



Why had I not traveled this road before? The Little Dragon—Highway 49 near Coulterville, California, an eleven-mile stretch of highway with a total of 318 turns—was mind-blowing. Following Kevin Enderby's Ferrari F-430 up the Little Dragon was the most car fun I have had since taking the BMW M Performance class with my wife, Sue, a few years ago.

But it was just one of the four spectacular days of the 2022 Andiamo California Gold Country Grand Tour.

This was the second event organized by Andiamo Rallies (www.andiamorallies.com). The first rally, in May 2021 was

the Freedom From Covid Rally, and that free spirit continued this year. There were two BMWs participating this year, my 2013 640i Gran Coupé, and rally founder Steve Pedone's 1989 635CSi. These cars represent the first 6 Series that BMW built and the most recent Sixer series—siblings from the same mother, but different fathers.

A glance under the hood gives a strong sense of the change in automotive engineering after 24 years: Analog changes to digital, and keeps going. Both cars are chipped, with Pedone using Turner MotoSport's chip, giving 280 horsepower and 285 pound-feet of torque, while my 640i has a Dinan Stage one system yielding 360 horsepower with an adequate

426 pound-feet of twist—very handy for driving up the Little Dragon.

This year's Andiamo Grand Tour was a mid-May event starting in Bass Lake's Pines Resort and ending four days later in Old Sacramento, where we partied at the Delta King Hotel. Kathy and Steve Pedone were event manager and founder, respectively, while Dave Buchanan was the director, and Dave Dell'Aquila was our *routemeister*. Pedone and Buchanan are BMW owners and BMW CCA members. There were also dedicated photographers, mechanics, and luggage service that were part of the tour's support team.

The day before the tour began, it was snowing in the Sierras, and some of the passes we were to drive were closed.



THE GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS

TODAY, THE TREASURES OF THE
CALIFORNIA GOLD COUNTRY MAY BE
FOUND ON THE ROADS.

Story and photographs by **ELLIOTT D. BLOOM**



But on the first morning of the tour, the weather was just wonderful, and it continued like that for the rest of the event. On Day Two of the tour, on the way to Lake Tahoe's south shore, we drove State Route 4 over the Pacific Grade, summit 8,050 feet, worried about the possibility of a summit closed by snow. A closed summit would have required a long detour to get us to South Shore. But we arrived at the summit about half an hour after it had opened!

Why have two mechanics accompany us? Well, we had lots of old and complicated cars. Besides the two BMWs there were nine Ferraris from 2004 to 2022. The latter car was new, and still had a few production bugs evident that

needed some smart solutions from the tour mechanics. In addition, we had five Porsches dating from 1965 to 2021, a 1957 Triumph TR3, a 1953 Jaguar XK120, a 2012 Lotus Evora S, a 2002 Corvette, a 2007 Aston Martin Vantage, a 2017 McLaren 570 GT, and a smattering of Mercedes-Benz, Alfas, and Mazdas, for quite a menagerie of 31 interesting and fast cars.

There were no Teslas.

The route was the responsibility of route-designer Dell'Aquila. At the last dinner at the Delta King paddleboat, he related his road philosophy, and Sue and I were lucky enough to be sitting at his table. Dave views route design as a calling that combines art, science, and lots of

experience driving the roads in question. Each road has a different personality and technical potential for speed, comfort, and interest. The route designer must consider the time of day, traffic, speed limits, road conditions (newly paved like the Little Dragon, average, or rough), and so on. Crowned roads are tricky, as are curves and straights, potential weather, altitude, and the rate of climb or descent. Then, of course, there is the scenery, and the location of suitable accommodations (we were generally an older group).

Besides our adventure driving up the Little Dragon, on that day's tour we visited Yosemite Valley, where the waterfalls were flowing. The following day we traveled from Bass Lake to the Edgewood



Steve Pedone's 635CSi leads a much younger Six through the Sierras.

Resort in Stateline, Lake Tahoe. We sampled a number of gold-rush towns, now charming tourist destinations such as Hornitos, Jamestown, and Columbia. Along the way, we gathered at Loon Lake to allow the rally to regroup.

One of the “Gee, that was lucky!” moments was our arrival at State Route 4’s Ebbits Pass summit about half an hour after it opened following an earlier snowstorm. From sunny valley to snowy summit was quite an unexpected extra in mid-May! Once over the summit we continued on to Markleeville (home of the “Death Ride” bicycle tour of the California Alps) and then arrived late in the afternoon at our Stateline hotel.

Buchanan is a longtime car enthusiast.

He races, and he rebuilds classic cars and shows them at places like the Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance. He had hoped to have his most recent acquisition, a 1964 Jaguar E-Type semi-lightweight, restored and equipped for the rally, but unfortunately, the heated seats he wanted for the rally (this car has no heater or air conditioning) did not arrive on time. As atonement, Buchanan’s restorer, Raffi Najairian, offered him the car that *he* was planning to drive in the rally, the Alfa Giulia Quadrifoglio. The proud owner of a 2013 M coupe, Buchanan is a sucker for a new drive, and took Raffi’s offer. By the way, the Alfa has air conditioning and lots of room, which made Dave’s wife, Susan, very happy.

After a hearty breakfast at the Edge-wood Resort, we headed to Virginia City on Day Three. But before we reached the Comstock mine country, we stopped at the Genoa Bar and Saloon, Nevada’s oldest “thirst parlor” in Genoa—Nevada’s oldest town.

Then we headed to Virginia City via the Occidental Grade (Nevada State Route 341). This road has been used for professional racing, in particular motorcycle racing. Andiamo Rally founder Pedone told me a story of his motorcycle-racing days on this road. He was on the Honda pro motorcycle racing team, and the race up the Occidental Grade was an important race for the team. Pedone was leading, but on approaching the top of

A tale of two coupes: The E24 defined BMW’s “big coupe” legacy; the 6 Series Gran Coupé added two doors to the definition.



Tour director Dave Buchanan (left) and I ham it up at Loon Lake. Dave’s wife, Susan, is just behind me.





At a Sacramento parking garage, the tour director finds himself waiting for Gadot.



A Yosemite Valley waterfall makes a nice backdrop for a class Jaguar XK120.

the grade, he missed a turn and went off the road, falling about 100 feet down a sheer embankment. That was the year that he decided to retire from professional motorcycle racing.

After our lunch and visit to Virginia City, the rally headed to Mount Rose, and then took a drive around Lake Tahoe and back to the Edgewood Resort. That night we had the outstanding meal of the tour at Capisce Italian Restaurant in Zephyr Cove, Nevada—expensive, but definitely worth it.

On the final day we took a winding course to Old Sacramento, stopping for lunch at the Bella Piazza Winery, which is close to the town of Fairplay, the residence of Dell'Aquila and his wife, Nancy. We continued through gold-country towns until we arrived at the Delta King paddle-boat hotel in Old Sacramento. The organizers of the tour,

realizing that 30 cars descending on the Delta King valet service almost simultaneously would lead to great confusion and frustration, had cleverly arranged with Sacramento municipal parking to rent a nearby parking garage until the next morning, and one Gadot, the garage attendant, was to meet the convoy at a specified time to let us in. Luggage transfer was arranged using the rally's luggage service. Although there was some delay, Gadot eventually arrived, and all was then smooth.

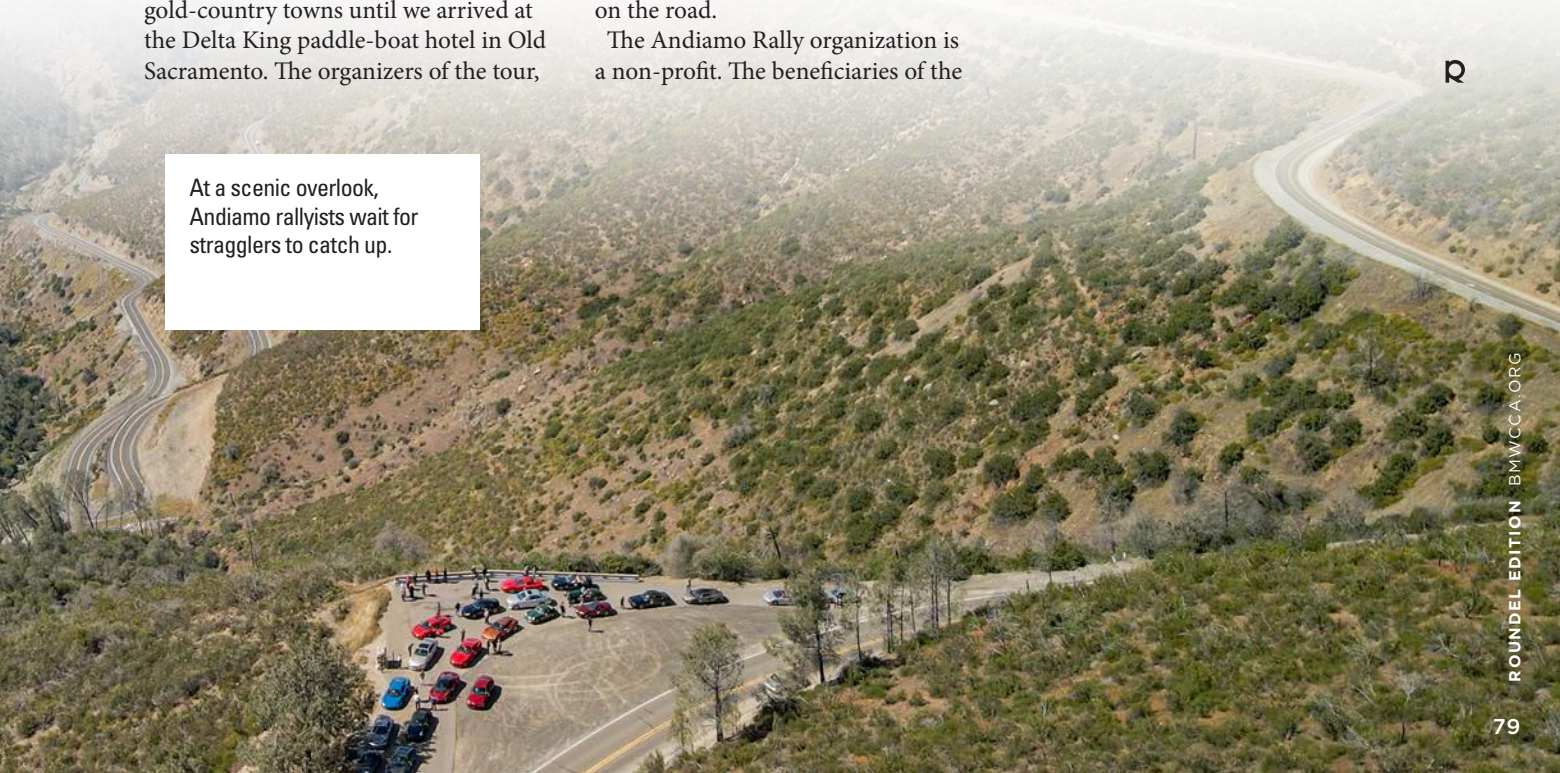
Our group had an enjoyable party and dinner at the Delta King that night with a Dixieland band and dancing. However, Sue and I retired on the early side, after five days of extra adrenaline and intense—though very satisfying—days on the road.

The Andiamo Rally organization is a non-profit. The beneficiaries of the

2022 event were the McPherson College Automotive Restoration Program that is part of McPherson College in McPherson, Kansas. The Automotive Restoration Technology program at the college was established in 1976.

Drive Toward a Cure was another beneficiary; this organization works with non-profit rally events where team cars and camaraderie can raise funds and awareness to support the challenges of Parkinson's Disease, benefiting research and patient care. So not only were we having loads of fun, but we were also supporting a couple of very worthy causes—a win-win!

At a scenic overlook, Andiamo rallyists wait for stragglers to catch up.



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