

REPORT ON A PCA TREFFEN

By Marty Goldsmith



Brita and I returned home on September 26th from one of the 2010 PCA-sponsored *Treffens* in Stuttgart, Germany. They are Porsche-oriented tours operated by FastLaneTravel.com, and led by Peter Sontag, who has done these tours for over 35 years.

We flew the previous Monday (arriving Tuesday) from LAX to Frankfurt, and took a train from the airport to downtown Stuttgart. The station was just across the street

from the Hotel Graf Zeppelin (a first class property), our Fast Lane headquarters.

Stuttgart is a city built on hilly terrain. Any space not occupied by buildings, is devoted to vineyards. Including just up the street from the hotel and station. While heavily damaged in WWII, the city is very attractive, with mixes of the old and new. After arriving, we walked up the Königsstrasse through some of the nearby shopping areas. While the retail stores resemble ours, the interspersed bakeries are something we can only wish we had. The large promenade (like an



outdoor pedestrian-only mall) Königsstrasse with rail transport underground along with more retail shops is very busy. At the end, two very large open park areas were covered with people enjoying the sunny weather. It is really very, very attractive.

Our small group was taken to dinner that night by one of our *Treffen* hosts, Ilse Nädele the President of the Porsche Club Germany emeritus, at the Dicker Turn fortress, a 13th century structure in a nearby suburb. It was a very fine restaurant, and the view from the fortress wall was simply breathtaking, over the hills and valley of the surrounding town. This “early arrivals” dinner was not part of the program, but Peter treated us to this wonderful surprise. On returning to the hotel, we discovered one of the trademarks of these trips - a note and a gift from Peter Sontag, the director of the PCA *Treffens*.

On Wednesday, after a marvelous breakfast at the hotel we returned to our explorations of the downtown. Shopping is always more fun in new surroundings, or so Brita tells me. At noon we met up with our whole group, twenty nine persons plus our hostess. It was a good get-acquainted lunch, and afterward we got on a deluxe Mercedes bus (the nicest bus I have ever been on) and departed for the Mercedes-Benz museum.



Daimler-Benz is a very large industry, probably the largest in Stuttgart. The museum is very modern and spectacular in appearance. The whole Daimler-Benz history is shown in exhibits, not only of passenger cars, but also of commercial vehicles of every description. (9) Your path through the building, on multi-levels, follows in chronological order. As you move from one era to another along ramps, the walls display large groups of photographs and text describing the economic, political, and social history of

the time. To the great credit of the company, the history is presented straight, the good and the bad. I was impressed.

After returning to our hotel, our group walked through the downtown to a cellar restaurant, the Ratskeller, in the town hall. Every person was handed a tall glass of good beer as we entered, and we sat down to a very pleasant dinner. Paperwork was completed that evening for the rental of the Porsches we would be using later in the



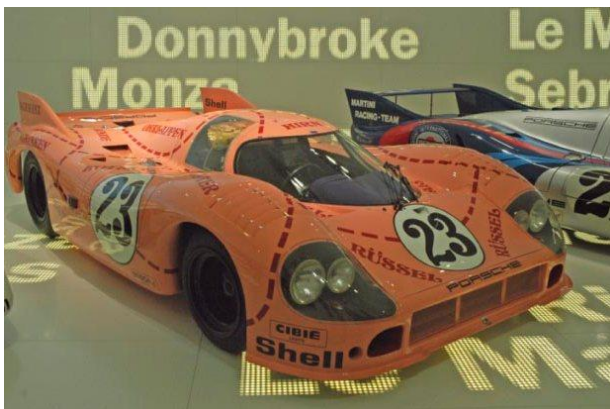
trip. Again, at our hotel room we found a note from Peter and a small gift.

The next morning, after the endless variety of our German breakfast, we left by bus for Zuffenhausen, the Mecca of our trek. Having been joined by another *Treffen* group just returned from Salzburg, our 54 - person contingent was separated into two parts on arrival at the Porsche complex. Some entered

the Porsche Museum directly, while others spent some time examining the "prototype" dealer complex across the street. While no doubt a 'super-dealership', it still offered the usual displays. The only unusual feature was a restored 356 offered for sale. We impatiently awaited our turn to enter the museum.



There we found that it is everything promised in all the magazines and promotional pieces. The architecture is remarkable (10), and the lobby is made more interesting by the glass wall between it and the restoration shop. About every famous Porsche you have ever read about is on display.



Then there are the special displays, such as aircraft engines, and cars carefully sectioned to show the construction. While one hurries along, hoping to be able to see it all, there is the urge to remain in place and savor what you are looking at. One short morning is absolutely insufficient to absorb what there is to see.

It is quite overwhelming. The whole company collection is far larger than what can be displayed at one time, so the exhibits change from time to time.



Reluctantly, after we were extracted from the museum, we followed our leaders across the street to the factory. We had been promised a lunch in the worker's cafeteria, but instead we were directed to the VIP dining room on the top floor. There we were plied with fine food and excellent wine. Peter had arranged for a number of retired Porsche personnel to join us, and the discussions seemed very animated. I know that the gentleman with whom I sat spoke



eloquently on many topics, and in perfect English (fortunately for me, as my German is confined to *Gesundheit*). In fact it was one of the most interesting conversations I have had in a long time. His insights into Porsche matters were most thoughtful.

After lunch we moved on to the factory, where photography is strictly prohibited - so no pix for you! After a stop at the closed-to-the-public 'special wishes' shop, where an amazing selection of customization items is provided, we moved to the factory proper. First stop was a logistics center, where engine parts are stored and distributed to the production line. Robot carts roll along the rows of bins, picking up the parts that are intended for a particular engine. When the little train of three carts has picked up the all specified parts, it moves to the engine line, where it moves along with the evolving engine through its manufacturing process. Most stations are fully automatic, or robots, while others involve a human carefully assembling parts. All the different engines seem to be built on the same line, at the same time. At the end, all engines are pressure tested cold, then hot, and many are run at full throttle with white hot exhaust pipes as quality control.

The auto assembly line is quite different. Again, all the sports cars models are built on the same line at the same time. But here only one station is robotic - it mounts the windshields. All other work is done by humans. The line begins as finished body shells are lowered from the conveyor from the body works across the street. Then at each station the parts appropriate to that particular car are put in place. Porsche points out that every car built is already sold, and has been specified by the purchaser, either a customer or a dealer. Thus there are no 'generic' Porsches being put together; all are custom. Porsche, like most auto builders today, purchase most of their parts and sub-assemblies from other manufacturers. While the sheet metal panels are likewise produced by others, Porsche assembles the parts into bodies. Unfortunately we were not able to see the body shop. Porsche makes all the engines. Everything else, including transmissions, suspensions, etc. is produced by others.

As we left the factory, past a parking area for finished cars, we noticed a large group of GT-2 RSs - apparently there is to be a mass delivery of these very special cars. We returned to the hotel, quite late in the day, and were asked to clean up for prompt departure to a dinner at a medieval castle for a "raucous medieval dinner with music". It was an overwhelming and eventful day. Every PCA member must do this.



The next morning, we checked out and departed for the Solitude Race Track, where we would pick up our Porsches for the Bavarian tour. We were told that there was good news and bad news - good, everyone got exactly the Porsche of their choice (ours was a Cayman S) and the bad, they were all black. We quickly took off on the nearby Autobahn, heading south. We had enjoyed perfect weather all week, and today was no exception. Our caravan of fifteen cars was broken into three groups of five, each with a guide in a lead car, and all equipped with two-way radio. These proved to be vital in keeping the groups together, particularly in traffic or on the Autobahn.



We had all been thoroughly briefed on German traffic law and customs, so we had some idea of what to expect. Two key points - on the Autobahn there is NO passing on the right, and all cars will remain to the right except when passing (of course our Porsches were always passing so we were never in the right lane). No abalones stuck in the fast lane! The leader kept us informed of current speed limits and other factors. Then, when the opportunity presented itself, they called for Let's Go! Down went the throttles and we started flying by traffic. It is a 'thing' with FastLaneTravel.com, the *Treffen* organizers, that every client should hit 150 MPH (242 km/hr). Indeed we all did, and in fact on our first attack on the speed goal, I got cut off by traffic and had to hurry to catch up - the speedo once showed 260 km/hr (162 mph).



I'd like to say it was thrilling, but the Porsche just makes it seem routine. The most outstanding thing about the Autobahn (and the local roads) to me is the perfection of the paving - it is just dead smooth and very grippy.

We entered the Bavarian Alps, and the scenery was wonderful. The roads changed to two lane twisties, running between farms, villages, and mountains. Just perfect touring, but no time to stop and savor. We lunched at a village at the base of the famous Neuschwanstein Castle. (18) The castle is quite a sight on its mountain, but the village is a typical tourist trap, overrun with tour buses, gimmick shops, and humanity. Nonetheless we were served a wonderful German lunch in a fine restaurant. We moved on through more wonderful scenery, moving back and forth between Germany and

Austria and ended our day at a five star resort hotel on the shores of the Tegernsee. a lake near the Austrian border. All I can say is the hotel was far more elaborate than any of us really expected. The surrounding village was very upscale - sort of like Carmel, and this area is clearly a retreat for the wealthy. It is really quite beautiful.

Our perfect luck with the weather ended that night. Saturday opened with rain that seldom stopped. That was OK, as you could see the nearby scenery, if not the mountains that lay behind. But as soon as we hit the Autobahn, traffic slowed to a crawl, then sometimes stopped. The congestion was unrelenting, with only a few places where normal (normal for the I-405, that is) speeds could be maintained. We arrived at our drop-off point where lunch had been planned for sandwiches on the bus, so we were a tired, hungry bunch as we set off



for the hotel in Stuttgart.



Evening plans included the opening of the Stuttgart Oktoberfest, famous for its wild and wooly ways. It was held in several huge tents, with several thousand people, a real spectacle. The food was, well Oktoberfest food, the beer was plentiful and good, and the music was the appropriate Oompah renditions underscoring the celebration.

On Sunday, we had a good breakfast, got on the train, then the plane, and 24 hours after getting up in Stuttgart, we were in bed in Long Beach. It took us nearly a week to recover. That is *Treffen*. Clearly they are extremely well planned and organized, with no expense spared. I want to relate one lasting impression of our trip. That is the unflinching courtesy, kindness, and helpful nature of the German people we encountered, whether it was at the airport, on the train, in the street or stores, or anywhere we went. I can only hope that we Americans will leave such an impression on visitors to our land.

