



MBCA Memphis Section Newsletter - January/February 2021

River City Star



President's Message:

To All Members, Associates and Friends:

Welcome to the January-February 2021 issue of the **River City Star**. Once again let me say welcome to our new members, and a thank you to our old ones for continuing to support the Memphis Section and the MBCA. For the new members, please believe me when I say that our current club activities, or rather our lack of them, is not the norm. We all hope to get back to enjoying each other's company at dinners, trips, tours, parties and other events just as soon as we can.

Next, I'd like to congratulate our 2020 Member of the Year (MOTY) as it is sometimes abbreviated, Lordita Nowacki. This year's winner and her husband Erik joined the Memphis Section in July of 2015, and immediately began joining in our activities and volunteering to host several events. By October 2018 she (with support from Erik) volunteered to be our Events Coordinator, deconflicting our events calendar and double checking that all of the major and minor things were taken care of for our activities. She also sends out all of the e-vite invitations to track those signing up to attend. In April of last year, she was elected the section Secretary, to add a few more responsibilities to her growing list. I know you join me in congratulating Nordita and saying thank you for your untiring efforts during the past year.



MBCA Person of the Year Lordita Nowacki and her GLE 350.

Although COVID-19 is still with us as I write this, we hope to put together a proposed calendar of events for 2021 by the March/April newsletter. We have provided a short list for this issue. Please check the section's website memphis.mbca.org for any updates and/or cancellations.

I want to wish you all a Happy New Year. Please stay safe and if you need to get hold of me, my email address is sudekumwa@msn.com.

Bill Sudekum,
President, Memphis Section

Memphis Membership Matters

By Mike McHann (Membership Chairman)



Please welcome our new members Timothy Prather, Grant McGee, Megan Austein, Joe McFall and Richard Cooper. Ordinarily, I'd encourage you to join us at our upcoming events, but in our current situation we'll make do with remote means to keep in touch for the foreseeable future.

For the calendar year 2020 we've maintained our membership of 82 members. We're hopeful for a better year in 2021 and look forward to growing our membership. Our recent program of providing our dealerships with copies of the Star Magazine to pass out to their customers and potential members is showing positive results. We will be expanding the program to other dealers in the coming months.

Let's keep up the good efforts in the coming year and encourage our fellow Mercedes owners to join. We have a colorful new application so let me know if I can send you copies. As a reminder you'll receive a one-month extension on your membership for every new member you recruit, so be sure you're listed as the referring member on their membership form.

Join now! <https://memphis.mbca.org/join/national>

Technical Tips and Tricks (TTT)

by Mike McHann

E350 "C" Service

My E350 is my daily driver and never gets the attention like my restoration projects. In December, it was time for a "C" service. I don't trust mechanics to do the detail work that I would do so I caught up on a list of needed work before taking it to Mercedes for the service.

Work I did myself included: flush and replace coolant, replace thermostat, replace spark plugs (really needed), replace intake air filters, replace front brake pads and discs, flush brake fluid, and replace the damaged front sway bar and bushings.

Mercedes of Memphis changed the motor oil/filter, transmission fluid/filter and gear oil in the 4Matic transfer case. As a result of my "pre-work," the service was downgraded from a "C" to an "A" service. This is a significant savings for me and I know the quality of work is more restoration than just a service.

Mike McHann

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The 2020 MBCA-Memphis Calendar of Events

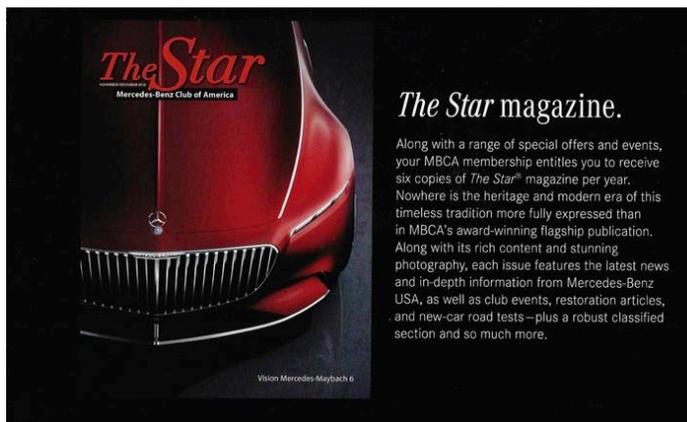
Our events include delicious dinners, fun drives and demonstrations on how to fix your car. Regardless of your interests and preferences, you will have many different events to choose from. We at MBCA Memphis value the safety of our members. As COVID-19 continues to be spreading rapidly, we will limit our activities to Cars and Carbs. We hope to provide a full 2021 events calendar in the next March/April newsletter.

As always, go to memphis.mbca.org for the latest updates on our events.

9am-11am	Saturday, February 6	Cars & Carbs	Panera Bread in Germantown
9am – 11am	Saturday, March 6	Cars & Carbs	Panera Bread in Germantown
9am-11am	Saturday, April 3	Cars & Carbs	Panera Bread in Germantown

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The Star magazine.

Along with a range of special offers and events, your MBCA membership entitles you to receive six copies of *The Star* magazine per year. Nowhere is the heritage and modern era of this timeless tradition more fully expressed than in MBCA's award-winning flagship publication. Along with its rich content and stunning photography, each issue features the latest news and in-depth information from Mercedes-Benz USA, as well as club events, restoration articles, and new-car road tests—plus a robust classified section and so much more.

Classic Cars

FROM BEIRUT TO AQUABA ON A DIVING VACATION - #3 in a Series

by Lynn Jones

Fresh out of graduate school in 1974 I took a faculty position at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. Soon after arrival I bought a 1960 Mercedes 190b that had just been imported from Switzerland intended for the taxi market. We did a lot of tripping until the Lebanese Civil War forced us to leave. The car came home with us and is still in use 60 years after exiting the Sindelfingen factory. This is the third in an occasional series about life with our W121 190b Ponton in Lebanon.

Some road trips are more exciting than others. In May of 1975 I took a SCUBA diving vacation from Beirut to Aquaba, Jordan, that included everything from long hours of arduous driving through foreboding terrain, to four international borders, to stops at ancient places, to an almost calamitous end at a military checkpoint – all that and a little romance too.

I had bought my 1960 Mercedes-Benz 190b in January of that year and by the time classes at the University

From Beirut to Aquaba cont.

were over in May, I thought it would be a great idea to take my 15-year-old car on an extended trip down and back through the desert in Jordan for a little SCUBA diving at one of the best diving sites in the world in Aquaba. The car had performed well in the previous four months of ownership including on several trips over the mountains out of Beirut into the fertile Bekaa Valley. It did not take much effort to find three AUB students who also wanted to go diving in Aquaba and my travel companions were set. One was a fresh business graduate about to head to New York for a new job with a multinational bank. The second was his fiancé who was an undergrad with U.S. and Mid-East roots. The third was a quiet undergrad from the Christian side of the city who wanted to indulge his interest in diving. The route was basically a simple one – Beirut to Damascus, Syria, on to Amman, Jordan and then south to Aquaba on the Red Sea taking one long day down and two days back and covering about 1,000 miles in all. Simple, that is, until realizing the route included two international borders, lots of city and desert driving, and sections of road in Jordan not far from the Israeli border. On this stretch we saw miles of anti-tank holes dug into the landscape that served as reminders of old and current tensions. It should also be noted that the Lebanese Civil War, which had started at a low level earlier in 1975, was heating up daily with new flash points erupting with little notice.

We started off in high spirits with prospects of some world-class diving in front of us. We took all our camping and diving gear except SCUBA tanks. We were warned that SCUBA tanks, being large metal cannisters that cannot be inspected inside, would not be welcome at any border crossing. We left early on a Thursday morning with intentions of making the 420-mile trip in one day. The venerable old road from Beirut to Damascus first rises over the Lebanon mountains, down into the south end of the Bekaa valley and up over the anti-Lebanon mountains to the higher ground in Syria and on to Damascus. Beirut to Damascus was usually a two-hour drive, border formalities included, and we managed that leg with little trouble.



We drove the Ponton right up to the water's edge at the diving site on the Gulf of Aquaba. The contrast between the bleak desert and the lush marine life underwater was stark.

We were familiar with procedures at the Lebanon-Syria border, but when we got to the Ar Ramtha crossing into Jordan things were different. We waited in line to get the car and all its contents inspected, including driving over a pit where the car was gone over with a fine-tooth comb and mirrors were used to look at the undercarriage. We had to make a full explanation of our camping and diving gear. I commented to one of the students that "Wow, they sure are efficient here." That just made the buttons burst on a border officer who overheard and took great pride in the heritage of British efficiency learned when Jordan was a protectorate.

I had never been to Amman, but there was no time to play tourist. We drove through

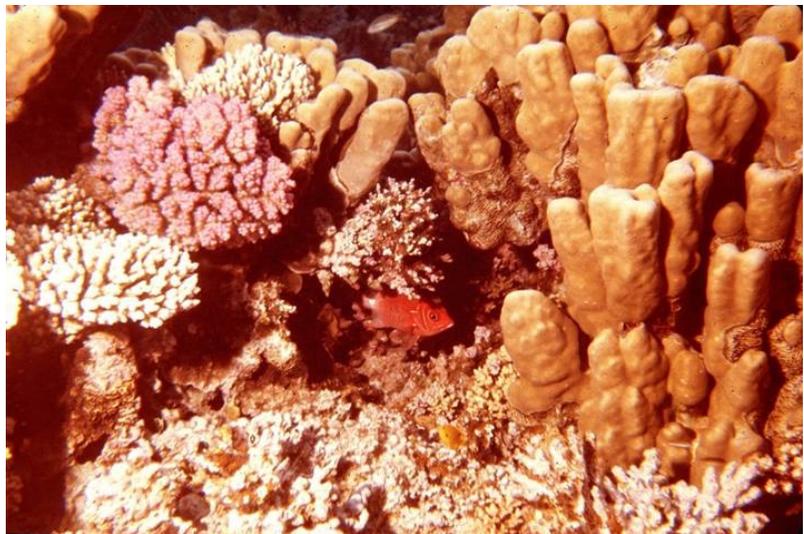
and on into the desert south of the city. A lot of dry, open, beautiful landscape with very few people and little livestock. As we approached Aqaba, the road goes through Ma'an and then into the other-worldly geography of Wadi Rum. Wadi Rum is the high valley that was used as a headquarters by T.E. Lawrence in 1917-18 when he participated in the Arab Revolt. Wadi Rum is stark and awe inspiring and has recently become a rock-climbing destination for European tourists. The location was used in the 1962 film "Lawrence of Arabia" and as the surface of Mars in the 2000 movie "Red Planet." I contributed my part to the ecology of Wadi Rum when the muffler and a piece of exhaust pipe came off on the steep climb out of the Wadi. The 190b is built to take a wide range of road conditions and I was mighty glad it was the muffler and not the cooling system that gave out during the trip. The trunk, as in many Mercedes, has a second well to accommodate an extra spare tire. We had no need to change tires on this trip, but after I saw the terrain, I wished I had taken the precaution of carrying two spares.

From Beirut to Aquaba cont.

We arrived at the Barakuda Club Jordanian Diving Center camp run by Dutch nationals late in the afternoon and set up camp. The recent grad and his girlfriend pitched a tent, and I erected a tarp as a lean-to on the side of the car. The undergrad, however, indicated he only felt safe if he could sleep in the car. I had agreed to transporting passengers from Beirut to Aquaba, not providing lodging too, but after some persuasion and recognizing that we had left a civil war behind in Beirut, Jean-Pierre ended up spending four nights sitting upright in the front seat.

Diving in Aquaba is one of the rarest of treats for a diver. Jordan owns this short strip of coast that stretches from the Israeli city of Eilat on the north to the closed Saudi border on the south end. The Gulf of Aquaba is an arm of the Red Sea and the desert comes right up to the beach and this stark landscape makes a vivid comparison with the teeming and colorful sea life just below the surface. Huge brain corals, fan corals, organ pipe coral and many others are surrounded by reef fish of all kinds. Snorkeling in the shallow depths is where the color shows off the best and the bright desert sun made every shade vibrant.

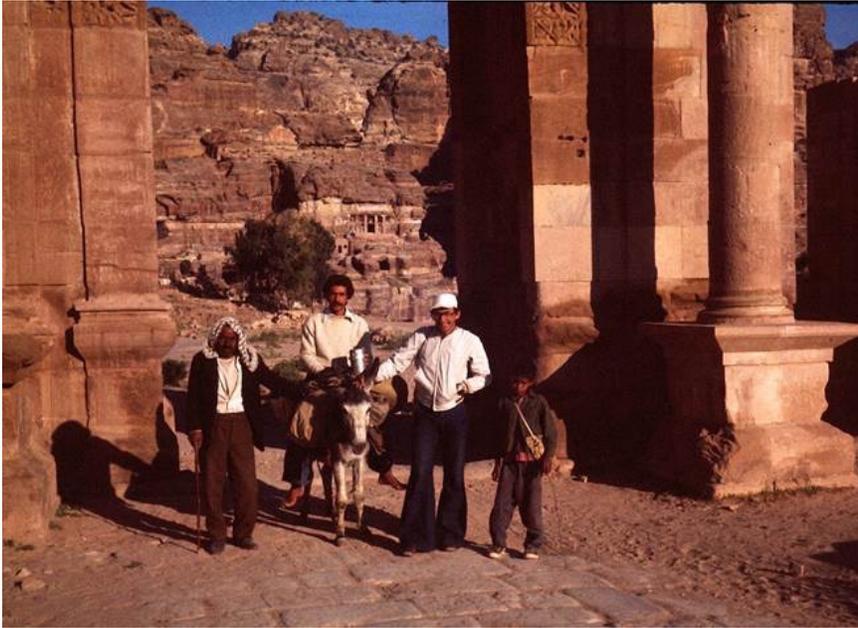
At deeper depths with SCUBA, the sights are even better. Flat fan-like corals as big as a bed and as delicate as glass, brain corals like boulders, and huge coral faces with all the variety intact. At one site we went down to 90 feet and enjoyed the difference that less light and greater depth brings to the coral and the fish population. Jordan was very aware of the resource they had and after emerging from a dive we were met by an armed soldier sent along to enforce the no-coral-picking rule. Night dives were prohibited, and all gear had to be back at the shop by closing. With Israel as a neighbor, there were a lot of rules presented for "security reasons."



Sea life teamed just under the water's surface and the bright sunlight of the Jordanian desert made all the colors vibrant.

When it came time to leave Aquaba the new graduate suggested we move our departure ahead so we could see some sights as well as spend the night at Petra, the ancient city carved from the surrounding stone that was just a few hours north of the dive camp and roughly on our way home. Why not? Ten years after we visited, Petra was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is now listed as one of the "New Seven Wonders of the World." With that kind of reputation, it was easy to plan an overnight stay in Petra. We arrived outside the site in the late afternoon when the sun was low and slanting across the rose-colored sandstone and left the car at a small visitor center. The approach to Petra is through a defile in the rock that winds the better part of a mile and at some points is only a few yards wide. With vertical bluffs rising above as high as 600 feet on either side, and the sunlight alternately appearing and being hidden by the twists and turns of the trail through rock, it presented a striking effect. This narrow route made for a perfect gate for the original Nabataeans who built the city and made Petra their capital from 400 to 106 BCE. At that time, before sea lanes had been established, Petra sat right on the important trade routes between the Mediterranean and the far, far east. This place is old!

From Beirut to Aquaba cont.



Two of my dive companions (center) with guides in the ancient city of Petra. Petra dates to the fourth and third century BCE.

Once we came out of the gorge that had been originally shaped by rushing water, we were face to face with The Treasury, a several stories tall columned building carved out of the sheer sandstone walls of the rock face. Think *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* where Indie thinks he has finally found the location of the Holy Grail. It is that awe inspiring. We continued on since the light was fading and we did not have much time to gawk. We passed lesser buildings, an amphitheater, and other ruins of an ancient city, all carved out of the surrounding stone cliffs. We were the only people on the winding trail in and there were few tourists once we were in the city.

It turned out that the Bedouin villagers who had lived in Petra long before the country of Jordan had plans to make it a tourist destination still had homes in the area close to the hotel that were caves cut into the sides of the hills the same way the Nabataeans had cut classic structures out of sandstone for their city. My travel companion and I negotiated lodging for the night and at the end of the evening set out for bed. What we each had was a sleeping platform cut into the side of a large room that was itself a cave cut in the rock. It essentially was a common bedroom with a small sitting area and firepit and half a dozen other sleeping nooks, a few of which were occupied by some of the Bedouin villagers. Lying there in my sleeping bag, it was fascinating to wonder about the legions of others who had also slept in this spot over the ages with the low light of the fire in the background, the rough carpets on the stone floor and the smells that seeped out from the rock walls of this room that had been occupied by humans for centuries and perhaps for millennia. There was also the concern about just how safe we really were.

We had no cause for concern of our safety and spent the night warm and dry under Bedouin hospitality. A great night indeed. When Jean-Pierre and I arose and went out to find the others we found the two huddled together shivering in the early morning sun. When asked about their night they said they had spent it under a blanket on the lawn of the hotel. Turns out the strictly observant hotelier had refused them a room when they could not produce a marriage license. I could not resist telling them how wonderful it was to sleep in my own nook in a warm ancient cave. The two



Petra's ancient structures were carved out of and built from the sheer sandstone walls of a unique valley. Petra is a major Jordanian tourist center.

From Beirut to Aquaba cont.

of them in the back seat slept through much of the morning drive back up the desert road toward Aman.

For almost 200 miles the road to Aman was the kind where gas stations are prominently marked on any travel map for good reason. We encountered a Bedouin caravan moving the old-fashioned way – camels and donkeys and no trucks. Between rare villages, camels were a common sight.

Crossing the Jordan-Syria border and the Syria-Lebanon border went without delay and in the falling daylight we made our approach to the eastern edges of Beirut city. Traffic appeared to be at its usual chaotic level that belied an uptick in the conflict that had occurred over the few days we were out of the country and of which we were not aware. By now the darkness of evening had fallen and I was maneuvering through the traffic, intent on keeping the car moving through plenty of pedestrians, various hawkers, military, and police guides when we came to one round-about that was filled with foot traffic, dust, cars, trucks, and men in military dress. We came to our exit off the rotary with soldiers at the side of the road where I took my chance to get out of the circle. I had started to accelerate away (relatively speaking in an 80 hp car), had gotten only a few yards, when the new grad shouted STOP! STOP! I reflexively jammed on the brakes. A burley officer strode up to the window and, in Arabic, demanded to know why I had not stopped at the rotary when he had motioned us over. At this point the student in the back seat was doing all he could as fast as he could to explain that this foreigner, who did not understand Arabic and appeared to be driving a private taxi with three passengers was perfectly legit and should be allowed to pass. This new college graduate headed to New York to seek his fortune became my salvation. He was able to convince the military man (Lebanese Army, Palestinian militia, local armed sectarian?) that we indeed were innocents and that he should check the trunk to see our camping and dive gear. This was indeed checked and after a few words with the student, we were sent on our way. A half mile down the road the new graduate informed me how lucky we were, the armed soldier having told him that had we drove much further he would have fired shots through the back window.

The rest of the drive through the city and back to the University campus was uneventful except for the cold sweat I felt. I dropped off my diving companions, camping mates, road trip buddies, vital interpreters, and good Lebanese friends, and we went our separate ways. My wife and I did not leave Lebanon for another 14 months when we drove out in the same 1960 Mercedes 190b ponton with a U.N. convoy. In the interim we made several trips by air out of the country as well as back to the U.S. to bridge periods of fighting and several temporary suspensions of classes. The Lebanese Civil War intensified and sadly went on until 1990. Today, closing in on five decades later, the 1960-built car that carried us all through this still sits in our garage in west Tennessee and provides a lot of memories every day.



MERCEDES FREUDE
"The Joy of Everything Mercedes"

MBCA's newest & greatest National Event EVER!

Combining the best and most popular activities of both StarTech & StarFest into one fabulous Gathering!

Location:
Omni Hilton Head Oceanfront Resort,
Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

Along with our MBCA Event, we will be able to experience the kickoff of Legends of the Autobahn-East, as well as the renowned HHI Concours d'Elegance.

Dates:
Mercedes-Freude - Tuesday, November 2nd - Friday, November 5th, 2021
Legends of the Autobahn East - Saturday, November 6th (at Port Royal Golf Course)
Hilton Head Island Concours d'Elegance - Sunday, November 7th (at Port Royal Golf Course)

**Enjoy the camaraderie of being together with old and new friends alike!
Mark your calendars NOW for a NOT-TO-BE-MISSED event!**

Further details coming your way in the near future!
Rick Siefert - National Events Chair - ricksiefert@att.net

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