

France, Maps and a Mercedes

By Gerri Young

Do all roads really lead to Paris? Does a flashy sports car offset getting lost? Read on ...

Work had been tough and we were tired. My French art teacher was having a “vernissage” (opening night) of a month-long art show in an ancient chapel near Vierzon, France. We promised ourselves a long weekend to see the event and get away. We decided to rent a car.

“You take care of the hotel, I’ll take care of the car,” my boyfriend Bill said. I drove him to the rental agency where he surprised me with a brilliant black Mercedes, 350SL hardtop convertible. It was perfect for the state of mind in which we found ourselves.

Bill, always prepared, had gotten directions to the town about two hours south of Paris and, of course, the route skirted around Paris before heading south. If you look at a map of France, you will quickly see that all roads (of any significance) seem to lead to Paris. It sits there like the middle of a big spider web requiring all unsuspecting drivers to approach the megacity whether they want to or not.

As for me, I’m always very suspicious of Internet driving instructions, so I had

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quickly examined an old map of France and saw what appeared to be a quite large road that went from Trois, France, almost directly to our destination without ever going near Paris.

Having not spent much time driving in France, neither of us took the “all roads lead to Paris” thing very seriously, and, in an effort to avoid the city, quickly decided to take the other road.

All went well until we got to Trois and tried to get to the “big red road” we needed. Trois wasn’t bad the first time, but it got more than a little old the second and third time. Even the ambience of the Mercedes couldn’t relieve our frustrations.

“Okay, something must be wrong on this old map,” I said. “Let’s get a new one.” Even the envious stares of people as we parked our elite chariot didn’t help put us back on top of the world. New map in hand and supported by a lovely British couple, we studied the possibilities and decided that from where we sat our only choice was continuing on the red road which we now could easily see.

We had left Kaiserslautern, Germany, about 11:30 a.m. for the vernissage at 6 p.m. It is now about four. Studying the map somewhat closely, at least the wavy lines on it, we declare we are maybe a little more than an hour away from our destination. Off we go, this time with Bill driving and me studying the map even more.

What are all these little numbers beside the road lines? I go to the map legend and discover one is the number of kilometers between marked points and the other (2.5, 1.3, etc.) indicates the length of time between those same points. Doing the math, I quietly announce, “We’re done for.”

“What? What do you mean we’re done

for?” exclaims Bill. I explain what I have discovered and tell him we are about four hours from our destination and, by the way, I don’t have Annie’s phone number or address with me. We’ve only been there once by train and are not sure how to find her lovely old house in tiny Mery sur Cher.

The “big red road” is a long, little and scenic road, far from a motor route. There is no way to save ourselves. It will be very dark when we get to Vierzon and all we know is to find the train station and make a right out of the parking lot.

Fortunately, as we near the train station my international search to locate Annie by phone succeeds. She talks us to her house about five miles away on a little country road. As we make the last turn she runs into the road, jumping up and down in delicious welcome. It is now 9:30 at night.

We are bleary-eyed and hungry and a bit embarrassed for two people who usually find their way around much better. Awaiting us on the terrace is a tableaux from a magazine. White-draped tables, candles glowing, a lovely buffet, French wine and our ever-growing group of French acquaintances all connected to us by Annie and her husband Alain. As we relate our tale and mention being lost in Trois, they all laugh and tell us everyone gets lost in Trois. We feel redeemed.

The next day we get to see the exhibit and a French wedding, too. When we leave Annie’s in our beautiful car, we have a regional map for finding the Loire Valley chateaux and even a wonderful hotel we had our sights set on. The sun was shining and all was well.

Lessons learned: Wear really big hats to French weddings, all roads do lead to Paris, don’t ever depend on an old map, make sure you understand the map legend, and get a regional map for all the tiny roads. Oh, and definitely rent a sexy sports car just once in your life. It was worth every penny! **R&R**



Gerri enjoys her rental car – a beautiful black Mercedes convertible sports car.