

## Lake Tahoe to Las Vegas, the Extraterrestrial way.

I had a great view of sunrise over the lake from my hotel in the border town of South Lake Tahoe, a vacationers' paradise. My mission was to boldly go down the loneliest road in America via the Extraterrestrial Highway and through area 51 to planet Las Vegas. For such a voyage of discovery I piloted a 1968 Porsche 912, Zuffenhausen's marketing mens' interim new vehicle powered by the trusted 4-cylinder 90bhp motor. The Sci-Fi connections continued with the little sports car having a TARDIS like capacity to consume luggage and people, unlike its 21<sup>st</sup> century descendents.



The Targa version I had hurtled towards the Nevada Stateline in, surrounded me with acres of class. With the roof detached I gained a Jetsons Aerocar like vista of the Luther Pass, which I approached after an exhilarating 130-mile drive from 788 EEC owner Dick McClur's home in Stockton. Then came a telltale misfire and soon after the engine cut out at a roadwork's flag mans post on the accent to the pass. The Generator (Dynamo) was not charging and I had failed to note the warning light glowing left of the rev counter due to having such fun on the twisty mountain roads of the Sierra Nevada's! The roads of America are not like those of our crowded little island and wilderness it what it means. Therefore, I was oh so thankful for the works forman's offer of a drive to the only spot on the pass where there was a phone service and I was able to contact AAA and plead the reciprocal rescue service promised from my UK AA membership. A flat bed truck was dispatched and whilst waiting, a Highway Patrol officer appeared to check that I was okay; the first time I had ever been pleased to meet one as the

workers had departed for home and the temperature at 7000 ft was dropping like a stone. It was late evening before the 912 and I reached the Montbleu Casino, starting location for the planned adventure.

Eyeballing the day-glow orange 912 900 series short wheelbase, it radiated the purity of the original styling; skinny rubber on steel wheels with a classic Germanic Spartan interior of painted metal and vinyl. However, the seats were remarkably comfortable with great cabin space and visibility. A turn of the key fired up the air-cooled 90hp boxer sourced from the 365 which sounds like a bag of nails until the note changes to a growl all the way to redline at 6000 rpm. On my 140 mile drive up mountain roads, the 1960s chassis design with supple independent suspension gave no hint of wayward handling as mentioned in a period road test of the 911, probably due to the weight reduction of the four pot. The car performed well over the twisty bumpy roads. Porsche marketed the 912 as an interim car alongside the more expensive 911. The four cylinder often lacked the sexy features such as alloy wheels to keep the price down, selling for £2428 1s 10d in the UK in 1967. Despite this, the entry-level car outsold the 911 in 1966. 912 production ceased in 69.

If the mechanical mayhem of the day before wasn't enough, the service team that arrived in the Casino parking lot to repair the Porsche 912's electrical heart realised that the replacement generator had a larger fan and all efforts to remove the original just left various spanners shattered and screw drivers bent. I had a schedule on the trip and the local weather alert warned of the first snowstorm approaching at speed. There was nothing left to do but abandon Stuttgart's favourite and rent a car to make a dash to Tonopah avoiding road closures and the mandatory fitting of chains!

There was a great temptation to press the right foot to the metal as I headed south on hwy 376. Smooth tarmac looked like it was laid over the landscape and I imagined the 912 would be revving hard, cranking up the decibels if the 115mph top speed was to be attained without the optional 5th gear missing on Dick's car. Nevada is road trip heaven to a Brit, which might be due to the fact that Nevada is approximately twice the size as England with a population of 2.6 million against the 51 million squeezed in back home!



I travelled from mountain range to mountain range across vast arid but bountiful desert watching the thunder grey rain laden clouds skate across the Big Smokey Valley. The temperature was falling fast as I entered the mining town of Tonopah in nothing short of a blizzard. I guess the Porsche with its notoriously nonexistent heating system and windscreen blower would have shown its age. We now take these demisting luxuries for granted in the most mundane of modern automobiles.



I checked into the historic Mizpah Hotel on Main St. There was a flurry of activity and I found out that I was the first guest to check in after an eleven year hibernation and recent \$6 million dollar make-over. Built in 1907 shortly after Tonopah took on boomtown status when prospector Jim Butler struck vast silver and gold deposits which were so vast that they rescued an almost bankrupt Nevada. The elegantly decorated hotel was once the haunt of the rich and famous. Framed photographs of Hollywood stars such as Ava Gardener grace the corridors of the five-story stone built hotel that when new sported an electric elevator and on-suite temperature controlled running water operated by Rolex taps. The hotel restoration is of a high standard just like the 912 I should have been travelling in but like the car there were still snagging work to be done such as my over heated room. I regretted having to depart the next morning so missing the grand opening of the restaurant and the bar that Wyatt Erap once served behind.

It was a cold and crisp daybreak when I headed for breakfast, a hearty plate of French toast at Sidewinders diner where the graffiti on the honour wall was an international who's who of travellers; "Another German family" and "My lunch was worth a ten year wait". I was now all set for the excitement of HWY 375. I travelled east and at Warm Springs took a left onto the lonely road, named the Extraterrestrial HWY in 1996, to promote tourism in the remote area steeped in legends of UFOs and strange airborne sightings in Area 51, close to Nelis Air Force Base. Signs at the road junction warn of low flying aircraft and the down to earth fact that there is no Gas (Petrol) for 111 miles. I had half a tank so pressed the info trip computer on the rental to find I had a range of 232 miles. It occurred to me that if I had managed to pilot the little Porsche 912 on the journey, it would have been clever to carry a spare petrol can on the trip. During my day of hard driving in the 912 earlier in the week, I had confirmed the factory's 28 mpg; a small tank coupled with a vague fuel gauge could have been problematic and dangerous. In this lonely high desert the locals advise to check for road conditions, start the day on a full tank and pack water and snacks just in case and never stray from the vehicle if stranded.

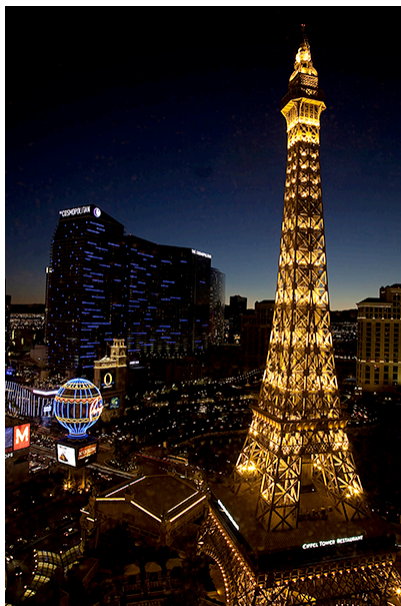


The wonderful vistas continued 57 miles all the way to Rachel, population 100, and the youngest settlement in Nevada located in Sand Spring Valley. There wasn't much there but numerous official and local signs. Welcoming Aliens have been suitably signed by true believers. Rachel is also the location of The Little A'Le'Inn (Earthlings welcome and UFO self parking!). The diner was serving tourists of various nationalities who kept jumping up from their tables to photograph the memorabilia or scan the gift shop. The waitresses were friendly and I guess had heard every alien joke in the book. Going boldly on, I kept my eye open for the remote Medlin family mailbox, No. HC61 Box80, which has attained cult status since 1989 when a Las Vegas TV station quoted an engineer who had worked on an 'Alien' craft at Nellis and the box became the focus for messages to Aliens. The box had to be armoured in the 1990s as visitors were opening the family mail. Now there is a drop box if you feel the need to make contact. This all seems a bit extreme but President Kennedy noted in a speech, "the US Air Force assures me that UFOs pose no threat to national security". At the junction with Hwy 93, my last 70-mile dash to Pioche and the Overland Saloon, there was a giant Alien attached to a barn building waving a fond farewell to Earthlings.

Pioche was known as a badass town. It had 72 occupants in Boot Hill cemetery before a citizen died of natural causes and joined them. The Overland Saloon and Hotel is the surviving example of 144 operating in the town's heyday of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when over \$20 million dollars worth of the shiny stuff made Nevada the largest producer of silver in the world. Mining has ceased but the town still has all the character of our childhood dreams of the Wild West. Today, it's not claim jumpers or gunfighters that lean on the saloon bar but groups of camouflaged clad hunters who are driving Dodge Ram pick-ups. Back-tracking on Hwy 93 south I took in the

Cathedral Gorge state park, which looks like a Luna landscape, the ravages of water on the shale producing conical towers that the set builders for Dr Who would be proud of. The section of road north of Alamo along the Great Basin Highway is smooth, sinuous and traffic free; good enough reason for any sporting driver to take my road trip. Two hours later, gridlock traffic on Interstate 15 in Las Vegas signalled the end of my great drive but hey, Las Vegas is like an alien spaceship landed in the Nevada desert.

My trip finale: a visit to the Imperial Palace Hotel Auto Collection, the world's largest classic car showroom. Not only is it in orbit on the fifth floor of the hotel but also the exhibits are for sale. General manager, Rob Williams, gave me the numbers; there are 200 cars on display and 300 in stock, and so the exhibits are in a constant state of change. Being Las Vegas and located in a casino, Rob told a story of a blackjack player who had an \$80,000 win in the middle of the night and bought two cars when the collection doors opened at 10 am. The exhibits are well laid out and on my visit prices ranged from a cool \$1.85 million for a wonderful 1930 Duesenberg J Murphy town car, to a low mileage Yugo, yours for \$14,500.



I boldly went forth in a 1968 Porsche 912 and landed at Las Vegas in a Chevrolet rental. All road trips are adventures and this one didn't disappoint. However, next time I will check my classics preparation before blast off!

Ends

## Trip Notes.

I stayed @

Montbleau Hotel and Casino  
HWY 50  
South Lake Tahoe  
Nevada 89449  
[www.montbleuresort.com](http://www.montbleuresort.com)  
+1 775 586 4695

Mizpah Hotel  
100 Main St  
Tonopah  
Nevada 89049  
[www.mizpahhotel.net](http://www.mizpahhotel.net)

Overland Hotel & Saloon  
662 Main Street  
Pioche  
Nevada 89043  
USA  
[www.overlandandhotelnv.com](http://www.overlandandhotelnv.com)  
+ 1 775 962 5895

Paris Hotel & Casino  
3655 Las Vegas Blvd  
Las Vegas  
Nevada 89109  
[www.parislasvegas.com](http://www.parislasvegas.com)  
+1 877 796 2096

## Dining.

Blue Water Bistro  
On Pier  
3411 Lake Tahoe Blvd  
South Lake Tahoe  
CA.96150

[www.Bluewaterbistrotahoe.com](http://www.Bluewaterbistrotahoe.com)

Mizah Hotel  
Restaurant  
100 Main Street  
Tonopah  
Nevada 89049

Sidewinder Café  
Main St  
Tonopah  
Nevada

Little A 'Le' Inn  
HC61 Box 45  
1 Old Mill rd  
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+1 775 729 2515

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Visit.  
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