

TT-West 2009: Driving Tour of the Pacific Northwest

By Peter Grabowsky, TT-West Primary Organizer. All photos by the author.

TT-West 2009 was held from Monday September 28 to Friday October 2, 2009 as a week-long driving tour from Hood River, Oregon, around Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Rainer, to Tacoma, Washington, onto Seattle, Washington, and then concluding with a return trip to McMinnville, Oregon via the Oregon coastline.

TT-West 2009 opened late afternoon on Monday September 28 with a sign-in session and welcome reception at the Best Western Hood River Inn located along the stunningly beautiful Columbia River in Hood River, Oregon. Earlier that afternoon, early arriving attendees were treated to a pre-event driving tour of the Hood River and Mount Hood region by TT-West 2009 co-organizer Rich Martin, a resident of Hood River and a past attendee of many TT-West and TT-East events. After sign-in, the group enjoyed a late evening pizza and beer dinner at the Double Mountain Brewery in downtown Hood River.

Tuesday September 29 was to be a busy day of regional driving and the group departed early to begin the day's adventures. Typical to the Pacific Northwest, the day started with cool temperatures and some scattered light showers, but the group was not to be deterred as they pressed on with the drive. Soon after departing, the group found themselves in the foothills above Hood River passing through the myriad of apple and pear orchards that line the gentle slopes. The first drive of the day was to Lost Lake which typically offers majestic views of Mount Hood, but due to the weather, the view was to be missed. After a quick stop at Lost Lake to regroup, the group traversed back eastward to eventually stop in Mosier, Oregon for lunch at Ten Speed East which is adjacent to Route 30 Classics, a classic car restoration facility that houses a small collection of vintage Porsches amongst other classics.

After lunch, the group wound its way through the twisty roads high in the golden foothills above The Dalles, Oregon to eventually arrive across the Columbia River in Washington State at the Stonehenge Memorial, a World War I memorial that is a near exact replica of the ancient Stonehenge found in Great Britain. After a quick photo shoot at the memorial, the group headed to the most anticipated activity of the day – an exclusive drive on the Maryhill Loops Road owned by the Maryhill Museum of Art. As we arrived at the Maryhill Loops Road, the weather was forbidding and on the first pass up this twisty bit of asphalt, there was plenty of rain and wind to make this first pass challenging. But the weather gods soon smiled upon us with a break in the clouds and some late afternoon sun, so further drives on the Maryhill Loops Road proved more enticing and exciting.

Finished with the Maryhill Loops Road, the group headed westward once again to arrive at the Maryhill Winery for a tour and an exclusive wine tasting. Since we were going to travel within some of the regions finest wine regions over the course of the week, it only made sense to stop and sample the bounty and the Maryhill Winery certainly did not disappoint with their vast array of fine wines. After departing the winery, the group crossed back over the Columbia River into Oregon and made the trek back towards Hood River with one last hurrah on a bit of the Historic Columbia River Highway between Rowena and Mosier, Oregon. The group later met for dinner that evening at 3 Rivers Grill in Hood River for a simply delicious meal and more wine tasting.

Wednesday September 30 was going to be a long day of driving with a back country trek from Hood River to Seattle, Washington. Checking out of the hotel and starting early, the group headed across the Hood River Bridge into Washington State and travelled north towards Mt. Saint Helens. With a few brief stops along the way to catch some waterfalls and the verdant views, the caravan regrouped in Randle, Washington and then continued its northerly trek towards Mt. Rainer. Arriving at the Mt. Rainer National Park ranger station, we were informed that there had been snow (!) the previous night along the pass and it had been cleared, but we were warned that some spots could be icy. Winter was certainly coming very early to this region of the country! Confident in our Audi quattro equipped vehicles and after a quick rest stop for lunch, the group continued with a counter-clockwise drive around Mt. Rainer to catch glimpses of its glorious and freshly snow capped peaks.

After a few more stops to stretch and check out some of the local scenery, the group carried on towards Tacoma, Washington to visit Griot's Garage for an early evening technical detailing session and a light dinner. The team at Griot's Garage demonstrated some rather impressive detailing techniques on several attendees' cars and also raffled off some of their product to TT-West attendees. Twilight was fast approaching and the group departed Griot's Garage to travel the short distance north to Seattle to check into the Grand Hyatt Seattle to rest from the long day's journey. However, a few intrepid souls made it to the hospitality suite that evening to join in the semi-annual Great Beer Exchange, a long standing tradition at TT-West events and they carried on well into the late evening.

With no major drives on the agenda, Thursday October 1 was planned to be a casual day for either sight seeing in downtown Seattle, or take a short drive up to Everett, Washington for a tour of the Boeing aircraft factory. However, some of the more adventurous took the ferry across Puget Sound and made a day-long drive out on the Olympic Peninsula. The group reconvened that evening for dinner at the Urbane Restaurant in Seattle and then for the traditional raffle in the hospitality suite afterwards. TT-West 2009 sponsors such as the Audi Sportscar Experience, Audi of America, Audi Club North America, Revo Technik, Griot's Garage, MCPi, Forge Motorsport, Stoner, Inc., Langka Corporation and many others donated generously to the raffle prizes and everyone was able to win something in the raffle.

Friday October 2 was to be a long day of driving with the need to get from Seattle to McMinnville, Oregon before the end of the day. After an early morning departure from Seattle, the group enjoyed a leisurely freeway drive south on Route 5 and then hooked right towards the coast at Longview, Washington. After crossing back into Oregon, the group soon separated into two groups - one a more "spirited" group that would take a twistier route and the other a touring group that would take the East Columbia River Highway. Eventually the two groups would meet in Astoria, Oregon for lunch and beer sampling at the Wet Dog Café.

After lunch, the group travelled south along the Oregon Coast Highway and stopped for a short visit at Ecola State Park to take in the glorious views of the rugged Oregon coastline and nearby Cannon Beach. Back on the road, it was already late afternoon as the group continued its southward journey along the coast eventually turning eastward to end the day in McMinnville to check into the hotels and catch some dinner. That evening a few attendees met at the rooftop bar of the Hotel Oregon to savor the last moments of yet another memorable week of driving adventures and camaraderie. While TT-West 2009 was officially over, there will always be next year...

TT-West 2010 is being held from Monday October 11 to Friday October 15, 2010 as a week-long driving tour and adventure starting from Las Vegas, Nevada and concluding in Moab, Utah. For the latest news and information, please visit the TT-West web site at www.tt-west.org and become a fan of TT-West on Facebook for more in-depth information on TT-West 2010.

And remember, TT-West is not just for TT owners as all Audi owners and enthusiasts are welcome to attend. We hope to see you there!