

TT West 2014: Pacific Coast Highway Tour

By Larry Brickner

It is a sunny day at the Lone Cypress vista at Pebble Beach California. The overlook is jammed with tourists snapping photos of that iconic tree. Almost in unison, the tourists swivel 180 degrees, tapping the shoulders of their friends to take a look, and rush towards the arriving caravan of cars. They are not taking photos of Brad Pitt or local resident Clint Eastwood driving by. It is just the usual reaction the TT West caravan gets wherever we decide to stop. Gawkers ignore traffic as they walk in the street taking pictures and videos at all angles of the now iconic TT design. While a single TT gets admiring glances, a convoy of TTs in a rainbow of colors reaches out to grab the attention of the most casual car enthusiast.

The 2014 edition of TT West focused on Route 1 along the California coast between Moonstone Beach and Carmel-by-the-Sea. We started on Sunday afternoon, September 28, at Moonstone Beach which is equidistant between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The opening drive was to one of the many wineries nestled in the rolling golden hills between Paso Robles and Moonstone. The following day had more sightseeing in the region. We visited the Piedras Blancas elephant seal rookery and Hearst Castle.

Elephant seals were almost hunted to extinction. Around 1990, a handful made the surf-sprayed beach of Piedras Blancas their home. Now the colony numbers about 17,000! Every visit there provides new scenarios as the seals swim, sleep, snort, burp, scratch, and fight on the beach – a teenage boys dream home!

William Randolph Hearst began building his “ranch house” in 1919 to house the architectural and art treasures he had accumulated over his lifetime. It took about 25 years to complete because, essentially, Hearst kept changing his mind about the design. Some areas were built and re-built multiple times. Even during construction, the ranch became a mecca for Hollywood celebs, and the rich and famous of the rest of the world. Its opulence rivals the famous “summer cottages” built by the New York wealthy along the Newport Rhode Island coast circa 1900.

Tuesday brought our first major drive, heading north 100 miles to Carmel-by-the-Sea. Many hail this rugged coast of California along Route 1 to be one of the most beautiful coast drives in the USA. The road is also a driving challenge with many tight curves and little margin for error or you become an inadvertent surfer. The TT West convoy made several scenic stops that included Ragged Point, McWay Falls, and Big Sur.

Wednesday brought the more relaxed drive of the famous 17 Mile Drive of Pebble Beach that included the stop mentioned above. Along with several other vistas along the way, we had lunch at the Pebble Beach Lodge. The valet attendants there asked us to park the TTs around the entrance circle which drew another swarm of tourists to our cars which became the centerpiece of the resort’s entrance.

Our final, and by far most difficult, drive of the event left from the Audi of Monterey dealership. Cheri Smith, Service Manager, arranged for a luncheon for the TT West attendees at the dealership. While we snacked the excellent food, Cheri’s service team gave each TT a free safety inspection and car wash. They found one problem with a CV boot on one of the cars that could have been a significant problem

during the ride home. We left the dealership and headed for the Laureless Grade road. This road has sweeping turns and beautiful views as it crosses over one of the coastal hills into Carmel Valley. We then turned towards Carmel Valley Village. Once past the village, there was little traffic which allowed us to begin to test the limits of our cars. However, the toughest test was yet to come as we turned onto the Cachagua Road loop. This nearly deserted road is about 10 miles of constant turns that include several hairpins. It is definitely an E-ticket ride! We then returned to Carmel Valley Village which had about 20 wine tasting shops.

TT West ended with its annual farewell dinner, this time in Carmel. Lots of new friends were made and everyone was excited about the next TTW in April that will cover Arizona and New Mexico. Go to <http://www.tt-west.org> for details.



TTs visit a local winery.



Most of the seals in this group at the Piedras Blancas rookery are sleeping. However, the two cute seals with the open mouths are actually engaged in a not so cute turf battle.



Reflections off of the stunning indoor pool at Hearst Castle. Note the diving platform at top center.



The beautiful McWay Falls cove near Big Sur



Some of the TTs at the entrance circle to Pebble Beach Lodge.



TTW attendees admiring an R8 at Monterey Audi. Monterey Audi hosted a luncheon and safety inspection prior to the most challenging drive of the event.