

The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer

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Dear Porsche Pushers;

While in Germany recently, I had to drive more than 600 miles, so I was really looking forward to the M-B I rented for the trip. Boy, was I disappointed. A C220 Kompressor, it was loaded with every option except the two I needed (make note of that word); it had no cruise control, but it DID have a speed limiter, which restricted me to 190 kmh because Hertz saw fit to equip it with M&S tires, a ridiculous combination for the German Autobahn. As things happen, it really mattered little, as I probably could not have been at a more appropriate 240 for more than about ten minutes in the entire journey because of traffic, but it was still a frustration.

Having the car allowed me one of those unique experiences one can never plan for, but will remember forever; I met a lovely young woman (her name, Beata, means beauty, appropriately) who decided to join me for dinner “when we find a nice place along the way”. She wanted to practice her english, and eating alone is the worst part of my job. But we got so carried away in our conversation that we completely passed all “civilization” twice before finally trekking through the hinterland in search of the last open Mandarin restaurant in northern Germany. In keeping with the impromptu nature of the encounter, we picked our meal by the “dart” method, but had so much fun talking that we hardly finished the soup before they had to doggie bag our food and close, and I got her back to her room at about 1 AM. So we drove about 180 miles for Chinese Takeout. I’ll cherish the entire trip.

The following day, after realizing that we had left the food in the car, I dropped it off with her landlady, and sped off on another adventure, this time to VW’s Autostadt at Wolfsburg. My advice; don’t bother. I had heard it had received over a million visitors since it opened just over a year ago, and was looking forward to something akin to Disneyland for Gear-Heads. Instead, I got to see a weird teutonic interpretation of even more weird art. While there were a few mildly entertaining exhibits, and even some neat demonstrations, they were so widely spaced amongst the “are you kidding...” stuff as to be absurd.

One particularly memorable spot, though, was the main entry pavilion. The general theme was supposed to be mobility, but there was precious little to actually show how the automobile had created personal freedom for so much of the world’s people, instead concentrating on silly symbolism and bald-faced advertising. The sole bright spot was a short film, which told one nothing about mobility and everything about cultural differences. Excepting the campfire scene from “Blazing Saddles”, which is totally butchered by censors for any network broadcast here, when was the last time you saw the act of human bodily waste dealt with realistically in a movie? What was absurd, though, was the depiction of this shapely (and properly underdressed) “teacher” with her schoolchildren headed for the seashore, transported by this arrogant driver who took the wrong bus, and headed for the mountains. When she awakens to discover the error, they are in an open area, and so she decides to do like the children and “relieve herself” along the side of the bus. With all the kids looking out the windows. And seemingly nobody but me realized the driver had wing mirrors. Silly, and don’t expect to ever see it anywhere near these shores, yet ironically entertaining just for the depiction of reality. Europeans are FAR less hung up about sexuality than Americans, which I found refreshing.

Other reality was also interesting – they actually acknowledged the use of slave labor at the VW works in WWII and the weapons produced, and one of few American vehicles shown was the original Olds Toronado, I guess in keeping with their (mostly) FWD theme by that time frame. Perhaps the most pathetic display was the light show at the Lamborghini Pavilion, which (I think) intended to show that the Diablo was a bad-ass car, but left me to wonder if it was a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that they often don’t start. I told an usher, who was of course impeccably Italian (style over substance) that a much better presentation would have been two minutes from the film “Cannonball Run”. If you saw the film, you know exactly what I’m talking about, and if not, it would take too long to explain. Suffice it to suggest “speed and sex” and leave it to your imagination. And the Bentley and Audi presentations were sorely disappointing, especially given their LeMans finish a week later.

And speaking of that, the biggest frustration was the fact they showed a number of engine cross-sections, and a great presentation on their rendition of variable cam timing, which has far more flexibility than the Porsche Vario-Cam system, yet nobody there knew a thing about it, nor about the W12 or W8 engines they had on display. Seeing a presentation on how they handle airflow in and out of those engines would have made the trip worthwhile. Not seeing any such thing made the trip a waste of time.