

Driving a Herd of Model A's Over the Swiss Alps

By Ken Mallory

(With assistance from Dick Canzoneri and Jim Macklin)

This tale challenges the tale Mark Twain told in *Tramp Abroad* about his pedestrian tour of Europe in 1878. In this case, in September 2001, a clutch (Pardon the expression!) of Americans, many from Southern California, shipped their vintage Model A Fords to Europe, drove them on a breath-taking thirty-day tour of Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Italy, including two sorties over the Alps, and lived to tell about it! I drove Number 41 of those 50 historic automobiles, my yellow Cabriolet coupe, in that adventure with my



Figure 1: Author and adventurer Ken Mallory with his 1930 Model A Cabriolet Coupe and fellow adventurers Norma and Dick Canzoneri with their 1930 Model A Tudor Sedan that they drove over the Alps and through Europe in 2001. Photo courtesy of Jim Macklin.



Figure 2: License plate commemorating Ken Mallory's position in the line of tour. Photo courtesy of Jim Macklin.

wife Betty. In this article, I will describe how we happened to hatch this adventure, how we made it happen and how it turned out.

How we hatched the adventure:

There are thousands upon thousands of vintage car owners across America in addition to even more hot rod and other vehicle enthusiasts. I am involved with a San Gabriel Valley club called the **Santa Anita A's, which has over a hundred families and individuals** as members. It is associated with a national organization called the Model A Ford Club of America, which has more than 280 affiliated clubs around the country and is the largest club related to a single model/make of automobiles. In Southern California in 2000, the Model A Touring Club was formed as a Special Interest Group of the national organization. The tour of Europe in 2001 was the first trip organized under the auspices of the touring club.

The Santa Anita A's are deeply involved in local communities through their car shows and events and through participation in small town patriotic parades and other **community events. You've** probably seen **some of our members' classy** classic cars in annual local parades, sometimes carrying dignitaries and/or beautiful girls.

A member named Lee Chase was the inspiration behind the creation of the touring Special Interest Group and the trip to Europe. Lee and several other Southern California Model A owners had planned and executed two less ambitious tours in 1998 and 1999. Then in 2000, they formed the touring organization and planned the European tour. We were blessed to have individuals with the experience of organizing and leading tours like this, including one who was a native German-speaking person with extensive knowledge of European culture, laws and regulations.

How we made it happen:

Obviously, an expedition like this requires advanced attention to details and logistics.

Who's on board?

The first necessary step was determining who and how many people and how many vehicles would be participating. This is something that the Model A Ford Club of America has done for years on a domestic basis. Groups of people from local Model A clubs enjoy traveling together. Eight couples from our local Santa Anita A's club decided well in advance to travel together on this tour. Most of the people associated with the fifty-car expedition came from the West Coast.

Will they let us on their roads?

Second, the legal and operational status of the classic automobiles **had to be thorough and accurate. The European authorities wouldn't** want unsafe cars operating on their *strasses, strade* and *rues*. (We **didn't use the famous autobahns** because our old cars could not maintain the high speeds required.) In the process of restoring these aged vehicles, lots of replacement parts are installed, including significant parts like engines and transmissions. In some cases, the

Vehicle Identification Number on the engine no longer agreed with the numbers on the registration. The club arranged for the California Highway Patrol to rivet new identification numbers on **the driver's** door post of any nonconforming vehicles so the ownership numbers could not be questioned by the European authorities. The members also worked together to make sure the cars were in top operating condition. This helped reduce the anxiety resulting from driving old cars in a foreign environment as well as satisfying the European authorities.

What if a Model A needs repair?

Since these cars, which are over seventy years old, are known to need repairs on occasion, and Model A Ford parts might not be readily available in Europe, the participating owners estimated how many tires, clutches, generators, water pumps and other spare parts might be needed.

Then they acquired an appropriate community inventory of parts and the tools with which to make repairs. This inventory was then broken down into boxes of material to be carried by individual owners. Then, if needed, the drivers knew on whom to call when they needed parts from the inventory. Having developed good relationships over the years, any driver in need would be well taken care of by the other drivers. Some of the drivers are also excellent auto mechanics.

How did we get fifty Model A Fords to Europe?

To get the cars to Europe is a story in itself. The answer to this question is that the cars were shipped to Antwerp in the Netherlands in marine containers and then the containers were taken up the Rhine River on a barge to Basel, Switzerland. The owners dropped off their cars at the docks in Long Beach, California on July 16th, seven weeks before the tour was to start. Almost all the fuel was drained

from the fuel tank and other steps taken to secure the cars during the voyage through the Panama Canal and across the Atlantic Ocean with the possibility of heavy seas. Obviously, the fuel tanks could not be full for fear of gasoline spilling out; however, there had to be enough gas for the port workers in Basel to drive the cars off the dock to a garage.

On the Model A car, the fuel tank is mounted across the top of the hood of the car just in front of the windshield and operates from gravity flow into the engine, as these old Fords from the early years had no fuel pumps. The gas cap and fuel port are in the middle of the hood just in front of and just below the windshield. In spite of leaving only a minimal amount of gas in the tank, by the time my car got back to Long Beach in November, 2001, enough fuel had splashed out of the gas cap to corrode away some of the yellow paint on my car in that area. I wondered what kind of sea passage would have caused that much spillage.

It turned out that three Model A cars are just long enough to securely fill one marine container securely. The cars were roped and fastened to the wood floor of the containers. Some of the spare parts and tools and trunks were secured inside the cars, so they would not have to be shipped separately. But they did have to be secured, so they could not come loose during the voyage and damage the cars. The cars were shipped mostly from Long Beach but also from the ports in New York and Houston. The cost of shipping each container was about \$7,000, but each container held three cars for trips to and from Europe, so, the cost of about \$2,300 for each car was not very expensive.

In September, we all flew into nearby Zurich and made our way over to Basel. By the time we arrived in Basel on September 10th to pick up our cars, they were already unpacked from the containers and sitting in rows in a garage there. All we had to do was line up at a service station in Basel to fill the tanks. The gas cost the equivalent



Figure 3: *Dick Canzoneri fueling up his thirsty Model A called “Sweetpea” after a long voyage. Photo courtesy of Ken Mallory, whose car is next in line.*

of about \$4.50 per gallon way back then – a level astonishing to us at the time but normal in Europe. One driver made the mistake of filling his tank with diesel fuel instead of gasoline. His tank had to be drained and then refilled with the correct fuel. Due to the different design of the fuel pumps compared to the ones in America, one can see how this **mistake might be made. He didn’t make it again.**

Seeing fifty Model A Fords in lines at the pumps was a really unique sight for the residents of Basel! We knew that touring as a single group with fifty autos was too cumbersome. We ended up breaking down into smaller related groups who followed a general plan but managed their own choices regarding where to stop for fuel, have lunch, etc. The only time the entire group got together at the same time was at the hotels where reservations had been made. All the folks on the tour were supplied with hand-held walkie talkie radios

so we could keep in touch. My wife Betty and I traveled with a group of eight vehicles mostly from our local Model A club.

The tour begins!

After picking up the cars in Basel and refueling them, we began our tour with a drive across the Rhine River into Germany to a small town called Rickenbach at the southern end of the *Schwarz Wald*, or Black Forest, district in the state of Baden-Württemberg.

We were pleased to have a flatbed tow truck furnished and driven by members of the Ford Motor Club of Switzerland to deal with any repair problems. In one incident, the spring perch, which attaches the body to the spring assembly on each wheel, on one wheel of a car broke. Since the car could not move without this piece, the accommodating Swiss truck drivers carted the broken car off to a Swiss **club member's location**. **By the next morning, the car was** returned with the broken spring assembly fixed, but also the car had been completely serviced courtesy of the Ford Motor Club of Switzerland members. This is typical of how club members treat each other no matter where on earth they live or are visiting. Luckily, other than this repair, the only repair on the trip within our small group was one flat tire! On the other hand, in the whole group, there were several serious malfunctions that required heroic repair efforts by those who sacrificed their sleep to keep everyone on the road.

On the first full day in Europe, the next day, we drove north through the picturesque *Schwarz Wald* to Schonach. There we visited a cuckoo clock factory where most of us bought genuine Black Forest hand-crafted cuckoo clocks. We also stopped in an enclosed plaza in a beautiful small town to eat lunch at an Italian restaurant called *Ristorante Centrale*. Our line of eight Model A cars immediately attracted the attention of the local folks, including the owner/chef and the staff at the restaurant. We found this happened virtually everywhere we stopped all during the trip.

A notable tragic day:

In the afternoon, as we were driving through the Black Forest enjoying the scenery, something extraordinary happened. Remember this was now September 11, 2001, and we were five hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time in America. Our friend who originally came from Germany was riding in the tow truck, which had a radio. He heard on the news that two planes had flown into the World Trade Center in New York, the towers had collapsed, and another plane had flown into the Pentagon. Immediately the news flew around the cars on the tour via the walkie talkies. We drove to our next hotel to be able to watch the developments on television. The hotel staff found a channel on television with the news spoken in English. One of our group, who was also a minister, held a



Figure 4: *Display in store in Germany showing sympathy for the attacks in the US on September 11th. “Opfern” is the German word for “victims.” Photo courtesy of Ken Mallory.*

spontaneous religious service at the hotel. This gave us some relief from the shock we all felt. We stayed up late watching for any new developments.

The Swiss and German people around us were as shocked and disturbed as we were. On later days during the tour, we saw signs up expressing sadness and sympathy for the loss of lives in those events. An example is in Figure 4, similar to many others we saw in windows of homes, shops and other public

Although the tragedy of these events will forever stay with us, it's interesting to note how fortunate we were to arrive in Europe just the day before all flights in America and elsewhere were cancelled due to uncertainty in the immediate aftermath.

Our overall itinerary:

Since this is an article about cars and not a travelogue through **Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Italy, I'll provide you with a** general itinerary of the circuitous route we drove through those

countries. I will, however, describe some of our adventures with these old Model A Fords. Let me just say that this route is full of history and has just flat-out spectacular scenery!

Our route included the following places:

1. You know that we started in Basel on the Rhine River in Switzerland.
2. We toured through the Schwarz Wald in Baden-Württemberg and then through the neighboring state of Bavaria ending up in the Swiss city of Bregenz at the south end of Lake Constance.
3. From Bregenz, we drove to Oberammergau, a small picturesque German village that is known for putting on, every ten years for the last 380 years, a Passion Play exploring the life of Jesus. It was started in 1632, the year after the bubonic plague killed most of the people in the village. The survivors committed to

God to put on the play every ten years if He protected the people. No one from the village has died from the plague since then. So, the play continues to today. Religious people travel from all over the world to attend it. Ironically, in 2020, the pageant has been cancelled in the name of COVID-19 and social distancing, challenging the promise made almost 400 years ago. We also visited the nearby Linderhof, the summer palace of Mad King Ludwig II of Bavaria, known for building magnificent palaces costing way beyond his pocketbook, like Neuschwanstein Castle.

4. We then drove south to Austria to the city of Innsbruck, named after a bridge (*brücke*) over the River Inn. This is near Salzburg, so you should think of the scenery in *The Sound of Music* to get some idea of how beautiful the area is - or of the 1976 Winter Olympics, **if you're old enough to remember those days**.
5. We drove southwest from Innsbruck to a ski area in Austria in the Tyrolean Alps called Fiss/Ladis. From there we ventured up



Figure 5: *Model A's at an inn in the Tyrolean Alps in Austria. Photo courtesy of Ken Mallory.*

two valleys to other scenic ski resorts to the south - Kütai and Sölden in the Ötztal or Ötz Valley. (*Tal* is the German word for valley. You may have heard about *Emmentaler* cheese – probably the best of what we call Swiss cheese in America, the one with holes in it. That name just means that the cheese is produced in the valley in Switzerland through which the Emmen River flows. Just like Install, when you get a new computer. By the way, to the Swiss, all their cheeses are Swiss cheese – holes or no holes!)

6. After going over the Alps from north to south, we dropped down into an Italian village called Poschiavo. Thankfully, there was no more snow or ice! (Model A cars do not have heaters.) The day after that, we crossed Northern Italy past Lake Como and Lake Lugano until we got to the middle of the east shore of Lake Maggiore, a long skinny lake running north and south. The northern end of Lake Maggiore extends into Switzerland. From that midpoint, we crossed the lake on a ferry to the city of Stresa. Italy, which has a warmer, more Mediterranean climate, gave us one panoramic vista after another!
7. From Stresa, we drove back north into Switzerland to one of the most spectacular places on earth, Grindelwald! To get up to Grindelwald, we had to drive over the Swiss Alps from south to north over the Grimsel Pass at about 7,100 feet. Without heaters in the cars, it felt much higher. The following day, we took the cog railway through tunnels and past cliffs to the Jungfrau mountain.

At one point we got off the railway, walked through a tunnel carved through solid ice to a viewpoint. Unfortunately, the view was obscured by clouds below. But then a colorful tourist observation balloon suddenly rose through the clouds into the sunshine. This was surely an unexpected event! We wondered how the balloon operator was going to find his way back down. At 13,700 feet, the Jungfrau is not one of the tallest peaks in Switzerland but is massive in size. It is accompanied by two similar peaks to the east called the Monch and the Eiger – in English, the Young Lady with the Monk and the Ogre. Or, if you prefer, the Beauty and the Beast!

Across the Lauterbrunnen Valley far below is another famous mountain called the Schilthorn. It is famous for a James Bond movie in which Bond skis down the mountain with bad guys chasing him on skis and shooting automatic rifles at him. To reach the peak of the Schilthorn, you have to take three separate cable-cars.



Figure 6: *Ferrying Model A's across Lake Lucerne. Photo courtesy of Ken Mallory.*

8. Nearing the end, we drove north and ferried our cars over Lake Lucerne and stayed in Weggis, a suburb of the scenic city of Lucerne. From there, we explored Lucerne, with old wooden covered foot bridges across the River Rues with colorful flower boxes along the sides. However, in the pediments of each strut is a triangular painting from the seventeenth century illustrating some aspect of death. Together the paintings are called the *Totentanz*, or the Dance of Death, to communicate to



Figure 7: Historic covered bridge over the river Rues in Lucerne. Photo courtesy of Ken Mallory.

the citizens that death is universal for all men. There were originally 67 paintings, but only 45 remain today. The bridges were originally built to reach water-powered mills in the middle of the river. The chaff (*spreu*) left over from milling grain into meal and flour was dumped into the river from the bridge, thus the first bridge is called the *Spreuerbrücke*, or the chaffing bridge. At least chaff is organic and biodegradable.

9. And finally, we returned to Basel to drop off our cars for the voyage back to America and then to Zurich for our flights home.

How it turned out:

This was the Model A tour of a lifetime! Almost twenty years later, **we're still telling stories about it. Imagine fifty Model A's driving into** an alpine town with American license plates. Imagine the reactions of the townspeople, most of whom had never seen a Model A Ford! Invariably, the folks would join around to talk and interact with us.

We really enjoyed this chance to visit with people on a personal level we would not be able to do in normal tourist situations. They provided us with hospitality we could not expect but which we much appreciated. For instance, at one point on a Sunday, we were having little success in finding a service station that was open in a small town on the sabbath. When we asked a local man for help, he got in his car and drove us to a service station that was open.

On the other hand, remember that these were really old cars. Driving over the Alps twice represented a particularly stressful environment for the cars - and for us, with only our love to keep us warm. I've described some events and incidents we encountered earlier in this article.

How the adventure affected our hearts and our memories:

All Model A Ford owners can tell you about the challenges and the thrills that we get when we take our cars out to places, but this tour stands out as really special. We were continually surprised by the number of people in other lands that have such a strong appreciation of the Model A Ford and express a shared affection with us. Plus, we have a perpetual bond with the other people who ventured out with **us on this tour. Thankfully, we've had the opportunity to do later** tours with them, and they have become close and special friends – an unintended consequence of our Detroit Iron!