Headline: Unique roads rumble to different tunes

Deckhead: Singing highways come to life in California, New Mexico

Music plays an integral role in our driving experiences – especially on road trips. Tunes spice up the route. Dialing to your favorite radio station or synching your smartphone has you jamming to your favorite singers and bands.

It’s an ideal way to pass the time, but have you ever thought of the road providing the melodies? Only a few highways in the world offer this unique opportunity and two of them are in the U.S.

Singing highways make literal symphonies from streets. It seems impossible, but careful planning and mathematics make this possible. It’s not magic; it’s science.

Music is the result of vibrations. The speed of those vibrations dictates how sound waves are interpreted through the human ear. Certain speeds correlate specific notes on the scale. For example, 330 vibrations per second translates into an E note.

It *sounds* simple, but to reproduce them on the treads of tires involves more work. The rubber wheels are triggered by rumble strips – bumps that warn sleepy drivers to remain alert – and spacing them in a particular way produces the proper vibrational pattern to register a specific pitch.

Other automotive factors come into play to make the roads sing. Tire size makes a difference in sound quality and – just as music – timing and speed play leading roles in success.

Ingenuity comes to life. Engineers choose a speed at which they assume a vehicle will pass over the strips. A vehicle traveling 45 mph will require 330 strips per second to hear and E note – or one rumble strip every 2.4 inches.

The effort is dizzying but the payoff is priceless. It brings a new sense to sightseeing.

The U.S.’s dueling highways can be found in California and New Mexico. Rather than competing pianos, it’s more like repeating rumble strips.

Lancaster, California’s Avenue G is a nondescript trip of road about 90 minutes northwest of Los Angeles. It’s the first of its kind in the U.S.

The highway sings the “William Tell Overture.” Honda tuned it up in 2008 as part of a marketing campaign.

Travelers are warned of the oncoming song about a mile from the strips, which are located between the town’s 30th and 40th Street West. Motorists should take the left-hand lane and maintain a speed 55 mph for the best results.

Meanwhile, New Mexico’s Route 66 has its own roadway opus along a 490-yard section located between markers 4 and 5, between Albuquerque and Tijeras.

Completed in 2014, it’s more tuned than California’s road, playing the ending of “America the Beautiful” for drivers who find themselves motoring along the rumble strips.

Drivers are warned of the queued-up tune from about a mile away and speed plays a key role in hearing the correct notes. The song plays perfectly at 45 mph.

Perhaps the next singing road to be constructed could be named “Tom Cochrane Road”.

“Life is a Highway” certainly would be a fitting tune.

Cutline: TUNED IN – Legendary Route 66 in New Mexico is one of two roads in the U.S. that includes a singing highway. Image: trekandphoto. Adobe Stock.