone by.

The people that make up this vast alterna-culture represent in their own way a microcosm of America and are just as complex and diverse as folks in the 'real' world. Hobos have their own code of conduct, a short-hand language in the form of pictures they draw to advise other hobos who come after them and they come from all age brackets and backgrounds. Some choose to live the railroad riding lifestyle full time, others opt only to do it for a month or two every year.

Each has their own rough-textured reasons for living this way but without exception a single element binds them together - the pursuit of freedom and living life on their own terms.

5. The Native American Pau Wau

A "Pau Wau" is a Native American Indian gathering held every year in the spring and summer. The ground on which a Pau Wau take places is considered sacred, having been blessed repeatedly before the event begins and the event celebrates the heritage and traditions of America's indigenous tribes.

Each Pau Wau centers around a drum and dancers and can last for anything from a few hours up to a week. The dancing is overseen by a master of ceremonies, who co-ordinates the different dancing groups and is committed to the traditions and spirituality of each nation of American Indians in attendance. A master of ceremonies' focus is on maintaining a spiritually safe, peaceful and cleansed environment.

This is a celebration of harmony, balance, spirituality and wellness - ideals which all form the bedrock of the American Indian culture.

6. The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally

If the Pau Waus epitomise all that is peaceful, spiritual and earthly about the American way, the biggest bike rally of them all, Sturgis, is about standing tall, riding mean and getting your shit kickers on.

In a small town in South Dakota's Black Hills, some 375,000 hardcore bikers, America's last true outlaws, come together every year to get wasted, fight and generally have what they consider to be a romper stompin' good time. Sturgis, ever since its debut way back in 1940, has been the motorcycle maniac's dream.

No matter how many cops patrol the perimeter, this isn't the place to teach old dogs with pony-tails and tattoos new tricks. Drag racing, live rock concerts and furious drinking sprees all add to the rough and tumble nature of the event.

Participants here are searching for freedom of a very different kind to those who attend the Hobo Convention and a very different type of self-expression to the artists at Burning Man but perhaps in many ways their behaviour is driven by a similar underlying philosophy.

THE TRUCKERS GUIDE TO AMERICA

Familiar favourites

Travel shows are almost as old as television itself. Over the years they have given rise to a number of well-loved presenters from Michael Palin to Stephen Fry, Louis Theroux and more recently Griff Rhys-Jones. All these personalities have been lovingly welcomed into the nation's living rooms with open arms. And rightly so. The shows they have made have been engaging, funny and enlightening.

And yet, for all their greatness, each show carries with it the faint undercurrent of patrician elitism. This is not meant in any way to disparage the presenters, all of whom are entertaining and loveable characters but the fact remains – this is the Eton and the Oxbridge crew - the old Footlights gang. The world they show us is the world as they understand it.

Meet Steve Malone

Steve Malone graciously describes being a trucker as 'one of the shittiest jobs you could have in your entire life'. If long haul truck driving is 'one of the shittiest jobs you could ever have', Bedford-Stuyvesant, the New York neighborhood in Brooklyn where Stevie grew up, is without a doubt one of the shittiest neighborhoods you could ever live in.

Bedford-Stuyvesant, known locally as 'Bed-Sty' was for decades one of the worst inner city areas in America. In the 1970s, when a young Stevie was a reluctant tenant, it was home to the whole spectrum of inner city crime and civil unrest including race riots, gangland violence, drugs, car jacking and violent muggings. To this day, despite gentrification in the late 90s, it is still a staple reference in U.S. popular culture, hip-hop and R&B lyrics as the archetypal ghetto.

It is about as far away from the quiet cloisters of Oxford and Cambridge as you can get and the education and perspective people that come out of this neighborhood have could not be more different.

Welcome to the world's first blue-collar travel show.



"The Trucker's Guide to America"

The Format

Overview

The format for "The Trucker's Guide" is as follows: The presenter, someone from a low-income and blue collar background is taken to six places within their own country. Each place represents a radically different way of life from their own. The 'journey' of the show is reflected through the presenter and how they react to and are changed (or not) by what they see and experience.

It is important that the presenter possesses a likeable 'everyman' (or 'everywoman') quality. Because the show is travelling to unusual places, the presenter is obviously the lens through which the audience experiences the destination. While the audience may not always be able to relate to those interviewed and featured as part of the show, they need to be able to relate to the narrator and his or her feelings and thoughts. In this way the audience vicariously examines their own (or a different) country and the sub-cultures within it through something they already know and understand.

The presenter should also be someone that does a job typically representative of their country. Here it is the long haul trucker showing us around America, but it could just as easily be "The Black Cabbie's Guide To Britain" or "The Miner's Guide To Australia". The two most important things are that the job is blue collar and that it is in some way associated with the country's national identity.

This is, essentially, the ordinary man's guide to the extraordinary.

The most important element in the actual construction of the show is to present those people that are featured and interviewed in a non-judgemental way. Making fun of and pigeon-holing the fringes of society is easily done but not particularly constructive in terms of creating anything thought provoking or meaningful. The goal here is to provide a platform for people to make their point in a clear, succinct way without resorting to cheap editing tricks or sensationalizing the content.

Similarly, in showing other lifestyles, these should be presented in an unbiased and fair manner. Tickets to Burning Man are \$300 each and RV rental runs from \$2,500 for the week. Attendees have to bring their own food, water and anything else they need to survive. The average salary of 'Burners' is \$60,000 a year and it is clearly not cheap to attend. While it would be easy to focus on the 'hypocrisy' of an event that has outlawed money being so costly, doing so misses the point somewhat.

In other words, this is not the place for 'shockumentary' or reality TV type faux indignation. Here the goal is to create something a little more optimistic. From a pragmatic point of view, if the series or format enjoys success and becomes known for being fair and even handed, gaining access to other people and groups that might otherwise have been shy about coming forward would ultimately become easier.

The assumption here is that core human needs are essentially the same across cultures and sub-cultures, or at least very similar and merely expressed differently. The key question to be asking is, 'Why do these people choose to live this way?'

The show also needs to be a little anti-conformist. There is a lot going on beyond the 9-5 comfort zone and the series is in many ways about pushing those boundaries a little. By showing the audience lifestyle alternatives to their own, they are being encouraged to sit up and think about different ways of life.

It is also critical that the show maintains a playful tongue-in-cheek approach to the content, especially when dealing with those elements that may otherwise shock or make people uncomfortable (such as nudity).

Although it is not fundamental, it helps to have the presenter attend events that have a defined start, middle and end. That way, there is an obvious build up, development and resolution giving the narrator a clear opportunity to sum up their experiences and thoughts in the closing segment of the program.

It also helps that the destinations chosen are places that people watching the show can go visit, should they chose to. This is in keeping with the 'everyman' style of the show. In this series, all the places, with the exception of the 'Mars Analog' station are open to the public.

Pacing should be snappy. The problem of too many talking heads can be mitigated by laying cutaways and relevant footage over the interviewee or voice-over and music montages can also be used from to help reduce information overload and keep the flow.

Format Summary

- The presenter of the show is blue collar and an everyman/woman
- Each episode, the presenter is taken to a different place or event within their own country, each representing a radically different way of life from their own.
- The show's 'journey' is determined by how the presenter is affected (or not) by what they experience.
- The first segment of the show covers history and background.
- The second segment covers the initial experience - preliminary impressions, people, layout, etc.
- The third segment features in depth interviews with attendees or participants (at least three) to get to the heart of the ideology of the group in question.
- Each episode should ideally also have a climactic event to work towards.
- Following the climactic event, the presenter gives their thoughts and feelings about what they have just experienced, how it has changed them (if at all) and how it might be relevant to mainstream society as a whole.
- Remember: This is the ordinary person's guide to the extraordinary and unusual.



"Episode 1 – (Bliss Dance) Burning Man, Nevada"