

PCA PORSCHE TREFFEN - 2010

By John MacFarlane



After attending the Escape in September I spent a couple of days in the office and then headed to Stuttgart to attend the PCA Porsche Treffen. This is a PCA function, starting each year in Stuttgart and Zuffenhausen usually at the end of April/early May and September/October. The German word Treffen is defined as “a meeting” and this certainly was a meeting of about 50 PCA members (most with spouses).

The Treffen (an official PCA event) is organized by Peter Sontag who owns Fast Lane Travel, Inc. (his company name should tell you something about the trip). While this was neither my first Treffen (third actually) nor my first time driving the Autobahn with Porsche’s (my 10th) it was the first one where the cars were pre organized through Fast

Lane. All aspects of the trip, my pre Treffen 911 and all parts of the Treffen were organized to a “T”. Everything happened as and when it should throughout the official parts of the tour.

I left Vancouver on September 16 and flew to Stuttgart via London Heathrow arriving at dinner time on the 17th. There I was met by a Fast Lane Representative who took me downtown to the Hotel Graf Zeppelin which is one of the nicer ones in Stuttgart. I was the only person he was there to pick up as I was 4 days early.

As the Treffen itself did not start until the following Tuesday I had made arrangements with Fast Lane to rent a 997 C4S Cabriolet for a long weekend. I picked that up at the main train station (across the street from the hotel) on the Saturday morning. After figuring out the clutch had to be on the floor to start the car (I have a Tiptronic S in my 996 TT Cab so this was new to me). Had a little problem finding the top switch but even though the manual was in German I was able to figure out the pictures (they were in both languages). After a few minutes I got going and headed North and then West on an Autobahn to a town called Sinsheim where the German Auto and Technical Museum is located. Had the top down so kept under 125 mph on this first day but only got rocked by one very fast 911 going by me doing closer to 150 mph.

The museum is one to not miss if you are interested in anything historical about cars, airplanes, trains and the like. As an idea they have the largest collection of Formula 1 cars in the world. They also have, on static display that you can enter both a Concorde and the Russian TU 144 which is the Russian equivalent of Concorde. Boy were the passenger seats small in those aircraft.

They also have what is probably the best static display of WW II motorized vehicles all set up as they would have been seen and used during that conflict. The Afrika Corps. Display(s) are especially interesting as equipment from both sides was shown.

After Sinsheim I drove to village of Beilstein which was about 50 miles to meet with some former Porsche senior managers in the marketing department from the 80's that I had met a number of times and become friends with. They entertained me the first night by going to dinner in an old farmhouse that holds public dinners once a month and according to their license must use locally grown foods and wines. Extremely interesting and fun. The weather was warm enough to sit outside.

The next day they took me on a tour some of the historic villages in the area including looking at some fortifications that were done by the Romans way way back.

On Monday I had two items on my agenda. The first was to drive down to Schiltach in the Black Forest to the head office and factory of BBS Wheels. The BBS factory etc. is not open to the public but through the efforts of the local BBS distributor I was able to gain access to both the factory and also to spend an hour with their chief design engineer. Seeing a video of computer and actual models of their stress testing of a wheel certainly explained why these wheels are so strong while being light. He also explained the different construction and design techniques they use for both their road, production and motorsport wheels (including several Formula 1 teams) and explained why we'll seldom find a true "forged magnesium wheel" on a road car (They corrode). Virtually all road and high performance wheels are made of aluminum now (either forged or cast).

After the visit with the engineer I spent time going through the entire factory from where the aluminum ingots come in right up to the finishing of the end product. Interestingly, while I knew that BBS made many of the Porsche alloy wheels I found (which confirmed my thoughts) that there were wheels in the production area for the other main Stuttgart auto manufacturer and for one located in Bavaria. BBS won the honour of being the number one parts supplier to Porsche this past year. Apparently most of BBS production now is for automobile manufacturers.

After BBS I drove up to Reutlingen (a distance North) and picked up a jacket I had ordered from Heinz Bauer Manufacturing. If you read Christophorus you will have seen their advertisements and the jackets are every bit as nice as they appear in the ads. I had mine made to measure (I was there with Marni in August but that's another story) and I am just thrilled with the quality.

On Tuesday I journeyed to Zuffenhausen to visit the new Porsche Museum and also visit the factory. I had booked this 8 months in advance and only got confirmation in early August of my reservation. I only spent a little time in the museum this time (I'd seen most of it during the August trip) but did have lunch in their 5-Star restaurant *Christophorus*. It was fabulous.

The factory tour (unfortunately no cameras allowed) started with a little history of the Zuffenhausen location and then we visited the engine assembly line. We were able to both see engine assembly from overhead but actually got



down on the floor as well. Interesting to note that each employee works at this station for one hour then moves to the next station. If at any time he has to leave the station for any reason then there is a light he turns on and a “spare” comes and fills in for him while he’s away. The factory runs two shifts each day (weekdays) and they do allow smoke and beer breaks in the rest areas adjacent to the production line.

It should be noted that every car produced is already “sold”. Porsche itself does not build cars for inventory. While production was 100,000 cars a couple of years ago it slipped to 70,000 a year ago and then up to about 90,000 this year. About 25,000 of the 90,000 are actually Panameras.

Unfortunately we weren’t able to see the upholstery shop as that day there were some prototyping going on there and I’m assuming that was for the next generation 911 which is coming in a year or so.



We then went to the actual assembly building where the completed and painted body shells went to be turned into real Porsche’s. They assemble both Boxsters and 911’s in that hall. The first one we saw entering the line turned out to be one of the Blue Speedsters that were announced a week or two later at the Paris Auto show. To me the highlight of this visit was seeing the “marriage” of the body and chassis. This is where the car is now a real car. This tour took about an hour and three quarters and while not my only factory visit on this trip it was one of the highlights of the trip.



That evening a dinner had been arranged for those who arrived early in Esslingen, a nearby village, in a very old fortress that was originally a part of the fortification of the city, built about 800 to 900 years ago! Fast Lane Travel paid for dinner and drinks (approx. \$100 per person) as a welcome present. Ilse Nädele, President Porsche Club Germany was our hostess for the evening.

On Wednesday the official Treffen started with a luncheon and then a visit to the new Mercedes Museum. This museum is much larger than the Porsche one. The visit started by taking an elevator to the top floor (about 6 floors up) and then as you wind down a spiral walkway you traced the history of Mercedes from the original car right up to current production including extremely expansive displays of most models and almost all their racing cars through the years. Definitely worth the visit if you're in the area.



That evening function was a dinner in the local *Ratskeller* where in addition to the fine local cuisine and wine we signed our documents for the next Porsche's we would be driving for a couple of days later in the week. There we also met up with the twenty folks who just returned from the TREFFEN Plus from Salzburg and Gmünd, the site of the original Porsche Factory in Austria.

On Thursday we all went back to Zuffenhausen to visit the Museum and factory. These visits were a little shorter due to some time constraints but I did find time to try and wear out my credit cards in both the factory "Goodie" store and also the "Goodie" store at the dealership across the street. Normally, unless you are taking delivery of a new car the factory store is not available to visit. I had a very interesting U.S. Customs declaration as usual.

On the bus to the factory we were passed by a 911 "Mule" (one of the next generation 911's) which while disguised was interesting to see. I have a couple of rather poor pictures of it.

On this factory tour we also visited the engine shop but not to the floor, the assembly building and also spent time in the "Special" order department seeing how those who can get to the factory can specify virtually anything for their car. We also saw the assembly part of that department where the special equipment was added to the cars already produced and sold to customers. That evening we were taken up to a nearby village "Castle" for a medieval dinner.

Friday was the big day. We were bussed out to the site of the old Solitude race course in the suburbs of Stuttgart where our 15 rental Porsches were lined up in front of the old pit boxes. Quite a sight, 13 -911's, a Cayman and a Panamera. There were 14 black ones and 1 dark grey. All were 2010's and mine was a C4S Coupe with PDK.

After a short indoctrination talk about the rules of the road (no passing on the right) and other local driving customs we were broken out into 3 groups (fast, faster and fastest). I had elected to go in the “faster” group. Each group consisted of a leader and 5 participant cars. We were also issued two way radios so we could communicate back and forth as there was some regimentation required to keep anyone from getting lost.

We headed out, headed to a resort in Bavaria at the town of Rottach-Egern which is about 70 miles south east of Munich in the foothills of the Alps. The trip was to be a combination of about 3 hours on the Autobahn (contrary to public thought only about 45% of the Autobahn is without speed limits) and then about 3 hours on fabulous back country and spectacular Alpine mountain roads.



It took us about an hour to clear the speed limited portions of the Autobahn and then we were able to unleash the cars. It's very exciting to be driving legally around 150 mph (245k), in a line of 5 Porsche's, and know it's entirely legal. I hate to think how fast the “fastest” group was going. Our group actually went a little slower than I would have liked but one of the drivers was getting concerned (wrongly) that he was drifting (I think just not enough experience over 100mph) so we didn't get much over the 150 mph mark.

I was the only “single” person car and it did get rather exciting handling the car and the radio when our leader (Ilse Nädele, who was responsible for Porsche Clubs worldwide for the Factory) was radioing, faster, faster and close up. We had to acknowledge her so she knew we were in the group still.



After the Autobahn run we then headed onto the side roads for lunch at Neuschwanstein (the castle that Disney copied his Cinderella castle from). Following this we had a 2+ hour spirited drive on the back roads of Bavaria. We even had a great run one private, toll road that is set up just for this. On a portion of trip one of the participants was pulled over in a radar trap for being 20k over the limit (I was behind him and we were really about 45k over but they only wanted one Porsche that day). The fine was 260 Euro - \$365, payable in cash, right now! A few minutes later the “fastest” group went through the same trap but the Police laughed and said they had their token Porsche for the day so didn't need any more.

We then proceeded, albeit slightly slower, to the hotel (Seehotel Überfahrt in Rottach-Egern) for a wonderful dinner (this hotel has to be seen to be believed). Fantastic is the only word for it.



The next day dawned and we all looked forward to both the back road but also the Autobahn excitement to come. Unfortunately we had a rainstorm much like our local downpours where we were restricted to 130 k in the rain (still exciting when you're going this speed, 70 feet from the car in front of you so no one can barge in and have limited visibility. This went on for about 90 minutes. In a monster hour plus traffic jam, three of us actually lost our group but fortunately

found the "fastest" group at a rest stop and joined them. Now a total of 9 cars in the group, 130 k and not 100 feet of visibility – challenging is the only word to describe it!

That evening, our last, we attended to the Cannstatter Volksfest which is very much like the Oktoberfest in Munich but smaller. Our particular tent had seats for about 3,000 but they sold 5,000 tickets. Fortunately Fast Lane had reserved our tables in a special section with a railing separating us from the throng yet enabling us to watch the mayhem. The beer and wine flowed and the dinners were excellent and the company fun.

The next morning we were taken to the Airport for our flights home with headaches for many, including me.

This trip was fantastic. All hotels and meals were at 5 star or above, the beer and wine flowed (the Treffen was totally all inclusive Even with all gasoline, extra kilometers, insurance, transfers etc.). Each night we all received a personalized note and a present. One of the items was a decal proving that we had joined the Fast Lane 150 + mph Club (driving that speed legally and safely on a public highway).



In summary, near the end of the evening at the Volksfest Peter Sontag asked me how I enjoyed the trip. My response was instant "if it were any more fun it would be illegal!" Enough said. John Macfarlane