

Fasten your meatbelts!

By Joe Sage

Frankly, it's perfectly normal to think you've seen the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile before—it just has that kind of presence. A college football game? Somewhere on the Interstate? We had seen the oldest one still in existence (not the first one ever), built on a Ford chassis in 1952 and now housed at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan (a must-see destination). And we have now seen the current one, as it made a few stops in the Valley recently, with **Hotdoggers** "Cookout Kelly" and "Abe-the-Ham" at the wheel. Join Cookout Kelly as she takes us on a tour.....

"Our Oscar—that's our Wienermobile—is a 2009 model, and it's built on a Chevy one-ton truck, with duallys in the back and a V8 engine. We like to say it's powered on **ketchup** and **mustard**, but it takes regular gas!"

This one was built next after a prior 2004 model, with a newer chassis and such features as a flat-screen TV. In the last couple of decades, the Wienermobile hasn't changed too much, outwardly—just "mirror color, that type of thing. But the very latest 2012 models actually have solar panels on the top, so that's pretty cool," she explains.

Time to check out the interior. "So we have... it's not a sunroof, it's a **bunroof!**" Cookout Kelly points out, and "we don't have gloveboxes, we have **bunboxes!**"

"There are two rules for the Wienermobile. If you want to ride up front, you shout



'**shotbun!**' instead of 'shotgun!'... and then you fasten your **meatbelt.**" Etiquette is important.

In fact, the Wienermobile is engineered for etiquette. Cookout Kelly explains you can't get road rage when you're in the Wienermobile (how could you, really...?), so they have a special little horn. You can't really hear it on the Interstate, she says, but we can hear it in town, a lighthearted duet of their famous jingle: "**Oh I wish I were an Oscar Mayer Wiener....**"

"So when we're trying to get parking," she says, "that's what we play, and usually it works pretty well." She can also tap the rhythm out effectively on a real horn, if need be, one of the many skills learned at Hot Dog High—driver's ed for the Wienermobile, "where you learn to **drive and wave** at the same time."

Aspiring Hotdoggers go through two weeks of training with the Madison Police Department, near the company's Wisconsin headquarters. They also learn "a little bit of hot dog history, if you will."

And then they turn you loose. "Which is **crazy,**" she continues, "because it's a 27-foot-long hot dog! We show up one day, and two weeks later, we're driving a hot dog!"

Security hasn't been a problem, for instance when parked at a hotel overnight. "People are just in awe of it and don't really mess with it," says Cookout Kelly. "They're too busy taking pictures. So we haven't come out to any **bites** taken out of it yet! (Fingers crossed.)"

A common question is whether it has a bathroom, and the answer is no. "It's a **Wienie-Bago.** But there's no bed in the back and no bathroom, either."

There is ample seating that looks as much fun as any playroom, and behind that is storage—enough for their displays, luggage and up to 14,000 Wienerwhistles.

They live out of two suitcases each, for a full year, so they must pack carefully and "not buy a lot of shoes," she says while wistfully eyeing the Payless next door.

The Wienermobile gets monthly maintenance—they get "the **ketchup** and **mustard** flushed out and the tires filled." For this they use the Penske Automotive Group, some of whom they "just adore." Penske is also on their SOS, in the unlikely event of an on-the-road situation. (Another common question is whether the Wienermobile drives, or whether they just tow it places, like a trailer. The answer is that yes, it drives, and they try to avoid towing at all costs, like anybody else.)

Of course you're wondering how fast the Wienermobile can go. "Well, it **hauls buns,**" says Cookout Kelly. The speedo reads up to 100 mph, but "obviously, we're never going to go 100, because everybody would be tweeting about that. We pretty much stick to 65." It's as big as an RV, but has a slipperier shape, making it "pretty **aeroDOGnamic,**" we are told.

We are **eating up** the puns. "I can keep them coming," says Cookout Kelly. "I **relish** them! Call me **Corndog** Kelly. Love to **ham** it up!"

They like **bunny** people, and puns are part of the curriculum at Hot Dog High. They also "spend so much time on the road, we just **cook 'em up** as we drive. "I'm sorry... I'll stop!" she says.

No, we reply. We'll stay here until you run out.

"I don't! I can always cut the **mustard** when it comes to puns. We take the scenic **kraut,** so that gives me plenty of time to think them up." ■



WIENERMOBILE FUN FACTS

WIENERMOBILE
Oscar Mayer's nephew Carl Mayer designed the first Wienermobile in 1936.

WIENERWHISTLE
The highly collectible Wienerwhistle was developed in 1952 and included in packs of Oscar Mayer Wieners starting in 1958.

HOTDOG GERS
Over 350 college graduates have held the prestigious position of Hotdogger since 1988.

DOGMEASUREMENTS
HEIGHT.....24 Hot Dogs high (11 feet)
LENGTH.....60 Hot Dogs long (27 feet)
WIDTH.....18 Hot Dogs wide (8 feet)

THE MEAT
• Grilled fiberglass hot dog on a lightly toasted fiberglass bun • Converted Chevrolet 4-speed W4 Series chassis • 6.0L 300 Vortec 5700 V8 • Runs on high-octane mustard.

THE CONDIMENTS
• Gull wing door with automatic retractable step • Hot-dog-shaped dashboard • Hotdogger voice-activated GPS nav • Ketchup walkway • Condiment splattered carpet • Computerized sound system • Removable Bunroof • Rear nav camera • Blue Sky ceiling art • Six mustard-and-ketchup-colored seats • Smiling front grille • Official Wiener Jingle horn.

