

= Bart on the Road =

" Bart on the Road " is the twentieth episode of The Simpsons ' seventh season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on March 31 , 1996 . In the episode , Bart makes his own fake driver 's license . He rents a car with it and takes Milhouse , Martin , and Nelson on a road trip to Knoxville , Tennessee . In Knoxville , however , the car gets destroyed , and they are stranded without any money or transportation . To get Bart home , Homer orders equipment for the power plant and ships it via courier from Knoxville , with the boys stowed away inside the crate .

The episode was written by Richard Appel , and directed by Swinton O. Scott III . The idea of a road trip was " so exciting " that the writers immediately knew they wanted to write it . This features cultural references to the 1991 film Naked Lunch , American singer Andy Williams , and Look magazine . Since airing , the episode has received positive reviews from television critics , and Central Michigan Life named it the eighth best episode of the show . It acquired a Nielsen rating of 7 @. @ 2 , and was the fifth highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network the week it aired .

= = Plot = =

Principal Skinner closes school the day before spring break and sends the children on a " go to work with your parents day " in order to take a trip to Hong Kong . Bart is forced to go to the DMV with his aunts Patty and Selma , and Lisa decides to go to the nuclear power plant with Homer , where she bonds with him . At the DMV , Bart makes himself a fake driver 's license , which he , Nelson , Martin , and Milhouse use to hire a rental car with \$ 600 Martin earned in the stockmarket . The boys tell their parents they are going to attend the " National Grammar Rodeo " in Canada , but secretly take the rented car for a road trip to Knoxville , Tennessee after finding a brochure for the 1982 World 's Fair . During the car ride , chaos ensues as they stop in Branson , Missouri to see Nelson 's favorite singer Andy Williams , and Nelson later manages to provoke an agitated father of a Canadian family traveling to Cape Canaveral to turn around and head back to Winnipeg .

In Knoxville , however , they find out that the fair was held fourteen years earlier , and that its featured attraction , the Sunsphere , is now being used as a warehouse for a wig shop , now called the Wigsphere . The boys ' car soon gets destroyed by the Sunsphere being toppled by a rock Nelson threw , and they are stranded without any money or transportation . They sign up as couriers and then go to Hong Kong . Bart places a collect call to Lisa , who has spent the entire spring break with Homer at work , to ask her for advice . Lisa obtains Homer 's promise that he will not get upset and she reveals Bart 's predicament , causing Homer to scream in his safety helmet . To get Bart home , Homer contacts a power station close to the boys ' location , and orders a new command module for the power plant , after spilling soda over the current one , and ships it via courier from Knoxville , with Milhouse , Nelson , and Martin stowed away inside the crate and Bart as the courier .

The ending credits begin with an unsuspecting Marge getting phone calls from Principal Skinner ( who spotted Bart in Hong Kong ) , the Tennessee State Police ( who inquire about the crushed rental car ) , and the courier office ( which has an assignment for Bart ) . Homer snickers at these calls , which leaves Marge furious .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by Richard Appel , who wanted to do an episode that had two things ; a " go to work with your parents day " and Bart getting a driver 's license . The " go to work with your parents day " idea appealed to Appel because it was something he " lost the right " to do when he went from public school to private school as a child . Appel considered those days to be his favorites because he " didn 't have to do anything " at his parents ' job . The idea of having a driver 's license was something that Appel dreamed about when he was younger .

The writing staff had never done a spring break episode before so they thought , " What would Lisa and Bart do on spring break ? " and came up with the road trip plot . Bill Oakley , the show runner of

The Simpsons at the time , said that road trips were something that the writers liked to write stories about . The idea of four children going on a road trip was " so exciting " that they immediately knew they wanted to write it . There was a debate over where the children would go , and Fort Lauderdale , Florida , was first suggested , but the writers eventually decided to have them go to a " funny unlikely place " . Oakley 's show runner partner , Josh Weinstein , said that the writers were always looking for combinations of characters that had not been done many times on the show . Homer and Lisa had not been done " too often " and they wanted the two characters to bond and get closer to each other .

The episode was directed by Swinton O. Scott III . It was difficult to animate because the animators had to draw completely new designs for the locations outside of Springfield , such as Knoxville . The car scenes were also difficult to animate . At the time , The Simpsons was using traditional animation without computers , but they had to get one for a scene where the camera spins around the car from above . The car was difficult to animate because it had to " look real " and not " boxy like a truck " . The car was based on a 1993 Oldsmobile car with rounded edges . The Simpsons animator David Silverman said that the episode was " probably the most difficult one " Scott had to direct on the show .

= = Cultural references = =

When Lisa and Homer are playing with the radiation suits , Lisa says " Houston , we have a problem- Homer 13 is spinning out of control ! " This is a reference to the Apollo 13 incident , where an onboard oxygen tank exploded , causing the spacecraft to temporarily lose control .

Bart and his friends use Bart 's fake license to see the R @-@ rated 1991 film Naked Lunch , an adaptation of William Burroughs 's novel dealing with heroin addiction , homosexuality , and hallucinogens . Nelson 's muted " I can think of at least two things wrong with that title " afterwards reflects the fact that the film has a titillating title but is very much a dark , bleak , un @-@ erotic arthouse film .

The boys also go see an Andy Williams concert in Branson , Missouri , and the marquee advertising it outside reads " Wow , he 's still got it ? Look magazine " , Look having been out of business for years when the episode aired .

On the road , the boys pick up a hitchhiker who is based on the hitchhiker in the Texas Chainsaw Massacre horror film series .

Principal Skinner books a vacation with AmeriWestica , a parody of America West Airlines .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " Bart on the Road " finished 63rd in the ratings for the week of March 25 to March 31 , 1996 , with a Nielsen rating of 7 @.@ 2 . The episode was the fifth highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network that week , following The X @-@ Files , Cops , Party of Five , Martin and Melrose Place .

Since airing , the episode has received positive reviews from television critics . The authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , said that it " contains some superb touching character scenes between Homer and Lisa , a fascinating glimpse of Marge 's insecurities , and some nice touches that take it above the show 's very high average . " Dave Foster of DVD Times said that " Bart on the Road " is an episode which is built upon a " frankly ludicrous " idea which if the writers were to " stumble upon " now , " we 'd simply see Bart happen upon a license and skip town without anyone noticing , but here they do give the setup a great deal of consideration both on and off the screen . " He thought the story was " partly believable , though the opportunity when Bart hits the road is largely wasted with only a few well constructed jokes to speak of . " Foster thinks " what saves the episode is the opportunity to see Lisa and Homer connect , once again displaying what a strong season this is for Lisa as we see the two share some wonderfully tender moments , alongside some genuinely laugh @-@ out @-@ loud moments . " DVD Movie Guide 's Colin Jacobson enjoyed the episode and said

that he " loves " the children 's experiences at their parents ' jobs , " and when they head out of town , the fun continues . Any episode that sends the kids to the site of the World 's Fair is OK by me . " Jennifer Malkowski of DVD Verdict considered the best part of the episode to be when Patty and Selma explain their job at the DMV : " Somedays we don 't let the line move at all . We call those weekdays . " The website concluded its review by giving the episode a grade of B + . John Thorpe of Central Michigan Life named it the eighth best episode of the show . Robert Canning of IGN in a Flashback Review gave the episode a 9 @. @ 5 saying it was " Outstanding " and also stated " " Bart on the Road " is a fun trip and very funny , but it 's the way everything comes together that really makes it memorable " .