

TT West 2019 – The Enchanted Drive – September 8-13

This year's 900+ mile 6 day TT West drive derived its name from the fact that half of the trip was in New Mexico, "The Land of Enchantment" and that one of the daily drives followed "The Enchanted Circle" scenic route north of Taos, New Mexico. While the word "enchantment" conjures a mellow and easy-going environment, nothing could be further from the truth for TT West. Most days we were attacking the twisties through the Southern Rockies with daily high altitudes of 7800' to 11000'.

We had participants from all generations of the 20 years of TT sales in America, from a 2000 coupe to two 2018 TTRS models. Horsepower ranged from 180 to 400. Drivers came from California in the west to Kansas and Texas towards the east.

The TTRS participants were the most striking, not because of the special RS design features but rather because of their paint. One was Ara Blue from California and one was Porsche Green from Arizona. They both stood out among the more muted standard TT colors and attracted lots of lookers. (Hint to Audi if you want to boost sales.)

TT West 2019 started in Colorado Springs and began with a short easy Sunday drive through the nearby Garden of the Gods Park with its spectacular red rock formations. Afterwards we had a chance to meet everyone at a local brewpub where we had our only nasty thunderstorm of the week while quaffing our adult beverages. Thank goodness we got that rain out of the way.

Our Monday drive took us to the old Colorado mining town of Cripple Creek for lunch. Sitting at 9494', it was the site of the last great Colorado gold rush in 1890. Over \$500M in gold was extracted and a few small mines are still in operation. It was for all intents and purposes a ghost town until gambling was legalized there in 1991.

On our way to Cripple Creek, we had a rare flatbed as a 2001 TT roadster turbo's internals exploded. Fortunately we were only an hour into our drive and it was a Colorado Springs car. They went back home and drove their Porsche Cayenne the rest of the trip. Because of the aging TT fleet, a pre-trip safety inspection became mandatory last year to try to prevent such issues. Often we are over 100 miles from the nearest Audi dealer during TT West as we explore the back country of the West.

After Cripple Creek, we set out for another former mining town of Crested Butte. Sitting in the way were the twisties up and down 11,312' Monarch Pass where we made a "comfort" stop. Crested Butte was originally a coal mining town and supply center for nearby silver boom towns now long gone. Unlike Cripple Creek, Crested Butte successfully turned to skiing as its savior in the 1960s.

We try to select lodging each night close to the "old town" area to be within easy walking distance of the unique food and shopping offerings in these historic towns. We also like to experience some of the old time classic hotels like the Victorian era Strater in Durango that is furnished in period furniture, and the Casa Benavides Inn in Taos with its old time Spanish architecture and furnishings.

Tuesday began with a drive to a vista on the eastern edge of the Grand Canyon of the Gunnison. From there we drove to Ridgway for lunch and a visit to John Billings' Artworks Studio. This non-assuming

place is housed in a basement. Billings' studio is famous for producing the Grammy award sculpture and the NCAA basketball Wooden Award, among others. Then we had a stop at Cascade Falls State Park in Ouray before attacking the twisties of the Million Dollar Highway to Durango, another old mining town.

While some think the Highway was named for the value of the ore that traveled the road to Durango, it was actually the cost of the road in 1921. A "feature" of the road is that it does not have guard rails along the hairpin turns to obstruct your view of the scenery waaaay down below. The road has multiple mountain summits with the highest registering 11,075'.

Wednesday began by treating ourselves to some history at the Aztec Ruins National Monument. These 900 year old ruins were built by the ancient Anasazi people, not the Aztecs as originally thought. It holds the largest restored ceremonial chamber in North America.

After lunch we made way to Taos New Mexico following the Tracks Across the Border Scenic Byway for some of the route. We had about 1 hour of light rain to mar almost perfect driving weather for the week. Lightly traveled Route 64 twisties were a joy to drive with the highest summit "only" 7860'. Our sightseeing for the day ended with a stop at the Rio Grande Gorge before finishing in Taos.

Thursday took us on the aforementioned Enchanted Circle with a maximum elevation of 9810'. We stopped to view the sky blue lake at Eagles Nest State Park and ate lunch at yet another late 19'th century mining town, Red River, which is now a ski resort with a whopping 477 permanent residents. In the afternoon we explored the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument with its spectacular rugged vistas of the Rio Grande Gorge. We had planned to visit the Taos Pueblo but it was closed for the day to outsiders while a burial ceremony was conducted.

Our final day began with a drive along the High Road to Taos Scenic Byway on our way to the legendary shrine el Santuario de Chimayo which is purported to be the most visited church in New Mexico. Known as the Lourdes of America, the Santuario is believed to be built on sacred earth with miraculous healing powers. It has a large following among the Hispanic population.

From there we went to Los Alamos, the once Top Secret city that designed the first atom bomb. We had lunch and explored the local museums. We finished the day with a visit to the ancient ruins at Bandelier national Monument where evidence of human habitation goes back 11,000 years. We ended our excursion arriving in historic old town Santa Fe for a raucous farewell group dinner.

A Special thanks to the Audi Colorado Springs Service Manager, Scott Krencik, for reserving one of his service technicians for us for emergency repairs prior to the start of TT West.