

Der Drei-Eck Wanderer



June 2020 Newsletter

MBCA Central Coast Section

Incorporated July 14, 1982

<https://centralcoast.mbca.org/>

<https://www.mbca.org/upcoming-events>

2020 Events

- 7/11/20** Clydes & lunch **Cancelled due to Coronavirus** mbria
- 9/24/20** Morro Bay Maritime Museum & lunch at Togazinni's dockside
- 10/10/20** Oktoberfest & Planning Meeting
- 12/6/20** Holiday Party

These events are tentative until we know what's happening with the Coronavirus.

A flyer will be sent out when an event is re-scheduled.

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New & Renewed Members

New: *Pat Grosswendt ,
Brenda Shin*

Renewals: *Eric Baumgarten,
Gary Flanagan,
Stephen Graves,
Scott Grundfor,
Frank Massino,
Richard Pescatore,
Jim Rizzoli,
Kyle Rizzoli,
Robert Robbins*



SECTION OFFICERS:**President**

Bob Stanger 929-2901

Vice President

Gene Kruger 544-2002

Secretary

Sally Kruger 544-2002

Treasurer

Eileen Blair 489-9171

BOARD MEMBERS:**Membership**

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Activities

Mary Nohr 688-7192

Advertising

Vacant Position

Technical

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Hospitality

Gary Grunwald 929-2414

Photographer

Mary Nohr 688-7192

Newsletter Editor:

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Webmaster

Vacant Position

A Message from the Editor

This is a special time for our section because our events have been canceled due to the coronavirus. We can't wait until we can resume our meetings.

Instead of event reports I asked members to tell us about the automotive related activities. Gene and Sally Kruger submitted a great story about the history of their fintail. Thank you Gene and Sally.

The next newsletter will be published in September. Please send me submissions.

Phil Keys



Change of Address

Please send change of email and/or mailing addresses or telephone number to the editor.

When you change your e-mail address, please let the MBCA national office know. Otherwise, I don't receive the new address from them, and you don't receive the Der Drei-Eck Wanderer.

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The Story of Gene and Sally's 1961 Mercedes Benz 220 Sb sedan

When Gene's brother finished National Guard training at Fort Ord in 1959, his parents brought his brother's wife to Monterey CA for the two to have a little R&R. Gene happened to be on Highway 1 and saw a salesman giving a prospective customer a test drive in a black Mercedes 220 SE. The salesman tore out of the dealership down the highway in a roar. Gene was so impressed, he thought "I want one of those someday". Sally and Gene were married in 1963 and were driving a 1959 VW, of course. In 1964 decided it was time to look for a used Mercedes. Gene found only two finetail sedans in the LA Times classifieds. They were not a very well known brand at the time. Of the two we decided on a black 1961 220Sb that had been driven by an older couple from Chicago and had only 16,000 miles on the odometer. The couple were vacationing in an apartment on Wilshire Blvd. The man gave us a ride and shot straight out into traffic with drivers hitting their brakes and honking. Gene suggested that we go directly to the DMV, make the deal, and Gene would drive them back. We gave him a check for \$2,500 and got us all back safely. I think even the man's wife was happy that we got him off the road.

Our first vacation was to the gold country in the California foothills. It was very hot and the black Mercedes was uncomfortable. Gene soon had a Frigiking air conditioning installed. He fabricated and installed a trailer hitch to pull our ski boat. We spent our weekends water skiing, snow skiing, and tent camping with a car top carrier. We don't remember anyone using a Mercedes for such activities at the time. Gene was used to driving the VW on back mountain roads so one time at Lake Tahoe he drove the Mercedes into a stream and drowned the ignition in the middle. Water was lapping at the door sills. Fortunately, a jeep happened by and pulled us



out of the water. We had an independent Mercedes Master mechanic (Kurt Sauter) that serviced the vehicle.. Automobile mechanics you could trust with your Mercedes were hard to find at the time. Gene decided to try cleaning the Solex carburetors by himself one time and got the jets mixed up. Kurt bailed him out and told Sally to get him a box of tinker toys to

play with. He was more careful after that.



We joined the LA section of the Mercedes club in 1972. In those days club members were really into their cars such as driving and maintaining them themselves. We took over the monthly activity events for the section. Often there would be 25 or more rally participants. Monthly dinner meetings would number 100 or more. Celebrities were folks like Col. John Burnside, Band leader Don Riccardo, Speaker and race driver, Peter DePaolo and antique car collector Bud Cohn. Once a year we would have events in Solvang and Yosemite. In 1975 we drove to Monterey for the Western Caravan event put on by the San Francisco section. Track events were held at the Laguna Seca raceway. Gene removed the air cleaner and opened the little door on the firewall so we could hear the twin Solex carburetors sucking. It made it sound like we were driving faster than we were. Sally received a trophy in her class in the time trials. Gene drove foot to the wood and was dis-



qualified for passing the other driver on the track. Those were fun times and made us yearn for more. In 1976 we noted there were 290 members in the LA section!

In 1978 the LA section put on the Western Caravan XVIII. Track events were held at the Ontario Motor Speedway. Gene was chairman of the Slalom event. Col. John Burnside was the National Competition Chairman. We were short of pylons so Neil Salician came to our rescue. He drove down a new unopened section of freeway and started picking up pylons. A cop stopped him and asked what he was doing. Neil put on his hardhat and said he was checking the lighting. The cop let him proceed and we got the pylons. It was 106F on the day of the event. We were getting cooked out there, but the show went on. Sometimes there were 75 or more cars in line.

By 1980 we had driven the Mercedes for 18 years and had put on about 280,000 miles. One fateful day when Gene was driving home from work a large truck turned left in front of him and he smashed in the whole front end. He was not injured because of the safety crumple zone built-in to the Mercedes. The engine broke loose and dropped down just as it was supposed to do. Gene was extremely



depressed but couldn't part with the car. We had it towed to our garage and Gene cut off the front end at the firewall with a torch.

In time, Gene came across another 1961 220 Sb (gray) with a bad engine in a Pasadena repair shop. It was a European delivery model with European headlights, and had rock shields under the engine, transmission, rear end, and gas tank. Roads must have been rough in Europe at the time. We made an offer, purchased the car, and had the engine and transmission from the black car installed so it could be driven home. So came the long process of disassembling two cars and making one good one. Gene had the good fortune of obtaining not only the shop manuals for the 220Sb but also the spare parts book. He has the factory number for every part on the car which is a real help when rare parts are needed. When he goes to the Mercedes dealer and gives them a part number they can tell him the United States dealer that has that part and how many are in stock (if they are available). On one occasion, a carburetor part was shipped to Gene from Florida and arrived damaged. The dealer had the part manufactured at the factory in Germany and shipped to him. This is what is so amazing about the Mercedes parts system and why we can keep this old car on the road.

Every usable part of the black car was removed and the body junked. It should be noted that Gene did all the work by guess and by gosh in the garage by himself. Gene learned a lot in this process and came to greatly appreciate German engineering. Brakes and front suspension were overhauled using a combination of new and the best of old parts. All the paint was stripped off and the bare metal primed with epoxy. The body was generally in fair condition but some Bondo was needed. Doors were commercially submerged in a rust removal solution and coated with epoxy paint. Zinc-rich paint was poured into the door bottoms. These unibody cars were ripe for the tin worm. Then came the process of priming and painting. Doors, hood, trunk lid, and sliding sunroof panel

were suspended from the beams over our patio deck. The car body was painted inside the garage using a fan for ventilation. All surfaces were primed, sanded and sprayed with acrylic enamel in DB50 white. All chrome pieces, and there are a lot, were sent to Model Plating. New tail light assemblies were purchased because the lenses are not separable from the chrome frame. These were expensive but now are probably unattainable.

After reassembly, the car sat for a long time because he was busy with family matters. In 1996 there was to be a MBCA event at Portland International Raceway. This was the incentive to finish the car, which involved color sanding and polishing. The paint had hardened to the point that it was difficult to color sand with 1000 grit. Finally the Mercedes was finished after 16 years of work on and off. The gas tank was drained (boy did it stink) and gas lines flushed. When Gene tried to start the engine the valves were stuck open and hitting the pistons - scary.. After freeing up the valves the engine actually ran to our amazement after sitting idle for 16 years!

Gene drove the Mercedes the 1000 miles to Portland with other club enthusiasts along the way. The Benz passed an inspection by the Portland Mercedes Benz dealer so he was good to go. The events were: driving the Benz on the raceway in the time trials, autocross,



STARFEST 1996, PORTLAND, OR, INT'L RACEWAY

acceleration, and Concours d' Elegance. Gene won First Place in his class in the time trial, acceleration, and in the Concours Street Class (the most important). Gene received the Mercedes Benz of North America Award for best overall performance. This was definitely a high point in his life. He has to thank all of the MBCA friends that encouraged me to go to Portland. One of which is David Hunt, whose father, Chadwick Hunt was national president of MBCA 1972-1979.

Newport Beach Mercedes dealer Fletcher Jones sponsored several car shows at Fashion Island. These were what we would call world class events. We were invited to show our Benz in 1996, 1998, and 1999.

In 2006, Sally and Gene drove to StarFest in Las Vegas. Again in the Concours, our prized Mercedes placed First in Street Class. He especially enjoyed driving on the Spring Mountain Motorsports track with foot to the wood. Professional instructors accompanied him on an individual basis. It was a very rewarding experience. The highlight was an award presented to him by John Fitch called "Special Award of Excellence, Concours d'Elegance". It is a 300SL Mercedes Gullwing model similar to the one John drove for the Mercedes Factory in the 1,932 mile Carrera Panamericana road race in 1952. John drove a 300SL open prototype in the race and in other races for the Mercedes Factory. He was, we believe, the only American driver for Mercedes. John Fitch autographed the 300SL model and his book "Racing With Mercedes". He was 89 years old in 2006 and was an impressive speaker. John was an advocate for road safety and was the inventor and promoter of the yellow barrels you see today on the highways in front of abutments. They are called "Fitch Barriers" and have saved thousands of lives.

For the past 20 years Sally and Gene have

been in the California MBCA Central Coast section. We try to drive the Benz monthly but we are a small section and events are short rallies and lunches. We yearn for the good old days when the larger San Francisco and Los Angeles sections put on major events such as Western Caravan and Star Fest. Even at 80, Gene would enjoy driving on race tracks when they are offered on the west coast. One thing we notice is that members rarely show their cars. Also, it seems that only a few members seem to get their vintage cars on the track so there is some competition for our old Benz. Nevertheless, we love our Mercedes Benz and will continue to share our pride and joy with others as long as we live.

