Our journey to Strasbourg, France and the International 356 Meeting actually began amongst the hills of Woodinville, Washington. My wife and I participated in a charity walk/run event where the race results were posted at the finish-line. Because there were age groups, participant's ages were included with the outcomes. Upon perusing ages rather than elapsed times I discovered, at 67, I was by far the oldest contestant. This was a shocking epiphany. Simply stated: I'm not getting any younger and I'd better start doing those things now that I won't be able to in approaching years. Strasbourg was the first thing that came into my sights.

With the decision made to attend, registration was accomplished, airline tickets procured, hotels reserved and we were on our way.

The car. I was never really serious about shipping our 356 to France, but for curiosity sake I did take a gander at what it would cost. Around $6,000 was the common answer unless, of course, I wanted to fly it there.... I didn't even think about that one.

We arrived in Strasbourg via British Airways and a high-speed train from Paris. This was Thursday, May 9, registration and welcome day. Hopping a cab from the train station, we had a short trip to the hotel. When we began getting close to the meeting's venue, 356's began appearing everywhere. We encountered them on the highway, the overpasses, parked along the road and especially in the secured parking lot at the event. One could not avoid smiling at all these superb automobiles decorating the countryside.

The event was held at two adjacent hotels. Americans were assigned to the Hilton as well as some others but most French and German attendees were at the HQ hotel, the Mercure. Registration went quickly and, being without a car, I immediately began pursuing a ride for the following morning's rally. Sparky, my wife, was content to spend the day shopping and investigating Strasbourg while I fulfilled my dream of driving Alsace in a tub.

At the (French) champagne reception that evening I wore my NW 356 Group name badge with this note attached. The hotel receptionist was kind enough to translate it into French in order to augment my chances of finding a ride. The note was quite a hit and got the attention I was hoping for. When the organizers saw it they immediately went into action. Cell phones, text messages, word-of-mouth (in at least three languages) and roster checks for single registrants were utilized. I was thinking, if the French had mobilized like this in 1940, they wouldn't have been overrun by their belligerent neighbor to the east.
By the end of the evening I had two solid leads and the registration numbers of the corresponding cars that were now sitting in the secured parking lot. That evening I wrote a note for each car and placed them on the windshield of my potential rides saying I'd be there in the morning. Which I was.

The note was gone on the first car I visited in the rainy morning so I walked to the next. Standing at the rear of the car with an umbrella protecting a mechanic leaning halfway into the engine bay was Hendrik Moulds, an Englishman from West Yorkshire. My inquiries confirmed that I was navigating for him. Oh the joy! He has a sweet 1953 bent window cab, but with a bad "dynamo."

I should mention at this point that the regional Porsche distributor sent two experienced mechanics to the Meeting along with a Cayenne filled with spare parts. At about 11:30 the night before when I was putting out my notes there was an SC cab with four men working around the rear end replacing a generator. Two mechanics working, two owners supervising. The same two mechanics were at it again in the early morning doing their best to get everyone on the road. All of this was done at no charge.

Our group was to leave at 8:30. It did, we didn't. I also noted that the cars left at will rather than by number. Hendrik noted that if the event were held in Germany, the cars would have left in order. Notwithstanding, the mechanics finished up shortly after 9:00 AM. The rain stopped so the top came down and we were off.

Our goal was the town of Mulhouse. More specifically, La Cité de l'Automobile auto museum (reported to be the largest in the world). Lunch was to be served at the facility following a tour. Navigating was a little tricky as we had no 10ths of a mile odometer, so there was some guess work. We did miss one turn but a convenient signpost right next to us pointing in the proper direction put us back on the trail. (The
Porsche Gods were with us.) We arrived at the museum and Hendrik, who had been there before, gave me the essential tour. Then lunch.

After this gastronomical feast we headed to the parking lot to begin the second part of the rally. But wait, a couple of Hendrik's friends had another idea. As you can see in the photo (left), some were not totally content with the serving of wine we had at lunch and so opened their own. Then a suggestion was made that we blow-off the afternoon's rally and go find a winery. Being the ever-gracious host and driver, Hendrik asked me if I was OK with this. The only word that came to mind was: "Capital!" With little adieu we were off to the south while everyone else headed north on the second leg of the planned trip.

There is just something magical traveling with a few old Porsches through the countryside of Europe. The two '51 split window coupes led the way, free of the constraints of a route book. At the time I took this photo I was figuring life doesn't get much better than this; to hell with being (now) 68. Also, at this point I was really missing my car as the urge to drive was overwhelming.

Once off the highway we raced along single lane roads and eventually ended up in the vineyards.

Shortly thereafter we settled in to an outside table shaded by rather large trees at the Bollenberg winery (pictured below). The cast of characters starting from the left and going clockwise around the table are: Benjamin (the official Porsche factory rep), Robert Brocker from the Netherlands, Albert's son, Albert Haefner from Germany, your humble
Not satisfied with what was served for lunch, foie gras and Gewürztraminer were ordered and we settled in for the afternoon. The Europeans do have a certain style to their existence, one to which I quickly adapted.

It should be noted that Benjamin (whose last name I didn't get), even though working for Porsche (more specifically, the museum) had never driven a 356 more than about a block. On the way back and after a gasoline stop, Robert allowed him to drive his split-window coupe the remaining distance to Strasbourg. He never stopped smiling.

That evening the main event was, of course, more French food. The Alsatian region has been traded back and forth with Germany over the centuries as a result of wars and many names are Germanic in style and much of the food, in spite of being French, resembles what you might find in Stuttgart. For French speakers, here's what was for dinner:
It's the last item that I was feeling after stuffing myself again.

At dinner that night I learned from Hendrik he had a navigator for the next day so I renewed my quest for a seat. I was quickly paired up with Heinrich Besserer, a lawyer from southern Germany. Fortunately, Heinrich is fluent in English so I wasn't forced to use my truncated knowledge of German to navigate for him.

Heinrich has, among other Porsches, this beautiful '65 SC coupe. Our goal was to get through a group of mountains to the town of Gertwiller where the main attraction is a gingerbread factory. Rather than Hendrik's mile odometer, today I was working with kilometers which took a bit of getting used to as things seem to come much quicker. Nevertheless, we made it to our destination and back to Strasbourg for lunch.

This time we ate at the famous L' Ancienne Douane, an Alsatian favorite. The menu consisted of:

- **Kir Alsacien avec tarte flambee' et Bretzel frais**
- **Choucroute des Douaniers**
- **Kouglohpf glace' au Marc de Gewurztraminer**

The main course was made up of five different servings of pork; all were delicious. They also poured a very nice local Pinot Noir that few but me seemed to take a fancy. Can't let it go to waste (or is it waist?)
By the way, like many Europeans Heinrich enjoys driving his cars fast. On the way back to Strasbourg we stayed mainly to the highways where we cruised along at a respectable 160 KPH. All perfectly legal. SC's have a great engine.

For those of you still reading at this point and who are curious, the little tag above the cigar lighter says: "12V."

The Concours was held Saturday afternoon and the winners announced that night at the Gala Dinner. About 20 cars participated in various classes but the overall winner was a remarkable 1953 cab.

Bob Murray from Sacramento (on the left) had owned the car for 42 years and decided to restore it toward the end of that period. After the superb restoration he sold it to Heiner Fees (on the right) of Stuttgart. Since that time the two have become good friends and Bob told me he has driven the car more in Germany than the entire time he owned it in the US. Nice friend indeed.

The author close to two things of greatness: French champagne and a 904. It should be noted that the 904 participated in all three rallies and performed well. The sound of it, like the champagne, was ambrosia.
From the rainbow the last evening of the event, we can assume the Porsche Gods were active and happy.

The final night's Gala Dinner was held in the Palace of Congress. (The European Parliament is located in Strasbourg.) Augmenting the champagne (which they never seemed to run out of) and scrumptious appetizers, Alsatian dancers and band entertained until the wee small hours. The French like to dine late and the main course that night was not served until 10:30 PM. (Menu to follow.) Sparky and I sat at a table with the usual international representation but we had the coincidence of sitting with Bill Hurley and his wife Sebina. Bill, an airline pilot living in Germany, purchased his '63 coupe in Seattle from Mark Aker.

I know you are all salivating at the opportunity to learn what we had for dinner that night and I'm glad I saved the menu. The whole evening was a mix of dining, drink, dancing and exceptional merriment and I don't really recall all the fineries we enjoyed, but here goes:

Lobe de foie gras d'oie confit au gewurztraminer
Chutney de quetsches et pain d'épices

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Medaillon de veau à la crème de morilles
Blinis de pommes de terre et fricassée de légumes verts

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Moelleux au chocolat amer aux fruits rouges
Sorbet framboise
Of course, with dinner comes wine. Lots of it. The two tonight were a Pinot Gris and a Grand Marrenon Rouge. Waiting a long time for dinner created an opportunity to read the label on the back of the latter bottle describing the wine. In part, it read (in English): "a sexy personality and a curvaceous body." At that moment I knew I was drinking a wine built just like my 356.

**Epilogue**

- Great credit has to be given to Pierre Gosselin, President of the French 356 Club, and his organizing group. This was my first (and hopefully not last) International Meeting and I can't imagine a better one. Everything was planned, organized and executed with aplomb.
- The last time I was in France was 1965 when de Gaulle was President and anti-American sentiment ran high. I sensed none of that today. The French were polite, gracious and down-to-earth friendly. I'd go back in a minute, skipping Paris, which is another story.
- Sparky and I rented a car from Strasbourg in order to tour Bavaria for the next week and a half. We visited the Porsche and Mercedes Museums which are well worth the effort. You can get into the former free if you have your 356 Club membership card. And you can buy a transit ticket for two good for a day for about €9 allowing travel to each, plus anywhere else your heart desires.
- The majority of people I spoke with at the meeting own multiple Porsches. If they own a 911, without exception they all reported owning 993's. Many of the 356's they own have come from America. The Euro is still very strong against our currency so I don't see that trend changing.
- Things are expensive in Europe, so the old adage: "Bring half as many clothes and twice as much money as you think you'll need" still holds its meaning.
- I have many more photos of the event and if you'd like a sample, email me at bob-forman@comcast.net and I'll send them along.
- Next year the event will be held in Estoril, Portugal and participants will have the opportunity to drive the Portugal GP circuit.
- I purchased and downloaded a map of Europe to our Tom Tom for use when we had our rental car. The expense was well-worth the complete confidence it yielded when leaving the center of one city and navigating to a specific spot in another large city such as Munich.
- I was amazed at the ease our fellow European 356ers slipped from German to French to English at any time. Those of us in the US have few opportunities to practice a foreign language and stay proficient. With the ease of travel in Europe, the people on the Continent certainly have an advantage in this skill.
- I learned there is an informal Pre A International 356 Club that has annual meetings in countries selected by consensus of the members. Warning, they're not teetotalers and they drive fast. Not at the same time, of course.
- Probably the most talked about issue was the price of a beer at the Hilton Hotel. €8.50 for a normal sized beer. That's about $12.00. Everyone seemed to just have one and then the word got around and no one fell for that scam again. I figured at that price I must have paid for the glass too, so I brought it home.