

June 19-24, 2017 - Detroit... The Motor City - *It's not just for cars anymore*

I have established a specific criteria for my articles, published on this blog site. They **must** be about some interesting and special place that I have visited and it **must** have something to do with flying (other than a commercial airline trip that might be necessary to get there). Generally I also like to do some flying myself while I am visiting. On this one week trip to Dearborn, MI, Shippshewana, IN and St. Charles, IL, I have been able to cover **all three** of those bases.

As I have mentioned, in previous postings, the very first automobile that I purchased, upon graduating High School, was a brand new 1957 Volkswagen Beetle, and over the past six decades I have owned 10 VW's. For the last dozen years, or so, I have been coming to Illinois, Michigan or Wisconsin to attend conventions held by the Volkswagen Club of America. In fact, a few years ago I even helped to put one on myself, in Chattanooga TN., home of VW's Passat factory. I now own a 2013 Passat diesel TDI and have recently exceeded 100,000 trouble free miles with a car that gives me fuel economy numbers north of 45 MPG. I have owned 3 Mercedes Benz diesels as well, but none of them can hold a candle to VW.

Well, this year's VW convention is being held in the Chicago suburb of Saint Charles, and I would have normally flown into O'Hare, rented a car for the week, and visited the EAA headquarters, a hundred or so miles to the north, in Oshkosh, WI., as I have in the past. However, I have, on occasional Saturday mornings, come across Mr. Mo Rocca hosting "The Henry Ford's Innovation Nation" program on CBS television. I have been intrigued with this amazing museum and decided that this was the year that I was going to explore same. On the following pages I am going to show you some of the fascinating and thoroughly enjoyable photo memories that I experienced on the 3 days that I put aside to visit what turned out to be a vast three part complex. And those were not near enough to see it all. The right hand photo shows Innovation Museum and the 88 acre Greenfield Village an actual turn of the century community established by Henry Ford in 1929.



In the picture, immediately above, we can see the museum on the left and Greenfield Village at the right hand side. I put a day aside, each, to explore these two venues and on the next few pages I will show some of those photos. However on the first day there I toured the Ford Rouge Plant, which currently produces the F-150 pick-up truck.



You can see this enormous manufacturing complex in the photo above. The original plant went into production in 1915 to continue with the building of the Model "T", turning out 1,200 cars a shift. Much of that facility has been shut down as it is obsolete by today's standards. However, there is now a brand new state of the art factory there, which has gone into production; and while pictures cannot be taken inside of the manufacturing area, there are several places where photography is allowed. Of interest, in the left hand photo above, is the "green zone" at its very lower right hand corner. This is **not** a grassy park. It is instead the roof of part of that facility on which vegetation is growing. This is part of Ford's "ecological" statement. They say that it helps to regulate interior temperatures, helps to filter the rainwater and, dab nab it, it's just pretty to look at. On the next page I have another view of this roof, taken from an adjacent building, and, yes, it does look nice. I found, however, it much more interesting to actually go through the plant on a self conducted tour. By comparison with the VW Passat plant, that I visited during the Clubs Chattanooga convention, I found that there were a lot less robots working the line and much more human interaction. I didn't notice any robot welding machines at all, but I believe that much of that truck is made up of plastic and aluminum components, and the tour really only covers the very final assembly portion of the line, where everything finally comes together and a completed vehicle is driven off and into the quality inspection area for road testing.



The photo on the left is of me in front of the Rouge plant's visitor's center. It shows Henry Ford talking to a young engineer. On the upper right is a view of the grass covered plant roof which we saw from the 5,000 foot aerial view on the previous page. On the lower right I'm standing in front of a beautiful "T" model roadster, complete with a rumble seat, which was assembled in late '20's at the original Rouge facility. Several other car models were also built there but today it is only the F-150 truck and some SUV's that are built on that same chassis.



After the plant tour I went over to their Giant Screen theater to view a fantastic hour long 3-D film on a US aircraft carrier. This was, without a doubt, the best movie that I have ever seen of carrier operations. Seeing the Navy's F-18B Hornets taking off and landing was exhilarating but watching the F-35 take off vertically was amazing. This 1st day was capped off with a visit to Buddy's Pizza, a Dearborn staple, for one of their square pies



I had decided, in advance, to make this a 3 day sojourn as it was apparent that there was an awful lot to see. I am glad that I did and even that was not enough to encompass it all. When I visit a museum or historical venue I do not want to be rushed. I like to take the time to read the various plaques, posters and descriptive narrative. It is really the only way that you can fully understand and learn about what you are looking at. The entire second day was put aside to tour Greenfield Village. This is a turn of the (last) century "living community" which Henry Ford established in order to preserve some of America's more significant moments and historical items. While it would take, literally, pages and pages to outline all that is contained there, the quick synopsis is to envision an actual small town of the 1920's and '30's that has 7 distinct sections: **The Working Farms** area, with a cider mill, carriage house, wagon shop, etc. **The Liberty Craft Works**, with its sawmill, glass blowing shop, pottery shop, printing press, gristmill, machine shop and many more. **The Ford Home**, his Model "T" workshop and a Model "T" car loading center where you can take a "joy ride" in this iconic relic. The actual (not a replica) **Thomas A. Edison Laboratories**, moved en-mass from their Menlo Park, NJ and Fort Myers, FL. locations, and where "Edison" will actually give his audience a lecture on his light bulb discovery. **The Railroad Junction** with various steam locomotives, depots, roundhouse and railroad turntable and even a working steam train to ride on. The **Porches & Parlors** section with various cabins, homes and homesteads, farmhouses, school and even a windmill from the 18th, 19th & 20th centuries, all moved into the town and fully period furnished. And, finally, there is the Disney-like **Main Street** area with its early 20th century shops, stores, bank, newspaper, restaurants, horse drawn trolley, post office, doctor's offices, town hall, and pavilion gazebo. Here you can step back in time a hundred years and experience the more leisurely pace and simplicity of life of the last century. To me this was, perhaps, the most enjoyable of the experience as I was actually able to recall some of these memories from my own childhood. On the next page are just a few of the many dozens of photos that I captured as I traveled "somewhere in time" to an earlier and more satisfying way of life.

The #3 steam train pulls into the station as I await the "all aboard" call.



The town has its own inner harbor and a vaudeville style theater featuring daily musicals.



A 1/4 scale of the original Ford Mtr. Co. plant is open for inspection and behind it, is a loading bay where you can climb aboard a real 1920's Model "T" for a ride around town. Mine was in a convertible.



The homes are authentic residences, moved from all around the country and England, and furnished just as they would have been during their day. And two 'park rangers' ride with their mounts, all around town just "keeping the peace".



There is also a turn of the past century carousel. I re-discovered "my hidden inner child" as I climbed aboard this merry-go-round for a gentle ride.





The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation is a mini-Smithsonian in many respects, featuring sections devoted to what made the United States great. Areas are set side



tion, home furnishing, power generation, planes and aviation, as well as travel and civil rights. I put my entire 3rd day aside for an in-depth look at this fascinating insight into the American way of life. The "map my walk" app on my I-phone shows that I walked over 6 miles in the 7 hours that I spent in the museum. It was a highly informative and interesting day and I could have easily devoted 2 full days to this endeavor. Since the main reason that I was even in this part of the mid-west was to attend a VW Club convention, it is only appropriate that my first two pictures of are of Volkswagens. On the left is a 1949 Beetle, one of the first imported into the US. It has a "split" rear window, semaphores instead of directional blinkers and was powered by a 30 HP air cooled engine. In the background is a billboard showing a later model VW with a noticeable flat tire and the caption "Nobody's perfect". I first became interested in the VW Bug while still in high school when I came across an article in **Popular Science** magazine about this unique German vehicle and purchased my first when I graduated in 1957. On the right is the Westfalia Vanagon which a camping version of VW's van. What makes this of interest to me is that when my "significant other", Miriam was growing up in Nigeria, Africa, in the '50's, her missionary parents used this type of vehicle for their vacation trips to The Cameroons with her 3 sisters. She recalls the evenings spent trying to sleep in the camper as the baboons and jackals would be howling and milling around just outside.



The aviation portion of the museum is quite extensive and an aficionado could easily spend an entire day here. While I took more than a dozen photos, I am just going to feature four of them here. On the left, of course, is a depiction of the event that started it all when the Wright Brothers launched their heavier than air powered Flyer off the sands of Kitty Hawk, NC in 1904. Hanging on the ceiling is a Douglas DC-3, the first of the really comfortable commercial airliners which also made "its' bones" during WW II as the C-49 transport. The original civilian version would carry 21 passengers or 14 if configured as an overnight "sleeper". The Pitcarin Autogiro seen on the lower left is just an interesting flying machine that combined the best of a helicopter and fixed wing airplane and was used for a multitude of flying applications. At the lower right is the Ford Tri-Motor, a '20's and '30's aircraft that pioneered quick, efficient and economical passenger air travel. I have been lucky to have been able to make a couple of flights in this historic icon myself.





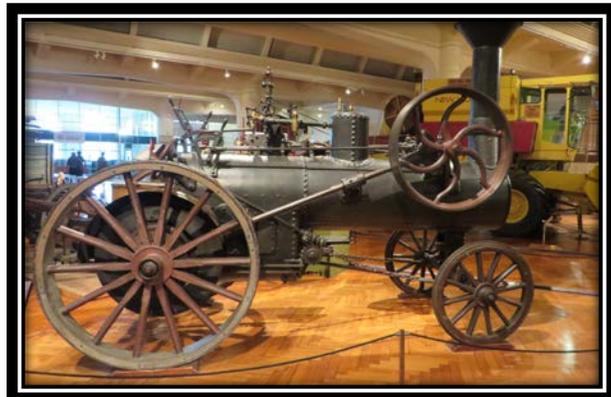
As I have all ready mentioned, I am never one to rush through a museum, wanting instead to savor all of the details and nuances of each exhibit and its various items. I spent an extraordinary amount of time in and around all of the automotive sections, and there were many, taking dozens of photos. However space in this blog is limited, and this will probably turn out to be the largest of any of my postings. With that in mind, there are two other auto photos that I would like to share. On the left is an "exploded" view of the Ford Model "T" which was originally comprised of only about 900 individual parts. And below is General Eisenhower's "Bubble" Lincoln Presidential Limousine. There are a half dozen of the Presidential cars available for viewing, but JF Kennedy's will be the last so displayed. Today the US Secret Service takes and destroys the newer vehicles in order to preserve their modern day safety and technological innovations.



And what would an auto exhibit be without other icons from the mobile age. On the left is a sign from the '50's showing a Chevy Bel air parked in front of a McDonalds golden arch. There is also a A&W rootbeer and White Castle sign present along with a typical trolley style diner from the period, all of which made driving and eating almost synonymous.



However everything in this museum does not have to do with driving or flying. On the left is a photo from the very large train and railroad exhibit and just below it one from the farm implements area. And, finally, here is a picture of the revolutionary Dymaxion Dome House from the 1940's. Designed for the post war housing shortage it is constructed of aluminum and configured with two bedrooms, a central core bathroom and designed to be erected by two people in only two days. This house was never commercially delivered and only two prototypes were ever even built. I also have some really interesting interior photos as well, but we have finally run out of space for my coverage of The Henry Ford museum visit.





Now for the "flying" portion of my article. Whenever I am in a new or interesting section of the country I try to schedule some time in a rental airplane. This is not always possible since not all airports have rental aircraft available and those that do often schedule them for flight instruction. Shipshewana, IN. is an interesting Amish community and a definite tourist destination. I have visited here many times in the past when I used to do my infra-red thermographic inspections for many of the RV and mobile home manufacturing plants that make up this part of the country. Here is a picture of me and the Cessna 150 that I was able to rent for an hour's flight around the local countryside.



Immediately above is both an aerial and ground photo of the Blue Gate Restaurant which I always try to have an Amish meal at while I am in "Shipsey". And immediately below is a photo of the gas station right across the street and some of the typical buggy's that travel the local streets. There is also a picture of me in front the Blue Gate's garden entrance.



And, finally here are a couple of photos recording my flight around this very beautiful and scenic portion of northern Indiana and southern Michigan. While much of the land is devoted to farming and light manufacturing, there are a few beautiful lakes in which resort living is the predominate industry. And, all flights have to eventually end. The final photo is taken as I turn left base on my final to runway 01. It was a beautiful day to fly and it brought back memories of a previous post when, in Sept of 2008 I stopped by Sturgis, MI., where I originally picked up my plane hauler and made a You-Tube video of me bringing the Highlander out of the trailer, unfolding its wings, and taking it up for a local sightseeing flight.



Now we come to the 62nd Volkswagen Club of America Convention. This is a gathering of VW aficionados, many from the early air cooled days, who get together for some camaraderie and socializing. It is held annually at various locations in the US and is usually hosted by one of the local chapters. The event usually starts on a Friday afternoon with registration and the distribution of "goody bags" which contain some automotive paraphernalia and local literature. Later that evening it is over to a nearby eatery for an informal get-together. This year it was to an Chicago Style Italian diner, followed by a Drive-In Theater night time movie. I opted out of the movie, Disney's *Cars III*. On Saturday morning there was the usual business and trustee meetings where the club's finances and future events are discussed, followed by a lunch break. The afternoon is devoted to a scenic "Photo Rally". This year I was navigating for a long time friend who had driven up from central Florida in a rented Toyota (less wear and tear on his own VW). We had just completed our task of finding 10 locations, via their street intersections, and answering questions pertaining to the photo clue attached to the direction sheet (usually sculptors, historic buildings, memorial plaques, and other unique items). We were on our way back to the convention headquarters hotel with about 15 minutes to spare before the disqualifying deadline. Perhaps my driver, Will, was a little too anxious as I heard that woeful sound of a police vehicle siren behind us. After the usual attempts at why we were speeding failed, ie: "I have a hard time seeing the speedometer on this rental". I told him the truth of what we were actually doing, ie: the photo rally and the urgency of getting the answer sheet back in time. The officer indicated that he had thought that he had heard all of the excuses for speeding but this one was so unique that he let us off with just a warning and a caution to "keep it under 100 MPH". He also gave us two "Junior Deputy Sheriff" stick-on badges.



On the left we have a photo of us wearing those badges and on the right one from that evening's banquet and awards dinner showing that we, surprisingly, won first place in the Photo Rally, along with a picture of my award plaque. Had we been given a ticket instead of the warning, we would have been disqualified.



In addition to the aforementioned activities and events, on Sunday morning there was an "ALL VW" car show held at a nearby dealership. Most of these cars were antique or classic's, some of which went back well over a half century in their age. Below on the left is a image of me along in front of several beetles, of various generations, all equipped with roof top luggage carriers. And, on the right, is a photo of another Westfalia Vanagon outfitted to the nines for a camping trip. All too soon the convention was over and it was time for me to make my return to South Florida, via Spirit Airlines, where it is entirely possible that it might be the site for the 63rd Annual VW Club of America's convention. If that is the case, I suspect that I will be lending a hand in helping to put that one on.

