

The Rough Ride

Those of us that have restored and driven older cars realize that today's modern cars pretty much insulate us from the driving experience. We ride on high quality springs and shocks and well designed suspension systems that tend to dampen out all but the most violent bumps. The climate control systems keep us comfortable while our automatic transmissions shift seamlessly between the gears. The soft supportive seats provide the ultimate support while our sound systems pipe in studio quality sound. The only disturbance in our cocoon-like envelop of peace and solitude is the soothing voice of our navigation and cell phone systems occasionally interrupting the music to remind us of an upcoming turn or a incoming phone call.

The 1956 BMW Isetta that I have been restoring for the past 4 years is the exact opposite of this pampered driving experience. The lightweight 800 pound car bounces over the bumps with its fatigued springs and friction shocks doing little to absorb things. The 300cc engine with its whopping 13HP must be shifted constantly to keep the ground speed fast enough so you don't get run over from behind by faster traffic. The engine winds up with such vibration and noise that you expect it to jump through the firewall at any moment. The Isetta bench seat has all the support and comfort of sitting on a wooden shipping pallet and a radio would be a wasted accessory as it could not possibly be heard over the drum roll of miscellaneous noises. It is difficult to imagine just how tough the drivers and navigators were that campaigned these cars in the 1000 mile Mille Miglia racing events of the 1950s.

Recently, I had a humorous experience while driving the Isetta in Northern California. Another Isetta owner and I were driving on some coastal roads above San Francisco. A third driver had been unable to bring his own Isetta along but volunteered to follow us in his more modern import sedan. He was our following vehicle just in case we had problems and needed to get a tow or retrieve tools or parts needed for a roadside repair of our 50+ year old cars.

It was a perfect day and the ocean views were beautiful. However, in the midst of the picturesque scenery on our 50 mile drive near Bodega Bay, I felt like I was being beaten to death in my little car. The secondary back roads were rough and the ups and downs had me rowing at the gear lever almost constantly. The car popped out of gear a few times revealing some previously undetected flaws in my shift linkage adjustment job. We finally reached a turnout area and took a much needed stretch break. I crawled out of the car to recover and the driver of the following car came up to tell me how nice my car looked and how well it was running and handling. From the comfy bucket seat of his car he noted how the cornering on mine was flat and efficient and how everything looked like it was working so well. I thought about offering him a turn at the wheel for the final few miles of our trip while I retreated to the comfort of his cushy air conditioned import sedan!

It really reminded me how things are not always as they appear on the surface. We see someone who has success, money, power, influence and possessions and then later learn that they live lonely, hollow lives. Thoreau wrote that many men lead "lives of quiet desperation" and we only need to glance at the sports or entertainment news to see the reality of that statement among people that we think would not have a care in the world. We see people who are rich on the outside but poor and destitute in the important areas of life. We hesitate to tell them about Christ because we can see they seemingly have their act together and we may wonder if they have any need of or use for a Savior.

What I have come to realize is that I'm surrounded by people who have real needs but who I mistakenly think have few or none. In the midst of that I am often primarily concerned about my own needs. My prayers are about me, me and me when it is obvious that these prayers should be about others. This has been a painful discovery that I am sometimes so self centered and not other centric. I have become convicted that I need to talk less and to listen more as we are admonished to do by James.

JAS 1:19-20 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

A friend of mine calls this ability to listen his "third ear". That explained that this is the spiritual ear he uses to really listen to what people are saying beyond the words they speak. When he listens with that third ear he hears the needs and hurts beyond the superficial words that a person is saying. Now I am not really good at this but want to get better. I want to make it my prayer that I would put aside my own needs and that God would give me a spiritually sensitive third ear so I could be hearing and ministering to other's needs. I think that to put others first, in this way, is the best way for me to demonstrate God's Love to others.

PHP 2:1-4 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

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