

HIGHLAND HISTORY, H I G H W A Y S H I D E & O U T S

*A quick tour of Scotland
in the Mercedes G-Wagen plus
a dram or two on The Whisky Trail*

BY INNES IRELAND

Scotland is like a large national park that was carefully made up of all the best parts of the world, such as Puget Sound, Baja, 17-Mile Drive near Monterey. I was surprised to find that many roads are narrow and rarely traveled, great for spirited driving, some like the Oregon logging roads. The vistas are exciting with something special about to be revealed just around the next corner. Sometimes there would be fields of sheep with twisted horns watching over bouncy new lambs, other times huge fields of daffodils or Highland cows with bison faces and shaggy coats. Suddenly we would come to a loch, and each one was special in its own way: some were peaceful turquoise while others were black and secretive. The moors were rugged with their scratchy coverings of peat and heather in rich browns and purples; it is no wonder Scottish weavings are done in such harmonious colors. The food was always good and I ordered haggis in Aviemore. When I asked Innes what it was made of, he said he couldn't tell me before I had eaten it. When I had finished, he said he couldn't remember. And, for all their history of being bloodthirsty crazies, the Scottish people were charming and cheerful.—Dorothy Clendenin



THIS TALE FOLLOWS no set pattern but wanders about as surely as the Scottish roads I chose for our journey. It combines a 4-wheel-drive Mercedes-Benz G-Wagen, a hint of the beauty of my country and an inkling that whisky is more than just a headache. This last element arose because I suggested to my photographer, our Managing Editor Dorothy Clendenin, that we might blend a G-

Wagen driving impression and a Scotland Sports Car Country with a tour of the whisky distilleries of Speyside. In all of these, I reasoned, I couldn't think of a guide more suited than myself.

The most simple approach to Scotland is through London, taking a connecting flight either to Glasgow or Edinburgh. The hardened motorist who wishes to drive should take the M1 motorway north,

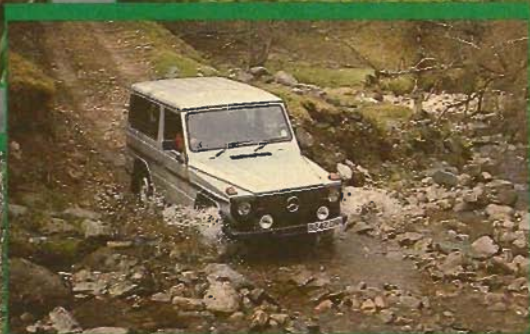
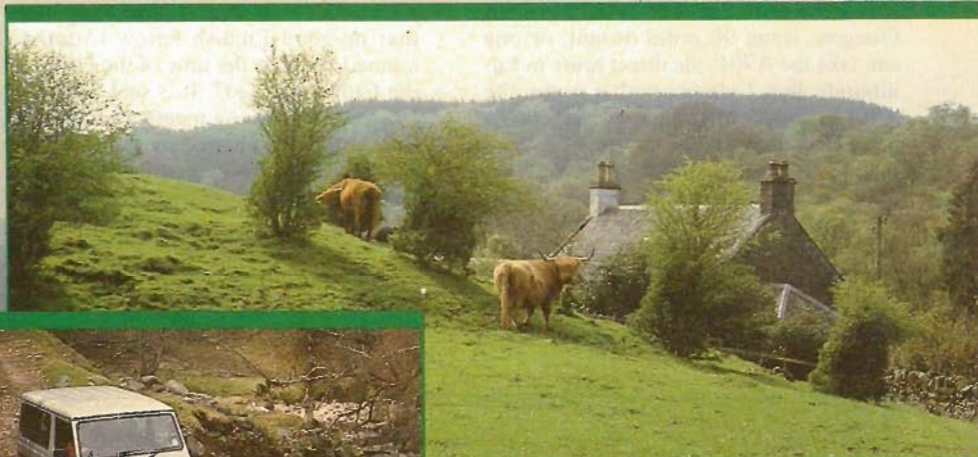
changing to the M6 about 80 miles out of London, which is what we did. This runs all the way to Carlisle, with its 12th- and 13th-century castle and cathedral, giving a glimpse of the Lake District to the west.

At this point the historian may wish to investigate Hadrian's Wall, the massive stone affair that once ran across the country from coast to coast. Built by the Romans about AD 120 in an expensive but

feeble attempt to keep the unruly Scottish hooligans in their own domain, many sections of it are well preserved.

North of Carlisle the motorway peters out to become the A74, and in a few miles a sign lets you know you are in Scotland. No, you don't need to dig out your passport! The romantically inclined can leave the main road here briefly to look at the old smithy at Gretna Green where for 200

PHOTOS BY DOROTHY ELENENIN



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years young lovers eloped, intent on marriage despite parental objections. The village blacksmith was empowered to perform the marriage ceremony without asking too many questions and many were the couples who sought their union in these humble surroundings.

Northward, the A74 heads toward Glasgow, some 90 miles distant, or one can take the A701, the direct route to Edinburgh. But, I chose another route, the A708, a narrow, twisting road that climbs up a long glen on its way to St Mary's Loch, parts of it great fun in a good-handling car, passing the Grey Mare's Tail on the left: a 200-ft cascade that is one of the most impressive waterfalls in Scotland.

A few miles on there is a splendid statue erected in memory of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. He was a simple, unedu-

cated fellow but wrote some of the most beautiful lines of poetry about the wind, the flowers and his beloved hills.

Directly opposite is Tibbie Shiels inn at the head of St Mary's Loch where Hogg used to get together with another famous Scottish writer, Sir Walter Scott. Apart from writing the Waverly Novels and stuff like that, Scott was a bit of a do-gooder, being one of those who rediscovered in 1817 the Crown, the Sceptre and other fanciful objects used to crown Scottish kings since the time of Robert the Bruce. These oddments were stashed away when that no-good English fellow Cromwell roamed about at the time of the Union of the Crowns in 1707. It is said Scott and Hogg would carouse together for days on end, aided and abetted by the venerable Tibbie Shiels who owned the inn, which shows that Scott wasn't such a bad fellow after all.

On to Selkirk, past which on the A7 lies a grand sight, the Meeting of the Waters where the combined flow of the Ettrick and the Yarrow join that famous salmon

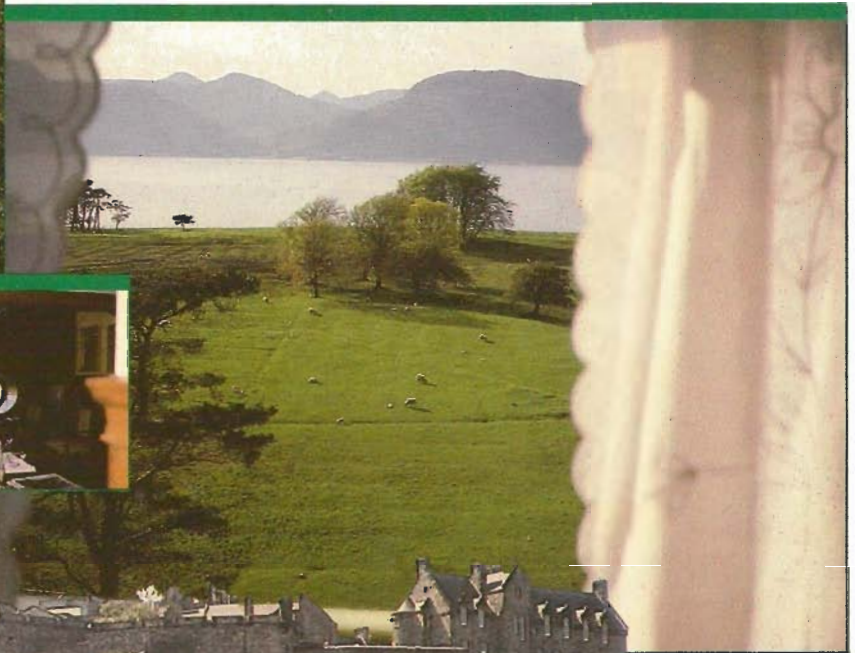
river, the Tweed. Branching off here on the B6360 will lead to Abbotsford House, the mansion that was the home of Sir Walter Scott from 1812 to 1832. Open to the public, it is still inhabited by the writer's descendants.

This whole Borders area, Galashiels, Hawick, Kelso, Innerleithen and Jedburgh, particularly famous for its woolen goods, is within easy reach of Edinburgh, ideal for a day's outing. In the past, the Borders had a violent history, but when the locals weren't beating their neighbors over the head with clubs and axes, they were busy building abbeys, sanctimonious lot that they were.

Dottie and I followed the Tweed toward its source, coming to the town of Peebles with its ruined 13th-century church and a 15th-century Friary. Here we sought refuge for the night in the enormous Peebles Hydro Hotel, which lords it over the town from its hillside perch. Its charges were not so grand as its appearance. We took dinner sitting by panoramic windows overlooking the river to the →



Ardsheal House, a hideaway worth finding. Below, Edinburgh Castle.



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green hills beyond. Dottie marveling at the duration of the twilight once the sun sank below the horizon. It was a clear night after a perfect day, the light changing ever so slowly, deepening to a dark purple in the hills while still the sun threw light to the sky.

Next morning we headed for Edinburgh, more enchanting and gracious than Glasgow. There we stopped on the esplanade of the 1000-year-old Castle standing so proudly on its rocky crag looking down grandly upon the city, with magnificent statues of famous soldiers guarding the place. There is much to guard, and among other things of interest are the Scottish Crown Jewels and Mons Meg, a 15th-century cannon. Brave was the lad who put tinder and spark to that lump of iron!

From there the Royal Mile stretches downhill leading directly to Holyrood Palace, the Queen's residence when visiting

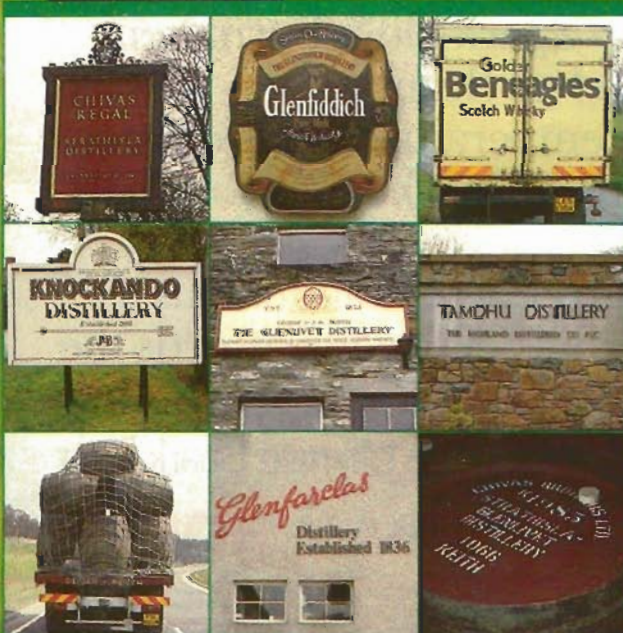
the city. We rumbled gently over the granite setts of the street passing the High Kirk of St Giles, often referred to as a cathedral, which it is not; the church of Scotland does not have cathedrals. Save for a brief period in the 17th century when the wretched English stuck their interfering noses in our business, this building is, and always was, a kirk, its origins going back to the early 12th century.

Much of Scotland's history as an independent nation is contained within this Royal Mile, for over the centuries kings, queens, princes and other noble folk have walked and ridden its length seeing it much as it is today; great men and ruffians alike have also passed by en route to their executions but I doubt if they were admiring the architecture.

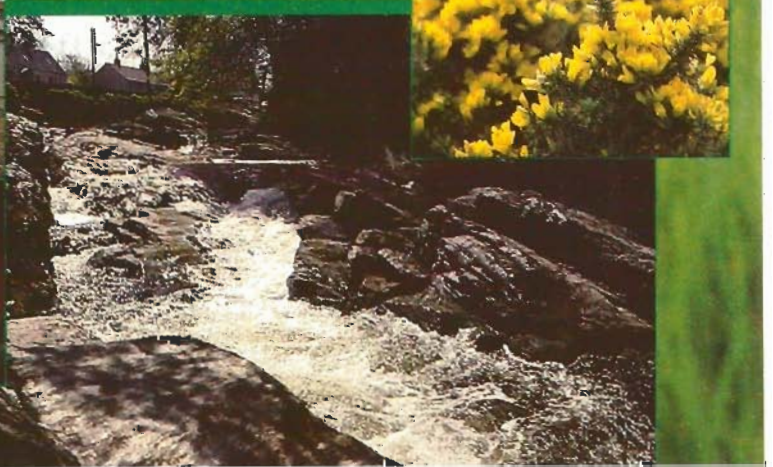
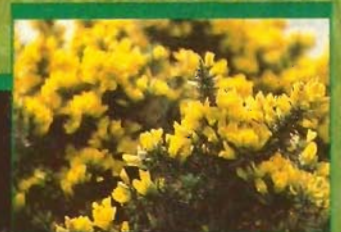
The palace, home of the Stuart kings, is set in the parkland of Holyrood—also the site of Holyrood Abbey—with Arthur's Seat, an ancient volcano, rising 822 ft above. Both palace and abbey were burned by the English when they had nothing better to do in the mid-16th century and only the palace was later rebuilt on the orders of Charles II. He was a bit of a dandy whose tastes were decidedly

French so the palace one sees today would be more at home on the banks of the Seine. Mary Stuart, our beloved Queen of Scots, lived at Holyrood and it was from her apartments that her Italian "secretary" Rizzio was dragged screaming to have a knife stuck in his ribs by some of the local gentry who thought he was more than just her secretary. They used to repaint the bloodstains every year, which added a touch of color to the place. I recall seeing them as a boy but now there is just a plaque marking the murder spot.

A contemporary chum of mine, the Duke of Hamilton, the premier Duke of Scotland, is the Hereditary Keeper of the Keys to Holyrood and whenever the Queen is skulling about he has to be in attendance. An unlikely lad for the job, more interested in cars than keys, he used to race a 250F Maserati when he was just plain Lord Angus Clydesdale before his father fell off his perch. His pa was the first person to fly over Mount Everest (1931, I think) and it was to him that Rudolf Hess surrendered in the early days of World War II. Angus still has the map Hess used as he aimed his plane for the Hamilton lands on that last day of his freedom. The →



Strathisla Distillery.



HIGHLAND

Hamiltons were staunch supporters of Mary Stuart and, more valuable than Hess's map, Angus also has the gold casket with its false bottom Mary used for sending out her love letters, naughty girl.

But our business lay north of Edinburgh, and crossing the splendid Forth Road Bridge, we took the M90 motorway to Perth. There we took the A85 to Crieff and then followed it along the edge of Loch Earn. This is all good scenic stuff but when the road turns north the climb up Glen Ogle takes you into the wildness of the hills to give the first feeling of being in the Scottish Highlands.

The road turns west to run through Glen Dochart, the hills to the north smooth in their rough grass. I know them well for I used to have the right of deer stalking the glen beyond and at its head, near to Tyndrum, stands Ben Challum sealing off the glen. It was in a corrie there that the biggest stag ever shot in Britain was taken two or three hundred years ago, the king of the time being brought along to dispatch it.

If you're a McDonald, you'll want to fork right at Tyndrum and head for Glen Coe where your ancestors were massacred by the west-coast Campbells in 1692. This dastardly, cowardly deed was carried out on the orders of William III, vividly remembered to this day in the Highlands. I know of a hotel that still will not allow a west-coast Campbell to cross its doorstep.

For purely romantic reasons, I took a

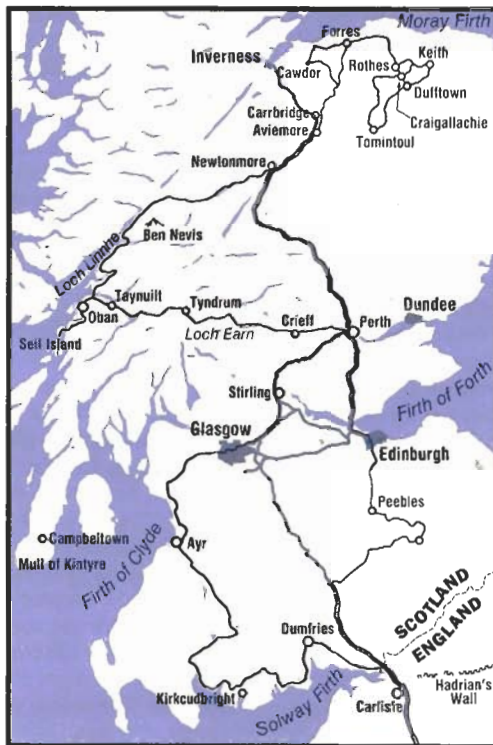
hairpin left at Taynuilt, one easily missed, to take the B845 toward Kilchrennan. Really narrow, with passing places, this is a road of extreme beauty requiring great caution. I took it because it went by the estate where I shot my first royal stag (12 points) and farther on, at Loch Avich, where I shot my very first stag as a lad. And when I came then it was in an old 3.0-liter Red Label Bentley, an open tourer by Vanden Plas.

Past Kilchrennan, take the first right and in a few miles, turn right again to go by Loch Avich and on to join the A816 at Kilmelford. You'll not be disappointed in this detour.

Turning north, you will come to a fork near Kilniver; choosing the left will take you to Seil Island. The crossing from the mainland is over the 18th century Clachan Bridge. The locals claim this is the only bridge to span the Atlantic but that's stretching the truth a wee bit.

North again is the charming little town of Oban with its harbor full of fishing boats. From here one can take ferries to the Hebridian islands but we pushed on north to spend the night at Ardsheal House a few miles south of Ballachulish.

The mile-long drive to the house winds along the edge of Loch Linnhe, the grounds containing some exceptionally beautiful and old trees (including a redwood and a few palm trees!). The original house dates from 1545, built for the Stewarts of Appin, but burnt to the ground in the Uprisings of 1745. Rebuilt in 1760, it has been added to by later generations of Stewarts and is a charming place to stay. Avid readers of Robert Louis Stevenson might recognize it from his book *Kidnapped* wherein it plays an important part. →



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Duncan did not die here at Cawdor Castle. For one thing it had not been built!" The central part is 14th century, but it has spread since then to become one of the most handsome castles in Scotland set as it is in the most beautiful surroundings. Containing many treasures, it is well worth a visit, the room notes written by Lord Cawdor himself, who has a splendid sense of humor.

To be close to the start of The Whisky Trail, we chose the Craiggallachie Hotel on the banks of the famous River Spey in time for dinner. Although early in the season, a 21-lb salmon lying in a Ford Granada station wagon, guarded by a snarling black Labrador, emphasized the point that this was a fishing hotel of some importance. The food was good, the whisky better, the prices moderate.

Next morning we pushed on to Keith to find the Strathisla Distillery. Strath means "valley of," Isla being the river. Architecturally, this is one of the most interesting and certainly one of the most attractive of all the distilleries in the area. It is also the oldest in Scotland, about to celebrate its 200th year although booze has been made on the site since AD 1200. Once owned by Chivas Brothers, who gave their name to the Chivas Regal blend, it is now owned by the Canadian-American firm of Seagram. Lochan Ora, a name many readers will recognize, is distilled at Strathisla.

The Whisky Trail is clearly marked by signposts and in following the route many familiar names will be seen, such as J&B, The Glenlivet, Glenfarclas, Glenfiddich, Tamdhu, Knockando and others. The route passes through Dufftown, Tomnavulin, Tomintoul, Bridge of Avon, Marypark, Upper Knockando, Craigellachie and Rothes. It is always interesting although not always inspiring, some stretches appealing to the sporting driver, others requiring great caution.

I won't bore you with details of how whisky is made but a little background may be of interest. Its origins are lost in the mists of history but for centuries folks have been distilling spirits, the process being brought to our shores from the Holy Lands by the Crusaders. Eventually St Columba, an enterprising fellow, landed on the Mull of Kintyre from Ireland with, among other things in his baggage, a still to brew up his *aqua vitae* as it was known, or water of life to you. As St Columba moved north to the Highlands so did the production of the spirit. Although Campbeltown, on Kintyre, once boasted 22 distilleries, now only two remain.

The language of the Highlands was Gaelic and the word whisky is a gobbledygook way of pronouncing *Uisge Beatha*, the Gaelic for water of life. (As you may know, Americans and Irish confuse the issue further by spelling it whiskey.)

It took no more than five minutes before the Scots came to like the taste, with

It is now the home of an American couple, Jane and Robert Taylor, run in a most friendly atmosphere where the limited number of guests get to know each other. Food is excellent with home-grown vegetables, reasonable charges: a room, dinner and breakfast about \$95 and well worth it.

Next morning we continued northeast, passing Fort William, an uninspiring place, with Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Scotland towering above. We whistled up the A86, which has some interesting stretches of road, and joined the A9 (the main north-south artery of Scotland) at Newtonmore. We soon passed Aviemore, the skiing center of Scotland and at Carrbridge we forked right on the A938 and in a few miles turned left on the B9007 toward Forres. Open and unfenced as it crosses the hills, it is a grand road for expressing one's self, particularly in a Ferrari. Coming down from the hills, we took the first turn to the left and crossed the very narrow Dulsie Bridge over the Findhorn River. And here I must let the traveler go straight on toward Cawdor for I turned left along a very narrow road with sheep all over the place, the odd wild mountain goat too, to test the Mercedes G-Wagen on some rough country belonging to a friend.

We scrambled up the narrow, stony track that leads steeply to the top of his grouse moor, a sheer drop to the river below on our right. Descending on an even rougher track, the Mercedes was as sure-footed as the mountain goats that live here. Dipping sharply to cross rocky burns, the positioning of the axles, well fore and well aft, and the excellent ground clearance allowed us to do so without grounding at either end, unlike Range Rovers I've driven over the same lands. Over a rock-strewn track just inches wider than the Mercedes, hacked out of the steep slope down to the river, we never slipped nor slid. To return, I engaged low ratio, locked both front and rear diffs and descended the bank of the wide Findhorn River to rumble over its stony bottom, the water lapping to the doors, the engine never missing a beat. Even on the roughest parts the ride was good, not throwing the occupants about violently, and with a minimum of fore and aft pitching.

Reluctantly we left this wild and lonely place and went to see its owner, my son's godfather, at his home. Open to the public in spring and summer, it is called Cawdor Castle. With references made to the Thane of Cawdor in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, it is thought to be the castle referred to in the play. Lord Cawdor denies this and in his guide book states, "King

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all hands gargling the stuff made in their own backyards. Even in those days the customs and excise boys weren't slow to spot a good thing, and in 1644 the Scots Parliament tried to impose a levy in a half-hearted sort of way.

But it wasn't until 1707 that a Board of Excise was set up to impose a duty on the production of whisky. The steely-eyed among you will recall that 1707 was the time of the Union of the Crowns so the iniquitous \$7.50 tax one has to pay on an ordinary bottle can be blamed entirely on the English!


Illicit distilling and smuggling boomed—859 illicit stills were discovered in 1797—but many an excise man sent into the lonely hills and the glens to deal with the problem was never seen again! Understandably there was little enthusiasm for the job, to end lying six feet down in a peat bog.

The many vast, gaunt-looking, windowless buildings to be seen on The Whisky Trail and other parts of Scotland are where whisky is stored in fired oak casks to mature, some of it for 25 years. No spirit sold before it is three years old may legally be named whisky, forsooth. At one time there was enough in store to wipe out the entire national debt! In 1980 the figure was 3,048,400,000 liters of pure alcohol, enough to keep you, me and the rest of the R&T readers going for a day or two!

Our hotel that night was the Rothes Glen at Rothes, a Victorian pile of stone designed by the same chap who penned the Queen's place at Balmoral. Built for some Englishman who made a fortune out of coal, he no doubt sought to elevate himself beyond his station in life by erecting this castle-like structure during the period when it was fashionable to have a Highland shooting lodge.

However, its charges were surprisingly reasonable, the rooms comfortable and the food good. Sitting down to dinner, we both ordered a soup that smelled delicious as it was set before us. After a day of sampling the charms, not to say an occasional product of the distilleries, I could scarcely credit it when the waitress reappeared, bottle in hand: "Struth, Dottie, they're even pouring it in the bloody soup!"

Nearing the end of our trip we visited one of my old racing mechanics now restoring vintage machinery in a garage in Forres. After a lot of giggles about how bad were the good old days, we zoomed south on the A940 and, following our noses, joined the A9.

Perth came, then Stirling—not you, Moss!—the Gateway to the Highlands (my father once told me never to wear the kilt )

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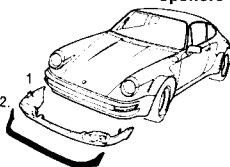
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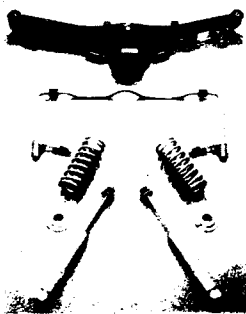
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HIGHLAND

south of Stirling). Stirling is strewn with castles, notably Doune (14th century).

North of it one runs onto the M9, one of the few motorways the government in England has been gracious enough to fund for the benefit of Scotland. Of course, it doesn't last long although abeam Glasgow there is another short stretch going south.

Effectively this saga of Scotland ended at Glasgow, but Dottie wanted to see the place where I had found my army truck ("Truck Stop," R&T, May 1985). So after spending the evening with a friend who lives west of Glasgow, we shot off south through a series of small roads to Galloway. It is a natural backwater, has everything from sea and sands to gentle lowlands and grand hills.

We did locate the spot where I found my truck, the whole area looking remarkably tranquil. Crossing the bridge over the Dee River into Kirkcudbright, with its triple, narrow arches. I told Dottie how I'd been severely scolded as a boy by a policeman for running over their full length! Then I showed her my school where I had been scolded for scaling the outer walls in my bare feet.

That evening we were back in Berkshire where I now live, to ready ourselves for our respective flights to the United States first thing next morning. The Mercedes had performed admirably, running easily at 85-90 mph although it did slow down on the hills, and going north, with Germanic determination, it steadfastly refused to do 100 mph, baulking at 99 mph! I got the better of it going south and a cheer was raised when the wind behind helped us to 105 mph. Our total mileage was 1554 and average fuel consumption 17.71 miles per Imperial Gallon (14.2 U.S.), most reasonable as approximately 700 miles were at high speed on motorways when consumption dropped to 14.3 mpg. A full 5-seater, with access to a further two jump seats through the rear door, the technical specification of this machine sets it above others I have driven for transporting people where no roads exist.

Dottie and I were both sorry our Scotland tour was over, but we hope you will find time to go exploring there. One often hears that it always rains in Scotland. This is just not true; for the rain stopped as we crossed into Scotland and the weather was superb with one minor exception. But even if the sun happens not to be shining, there is beauty to be found in the rugged moors, the gentle glens or the curious blackness of the sky.

Slainte-bha (slansha-vah)! Your answer to this old Scottish Gaelic toast is Slainte-mhor (slansha-vor)! 