

THE STARS ALIGN IN VALENTINE

by Tyson Hugie

Tyson Hugie's blog: www.drivetofive.com
 YouTube channel: Tyson Hugie:
 "2021 Acura NSX: Looking for Love in Valentine, Arizona on Route 66"

It seemed appropriate that several stars aligned during the seven-day period that I would have the keys to a 2021 Acura NSX. It was Valentine's Day weekend, the car was painted Valencia Red, and I'd been itching to get out of town for a road trip for some time. I remembered that Arizona is home to a community called Valentine, and the rest is history: I took a 500-mile day trip to check it out.

During the heyday of Route 66, this roadway carried thousands of travelers between its Santa Monica and Chicago endpoints. But in 1978, Interstate 40 was completed about 30 miles to the south, rendering 66 obsolete and bypassing the town. Valentine, like so many other communities, was left to desolation. As of 2000, the census tallied 36 residents. On my visit, I saw not a single person—nor a single building that looked like it was currently inhabited at all.

Like so many of the adventures I've documented, the destination in this case was far less important than the journey. And spending about eight hours behind the wheel of a \$197k supercar was a pretty nice way to spend the day. My travels took me initially from metro Phoenix up through the towns of Wickenburg and Wikieup—each stuck in a time warp of its own, relying primarily on flow-through traffic between Phoenix and Las Vegas to survive economically.

When I got to Kingman, I stopped briefly at the old power plant, which has been repurposed as a visitor center. Conveniently, there was a restaurant called Mr. D's across the street, and I was ready for lunch. Homemade root beet was served in a frosty glass, and it hit the spot. Kingman embraces its Route 66



heritage in a big way, and you only have to drive a few blocks along the Historic Route 66 Bypass—Andy Devine Avenue—to see that.

It took me about 30 minutes to get from there to Valentine, by way of a mostly flat two-lane road that took me through the desert countryside. I had to make a customary stop at the Hackberry General Store, where people had stapled \$1 bills to the ceiling and walls, accompanied by license plates from around the country and around the world.

My stay in Valentine was short-lived, as I had had a feeling it would be. The most pre-

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dominant remaining bit of civilization there is the 1903 Truxton school house, a two-story brick building that served as an educational institution for Native Americans until the late 1930s, but is abandoned now.

But that NSX! Talk about a crowd-pleaser. I'm certain I ended up on the TikTok, Snapchat or Instagram of at least a dozen people throughout the course of the day, based on the number of cameras I saw poking out of other vehicles. I guess if there's one modification the car needed but didn't have, it was window tint. Privacy is not afforded with that car. The level of performance, coupled with its overall driving friendliness, is pretty remarkable. It's a car you can pin at 70 mph on cruise control and drive all day comfortably, but still transform into a nasty speed machine on a moment's notice, thanks to its twin-turbo V6 coupled with three electric motors. The press car I was allocated was wearing well-used Continental tires with 7,000 miles on them—complete with very evident outside edge wear. I suppose every journalist before me



discovered the same thing I did: the car handles like nothing else. Taking a corner at any speed becomes confidence-inspiring.

Whether or not Valentine had any love to offer when I got there was beside the point. The mere act of getting there and back was better for my heart and soul than I could have ever expected. ■

