

## Oh, all right: Pittsburgh won me over



Satch Carlson  
scarlson@roundel.org

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Okay, I admit it: The Allegheny Chapter, Pittsburgh, and Schenley Park—put them all together and you have the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix—have won me over. And no, it wasn't just the beer.

I will confess that the beer was certainly fine, a special Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix pilsner from Hofbräuhaus Pittsburgh. That Hofbräuhaus was also the place where I found myself surrounded by BMW CCA friends in a *biergarten* setting on the evening I arrived. Boisterous fun, the evening confirmed the chapter's slogan: A Drinking Club With A Car Problem. I met so many people who are enthusiastic about the event, enthusiastic about their region, enthusiastic about their cars, enthusiastic about the BMW Car Club of America that I felt privileged to be a part of the celebration, and sorry that I had waited so long to make my way to the three-rivers area.

That's the problem with stereotypes. They tend to blind you to wonderful possibilities for great new adventures, terrific new friends.

I had only a vague geographical and historical sense of Pittsburgh before I got there; I guess I saw it dimly as kind of a tough beer-and-a-shot kind of town now down on its luck. I assumed that the Steel City was one of those broken-down rustbelt venues where you get depressed just looking at the place, a dystopian wasteland of rundown buildings and shuttered smelters, everything drably painted in tones of gray and sepia.

Wrong again.

For one thing, the countryside is beautiful, with green rolling hills in all directions; and the city itself is quite spectacular and energetic, with a high-rise downtown core framed by bridges—an abundance of bridges, bridges wide and narrow, bridges high and low, bridges crossing the Allegheny River, the mighty Monongahela, and finally the great Ohio River, which starts at the confluence of those two great pioneer pathways. What American child has not read the history of those rivers, and their importance to westward expansion? And here we were Friday night in the fabulous Restaurant Le Mont, overlooking the whole thing: the rivers, the bridges, the city itself.

And that was before the real fun got under way.

Although I missed the driving tour on Friday, I heard plenty about it from the people who enjoyed it. I know what kind of work it takes to put together a successful tour, so I am in total admiration of Glen Beattie, who designed it, with the able assistance of Rich Lipchik. Greg Calvimontes and his wife, Erin, coordinated our

Friday-night dinner at Le Mont, as well as backing up the chapter's PVGP coordinator, Eric Zagrocki, in making sure that everything went well at the weekend corral. And about a million volunteers made everything run smoothly at Schenley Park. (Well, it seemed like that many, anyway.)

I have to say that any doubts about this event—I mean, I've been to a few car shows, and more than one or two vintage races—were all dispelled even as I made my way through the beautiful winding roads up through the hills of Schenley Park. What a venue—no wonder the sports-car junkies were drooling three decades ago! (Apparently, city officials were not well informed as to the nature of vintage-car racing; they evidently believed that they were about to witness a gentle procession of stately antiques, but by the time they discovered the truth, the event was an established success.)

The BMW Club corral was—well, I have been to a few events, as I say, and I have to admit that the Schenley Park corral was simply spectacular. The Legends Of The Autobahn concours in Monterey may have a few more cars, but not many; this year the Alleghenians attracted more than 300 BMWs to their strategic spot high on German Hill! I am not sure whether the Hofbräuhaus pilsner had anything to do with it, but the lunch was terrific, and quite popular. The weather was mostly sunny and hot, which was a relief after the downpours of last year, and the Allegheny Chapter can certainly check off another overwhelming success.

The cars, both the vintage racers and the BMWs in the corral, were what I expected: a little slice of Monterey somehow transported through time and space to a lush, green venue. There were few surprises; for me, the greatest discovery was Pittsburgh itself. As usual, I started finding all the things I was missing when I made my way to the airport. Wait, Pittsburgh has an Andy Warhol museum?! Can't I stay over just a little longer?

The next time I visit Pittsburgh—and there will be a next time, believe me!—I intend to tour Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water house and that Andy Warhol museum, and take a tour on the water of those three historically significant rivers. Actually, there are so many great attractions in Pittsburgh that I feel like an idiot for just now getting around to a visit, and kick myself for not planning to stay long enough to explore the place.

But I did manage to find a place that sells decent Champagne for a reasonable price.

And that's a good thing when you find yourself in such a fine place, enjoying a terrific event with good friends—the sort of occasion that definitely calls for celebration. Clink! Well done, kids!