

Yarnell-Hoffer

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YARNELL & HOFFER INVADE GERMANY - part two

This is part two of the Germany invasion. Hope you enjoy it.

The rest of our trip was spent in Fellbach, Germany which is right outside of Stuttgart. We toured several plants where Stihl saws are made and went to several technical meetings about new products being developed. The most important thing I got from those visits was how dedicated Stihl is to exceptional quality, safety and customer satisfaction. All of their plants are so clean you could eat off the floor and they spare no money to make short cuts that would lower the quality of their product. I guess that's why Stihl is known as the best chain saw and trimmer brand in the business.

After touring the plants, we were taken into Stuttgart for shopping. This was really the most important day of the trip because we had to bring home some really good surprises to make up for not taking our wives. After shopping for a while, the entire group (about 50 people) ate lunch at a restaurant nearby.

I must make a comment about the food. It was tremendous, for the most part. Meals lasted about two hours each with about six courses. The bread was always first followed by soup about 45 minutes later. They don't use butter over there like we do, so we had to ask for it. That was one word we learned to pronounce (bootaire is how it sounded). The only problem was that they use unsalted butter that has no taste. The menu was amazingly the same every place we ate. For the most part though, the food was really good. I'm too American though and I thought I would kill for a McDonalds cheeseburger and a large Coke with lots of ice. They don't use ice over there either. I did find a McDonalds over there and ran

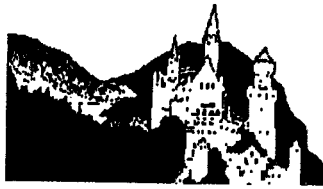
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inside for a large drink with lots of ice. I was finally going to get my fix after days without a Coke. I soon found out that lots of ice to the Germans means about 4 cubes. Oh, well, only two more days until we were home.

After lunch that day and more shopping, Craig and I decided to take the tram back to the hotel instead of the tour bus. Our awesome tour guide, Helmut (we called him "hardhat" for short) tried to convince us to take the bus but we were like little kids chasing a ball out into the street. Begrudgingly, he explained to us how the tram worked and which one to get on to take us back to the hotel. We had two hours to make it - plenty of time. We headed downstairs to the terminal - boy, did we stick out. Here we were, two Americans with arms full of shopping bags who didn't speak any German (except for "bootaire") trying to figure out how this tram thing worked. I guess if we were from New York we might have been a little more "clued in" but we had never

been on a subway before. The first thing we saw was what looked like people from outer space. One guy we saw had one half purple hair standing straight up about 10 inches and the other half of his head shaved. He was yelling or chanting something across the tracks to another guy who looked like Vincent on Beauty and the Beast. We found the information booth and asked them what to do. Apparently, you buy the ticket for your destination but you don't show it to anybody unless the tram police get on and ask to see it. The trams are all automated so we couldn't ask the driver. They were color coded so we thought we couldn't possibly get on the wrong one. We boarded the first tram and sat down. The German computer voice came over the speaker rattling off the next stop (which we couldn't understand of course). We tried to follow the little map on the wall while frantically trying to figure out if it sounded like that should be our stop. We were supposed to transfer two times to catch the correct tram back to the hotel. After two or three stops went by, we were way out into the city somewhere and knew we had missed the stop. We got off at the next stop. As we stepped off, we felt like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz. Here we were, in the middle of Germany on the outskirts of town in the misty rain when it was about to get dark. We couldn't talk to anyone because we didn't speak any German so we just stood there and laughed. We didn't see anyone for about five minutes until a young woman came up to wait for her tram. We tried to talk to her but she just shrugged her shoulders because she couldn't understand us. What a feeling to be in a place where you are totally helpless. There was a big map on the board there so we studied it for several minutes. We finally made a decision to get on the purple tram and transfer to the pink tram at a street that I can't even remember now. Well, we waited until the purple tram came to the stop (which was on a concrete stoop in the middle of the road) and proceeded to get on. The girl we were talking to was standing at the door up from us. Her door opened and she got on. We waited assuming our door would open but the next thing we knew, the tram pulled away from the stop and left us standing there in disbelief. Since the tram is run by a computer, we knew the fact that we looked out of place couldn't have made any difference but something obviously went wrong. By this time, it was getting hard to see but what's wrong with a little excitement? The next purple tram finally



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came along and we discovered a little red button next to the door. I pushed it. Amazingly the door opened and we hopped on. After that we finally figured out the system and made it back to the hotel with plenty of time to spare (about five minutes) to take the bus to dinner.

The rest of the trip was spent touring an old castle and visiting the worlds largest Christmas shop in Rothenburg, Germany. It's a good thing our wives weren't with us for that stop. But, we were good boys and bought them some nice decorations for Christmas.

Before leaving the airport in Germany we had to stand in line for our tickets. As we entered the door I was motioned aside with one other person in our group to a table for a search. It was pretty scary. I thought I would end up in jail somewhere. The men with guns opened my luggage and searched it. Then they put a piece of tape over it with writing on it I couldn't read. I didn't know if that meant I had passed or failed. I later found out it was a random drug search and I had passed. The flight home was long, long, long. We were flying against the jet stream making the trip take 2 hours more than it did going over. We arrived in Atlanta and heard English instructions for the first time in seven days. What a relief! The next 30 minutes made us very nervous though. We had to go through customs and declare all our belongings. We were told not to declare anything because that might require a major search of our luggage that could take at least an hour. The only problem we had was that we were over the dollar amount that we could bring into the country. The customs agents ask any question they can think of to see if you're telling the truth. They asked me about my line of work and where I was from and who the basketball coach of the Tarheels was. I was so glad to hear all that in English that I could hardly answer her questions. She motioned me on. I passed! I went on to get tickets for our connecting flight and left Craig waiting for the rest of his luggage. I waited and waited until finally he came down the corridor. Boy, was I relieved. I thought for sure he was being strip searched or something (It wouldn't surprise me, though). We boarded our final plane to RDU to the best sight we could ever ask for. Craig's wife and son were at the gate as well as my wife, two daughters and baby son to greet us. That was the best part of the whole trip - coming home. □