

Bertha Benz Memorial Route -- Bertha Started A Revolution!

I love stories of pioneer women who started a revolution. No, I don't mean like the war kind of revolution, not at all! It was a German woman by the name of Bertha Benz who jump started the love of the German automobile — see a revolution of the car kind!

Yes, her last name sounds familiar, her husband was none other than Carl Benz — founder of the beloved [German automobile](#) maker Mercedes Benz.

But, it's her name that's used to commemorate the pioneering journey — known as the Bertha Benz Memorial Route, which runs through one of my favorite [German region](#), the beautiful [Kraichgau](#), from [Mannheim](#) to [Pforzheim](#). Carl might have built the cars, but Bertha blazed the way for us all! :-)

Now, we've all heard that necessity is the mother of invention. So, Frau Benz wanted to visit her mother and decided to use her husband's Model #3 car to get there. She and her two teenage sons packed up early one morning, taking the prototype car out without telling the hubby. Brave woman considering that in 1888 there weren't any gas stations and the car hadn't been tested for long distances!

The Bertha Benz Memorial Route runs for about 194km (approx 120 miles); and if you look on a map Mannheim to Pforzheim isn't THAT far (nowadays, that is). This route has a northbound route and a southbound route, since Mrs. Benz was a bit nervous to drive the mountain terrain she originally drove on the way back.

Bertha Benz Memorial Route — Outbound Trip

By starting your trip in Mannheim you'll be taking the southbound portion first. Mannheim, once a Nazi stronghold, was seriously bombed during the last days of the war (and the 1st rocket plane was built here). Today it is rebuilt and hosts the annual Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival. It also has a *Tierpark* (Game Park) and a Farmers Market on the Marktplatz every Monday & Wednesday.

Coming south you'll arrive in historical [Ladenburg](#), where Mr. Benz lived from 1906 until he died in 1929. There is the Carl Benz Auto Museum to see, as well as a medieval and picturesque Old Town section that includes the 12th century Sankt Gallus Church and the *Martinstor* (Martin's Gate).

In [Dossenheim](#), the Bertha Benz Route meets with the [Bergstrasse](#) at the foot of the [Odenwald](#). If you're here in May, party hard at the *Sommertagszug*. If not, visit its local history museum and the ruins of Schauenburg.

Next up is chic [Heidelberg](#), one of my favorite cities! Its forboding castle atop the hillside isn't the

only thing to bring you to this university town. No, it has the pre-Reformation Church of the Holy Spirit, the 12th century Church of St. Peter, and the Autumn Festival on the last Saturday in September. The Vampire Ball in February is also a HUGE hit!

After leaving Heidelberg come to [Wiesloch](#). Why? Oh, because not only was the town's pharmacy the world's first petrol station (Mrs. Benz stopped here for Ligroin — the stuff used to fuel the car she was driving) but, the oldest hummingbird fossil was found here, too. Plus, I kind of like the Wine Festival in September. ;-)

Further south is Stettfeld (part of [Ubstadt-Weiher](#)) where you'll find an awesome Roman Archaeological Museum and a few ornately decorated Baroque churches. Come at the end of September when everyone in Stettfeld comes together to celebrate *Kerwe*, a church festival.

Another Roman settlement town along the Bertha Benz Memorial Route is [Weingarten \(Baden\)](#). Not only do they choose a wine queen every year, they also have a super fantastic recreational lake for swimming! Weingarten sits along a nature reserve area, so walking and bicycling is a very good idea — don't forget to ride past the 16th century *Wartturm* that's now an observation tower & museum, and the memorial to the town's former synagogue located on Keltergasse.

Berghausen, nowadays part of [Pfinztal](#), is next up and home to 12th century monasteries and wine production! With all the vino that's flowing through town no wonder its 8,000 residents love living here!

Bertha Benz also passed through another of Pfinztal's districts, Kleinsteinbach, which doesn't have a whole lot of sightseeing. Still, this village lost most of its population during the 17th century [Thirty Years' War](#) and now welcomes visitors to see its beautiful church and Castle Kleinsteinbach.

The next town on Bertha's tour is [Königsbach-Stein](#), a real treat and each of its parts is special in its own right. Königsbach has a charming framework Town Hall dating to 1622 and a Jewish Cemetery from the 1850's. Stein's half timbered Town Hall is a hundred years older, has a 16th century castle tower still standing, a local history museum, and a 1st century AD Roman relief to see. NICE!

Yepee, you made it to Pforzheim! — a town that's known as the Golden City because of its jewelry making and its location at the edge of the [Black Forest](#). While you're here check out the Wallberg, where tons of debris from [WWII](#) bombings were laid, the Jewelry Museum, a Roman archaeological site, the ruins of Liebeneck Castle, and the Schlosskirche St. Michael. If you have any energy left, take in a fun Puppet Theater performance.

Bertha Benz Memorial Route — Return Trip

All right, it's now time to turn around and do the northbound route, the tour Bertha took to get back

home!

[Bretten](#) is first up with many half timbered houses on the Marktplatz and its *Rathaus* (Town Hall) is still gorgeous after more than 300 years! Take your time here because there are castle ruins to see, a City Museum AND an Indian Museum to visit, and you'll also find a memorial to the town's former Jewish synagogue, school, and *mikvah* (a ritual bath). Afterwards a performance at the Baden National Stage is always a good idea!

I think staying the night in Gondelsheim, our next stop, is a good idea. Why? Because the Hotel *Löwenthor* has been welcoming guests since 1701 — I'd say they must be doing something right! Before you settle in for the night come see the Schloss Gondelsheim Park and the 19th century synagogue. Oh, did I mention that Carl Benz's mother is buried here?

Over in [Bruchsal](#) they don't have a castle — they call it a chateau! This Baroque chateau now houses exhibits from the State Museum of Baden; and it's a huge asparagus producing town — so eat your veggies, you'll need your strength as there's still a good deal more to see!

[Hambrücken](#) is where the Bertha Benz Memorial Route meets the [Baden Asparagus Route](#). You'll love being here on the last weekend in August for the City Celebration and its annual Christmas Market.

Kirrlach (which is now part of [Waghäusel](#)) is also part of the Baden Asparagus Route! Besides just growing the "king's vegetable" it has a local history museum and a lovely pilgrimage church with a monastery.

Oh, car fans — you're gonna love the next town along Bertha's Route, [Hockenheim](#)! Maybe not for its Art Nouveau Water Tower (which is the town's landmark) and neither for its Evangelical Church (gorgeous!), but for its Motorsports Museum and the Hockenheimring. Hey, isn't the Bertha Benz Memorial Route an honor for car enthusiasts? Yeah, that's what I thought! ;-)

Next fun stop? You'll have loads of fun in [Ketsch](#). So maybe it doesn't have a REALLY old medieval church or anything — but it has an outdoor pool that makes artificial waves (always for a great time!) and a fresh lake that's great for fishing. On the 3rd weekend of July, come join the Fishing Celebration!

Oh, our time on the Bertha Benz Memorial Route is nearly over — one last terrific town before you find yourself back in Mannheim. So, you better enjoy fine [Schwetzingen](#) while you can! Located on the western Odenwald (and meeting up with the Baden Asparagus Route once again & the *Burgenstraße* (Castle Road)), you won't know whether you want to see the town's Rococo Theater, the decorative Town Church, the Palace Garden, or the City History Museum First.

Oh, tosh! Forget that — let's party at the Mozart Celebration (Sept/Oct), the Church Festival (Oct.),

and the Asparagus Saturday instead!

After arriving back in Mannheim, I hope you fell in love with this route (and Bertha) as much as I have. Because without her we might never have fallen in love with the German automobile.

Sorry Audi, BMW, Volkswagen, and Porsche, you might be excellent German automakers — but, Benz came first! ;-)