



Clockwise from above, Amir Almagor, a partner in the event makes his departure under the historic checkered starting flag. The elegant gala hosted by Elad Shraga at his home in Tel Aviv. Patti Paulson and Pat Matthews make the ascent into the sweeping vistas of the Dead Sea.



The Holy Land 1000 Rally by 220 SE

“Three years in the making:
five days, 40 vintage cars,
1,000 miles through
3,000 years of history.”

With Pat Matthews



The Holy Land 1000 was the brain child of Amir Almagor, who we met through the Gullwing Group International and Elad Shraga. Having attended a number of world class rallies including the Mille Miglia together, they thought, we can do this in Israel, our home country. Three years and I am sure thousands of hours of effort later led to the inaugural Holy Land 1000, March 21st to the 27th, 2015. More than 40 cars, most of them from outside of Israel arrived in Tel Aviv to participate in the event. The owners came from around the globe – USA, both East and West coast, Switzerland, UK, Argentine, Canada. And from Germany, came his Highness Prince Leopold of Bavaria, a well known race driver.

The base hotel starting Friday night was the David Intercontinental in Tel Aviv. On Saturday, the 21st of March, Amir and Shoshi, his wife, graciously opened the doors of their home to all of the international attendees. It was a lovely way to meet the participants, talk about the cars and the upcoming event and enjoy good food and local wines (Israel is a strong wine producing region).

On Sunday, those who had shipped their cars to Israel, were transported from the hotel to a container storage facility outside Tel Aviv. Remember, this was a Sunday, but due to the efforts of Amir and Elad, the customs agents were in attendance and worked very hard to make the incoming customs procedure very painless. This was just the beginning of the government support that had been arranged throughout the entire event.

We all watched with bated breath as the containers were opened and in all cases our undamaged cars emerged. Patti and I shipped our 1960 220 SE Cabriolet that we have owned for more than 30 years and it was pretty special to see it arrive, ready for the drive in Israel. Patti described the scene as “almost like Christmas” as we watched each package (container) being opened, and finding the beautiful cars inside. The older cars included a 1928 Bentley 4.5-liter, an Alfa Romeo 8C, a 1935 Auston Martin and a one-off 1948 Bristol 400 Cabriolet. The post-war autos included six Mercedes-Benz: a 190 SL, 300 SL Roadster (that belongs to Amir), a 230 and 280 SL, a 250 SE Cabriolet and our 220 SE.

Of special note were the cars that one of the sponsors, BMW Classic, shipped over for the event including a 503 sunroof coupe, a 3200 Bertone Coupe and a 507. There were a few Aston Martin DB5s, A Ferrari 365 GTS, several Jaguar XKs and two Afla Romeo Giulietta Spyders from the '50s as well as three 356

Porsches, a 1958 Corvette, two 1965 Thunderbird convertibles and many others. A varied group to say the least! When all of the cars had been inspected and fired up, we then drove as a group back to the David Intercontinental where a section of the parking garage was reserved just for the cars of the Holy Land 1000.

That Sunday evening, Elad and his wife, Ronit, hosted a grand party at their home for all of the attendees, sponsors, press and even the Chief of Police for all of Israel. This was quite an affair, highlighted by the chance to tour Elad's beautiful garage and car collection, which consists mostly of Italian sports cars of the '50s.

Monday morning we departed the parking garage and headed north up the west coast of Israel. This is where we got our first taste of just how well organized this rally was going to be. Leaving central Tel Aviv on a Monday morning meant a lot of traffic, traffic lights and many turns. The cars quickly had to break into smaller groups. I was leading one small group when I realized that I had missed a turn. I was looking for the next suitable place for a U-turn when one of our escorting motorcycles zipped past me, pulled up at the next light, stopped the oncoming traffic and waved our group through. As soon we were through, he again zipped past us and made sure we were once again on the correct route.

It turns out that Amir and Elad had arranged for a volunteer group of six motorcycles on BMW's to escort us for the entire rally. The volunteer motorcycle riders really worked hard all day long, making sure that there were no stragglers, going ahead to the next turn to ensure we made correct turns and to stop traffic for us. It was impossible to keep all of the cars together and to keep civilian traffic from becoming interspersed with us, so many times we saw non-participant cars not quite believing that they were being waved through red lights.

We also had police on both motorcycles and in police cars escorting us. It took a while before I stopped having my heart jump into my throat each time I would see in my rearview mirror a motorcycle policeman coming up behind me, with his blue lights flashing and then have him wave us on! Even though the volunteer riders worked very hard, I suspect that if you asked them, they would tell you they had the time of their lives. We would watch them fly by us at high rates of speed, in the wrong lane with policemen following them, so they could do things with our group that they would never (legally) be able to do on their own.

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Israel
may not be a
large country,
but it's
topography and
flora is much
more varied
than I would
have guessed
from my
pre-conceived
ideas.

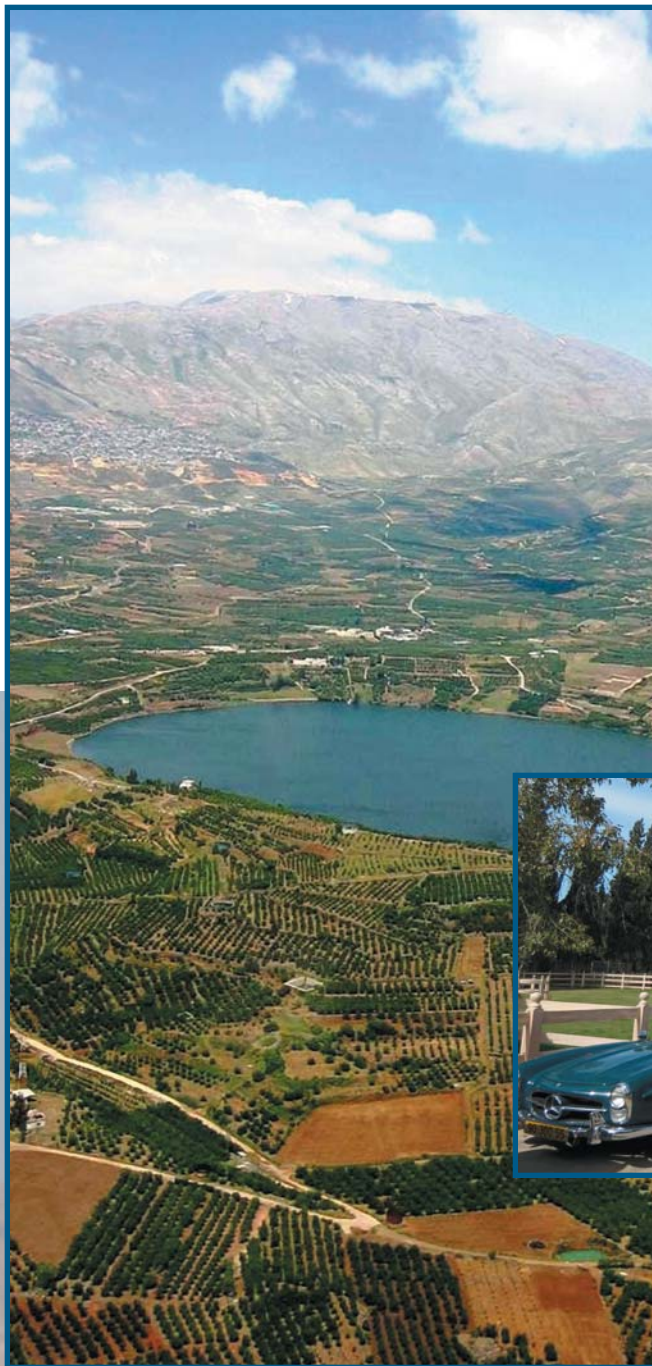
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The time that they proved most useful was one warm afternoon as we were heading back to Tel Aviv, driving up a hill and were stuck in traffic, which consisted mostly of large trucks. My car, and I am sure many of the other cars, were starting to overheat. Along came one of the motorcycle riders, who, upon realizing the situation, motioned us to follow him as he pulled into the emergency parking lane and led us up and over the hill and out of the traffic. I cannot say how much we appreciated the help.

Israel may not be a large country, but its topography and flora is much more varied than I would have guessed from my preconceived ideas. Tel Aviv, which is located on the Mediterranean Sea and approximately the center of the west coast is relatively flat, with typical Mediterranean climate. As we headed north towards the Lebanon border, the flat land turned into hills with small mountains and the landscape became more green and more lush. This part of the country is where most of the wine grapes are grown in Israel. To the south and east is the Negev desert, (highway signs warn drivers to be careful as camels could be present) a beautiful rocky landscape as we approached the Egyptian and Jordanian borders. This area is considered to have semi-arid climate.

Due to this diverse topography, the roads and sights changed often, providing us with a never ending variety. And just to make sure that we were never bored, Elad and Amir arranged the route to include some very small, mountainous roads. If we were going from one town to the next and there was straight road between them, we never took it! I would have to say that all of the international participants were very impressed with the quality and beauty of the route and the roads.

Monday and Tuesday nights we stayed in a lovely hotel in Tiberius on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. We averaged approximately 200 miles a day, but as most of the roads included lots of hills and curves, we would arrive at our hotel each night pretty tired. It was a real pleasure to arrive in your room to find your luggage there waiting for you. Every night a group dinner was arranged at a very nice restaurant. We found that the food in Israel was exceptional. We spent Tuesday circumnavigating the Sea of Galilee including lunch high atop the Golan Heights looking across the Sea of Galilee back to the town of Tiberius. Almost everywhere we went, from the big cities to the smallest villages, the local folks would stop whatever they were doing, wave to us and cheer us on with big smiles on



their faces. It certainly made us feel appreciated.

Wednesday, we drove south, the only segment of our route that included some of Highway 6, the main north/south four lane freeway of Israel. This allowed us to make it to Negev Desert. Here we saw something that showed us just how much pull Amir and Elad had with the government of Israel. This highway had the large programmable message signs and as we drove south, these signs flashed the message "Welcome Holy Land 1000"!

That evening we stayed at one of the most beautiful hotels I have ever seen, the Beresheet, poised on very edge of the Ramon crater near Mitzpe Ramon. Thursday was probably the most fascinating day of the



Clockwise from left: The vineyards of Tiberias on the coast of Berekhat Ram (high pool), at the foot of Mt. Herman and the Golan Heights. The verdant horse ranch was another surprise. Patti and Pat lead Sonoma and Will Clark into the Negev Desert.





event. We started off by driving straight down in to the Ramon crater on our way to the Dead Sea, where we were able to park our cars about as close to the Dead Sea as I think is possible at minus 400 meters, the lowest point of dry land in the world. We had lunch on the shore of the Dead Sea and a few of our more adventurous members donned bathing suits and applied the legendary mud of the Dead Sea all over their bodies and bathed in the water. Many people believe that a mud covered swim in the Dead Sea is very beneficial for the skin.

After lunch, we drove to the city of Jerusalem, the largest city in Israel, it's capital and the center of three of the world's main religions. We stayed at a hotel just out-

side of the "old city" of Jerusalem and were treated to a dinner on the top floor of the hotel, overlooking the old city, beautifully lit up, as if it was putting on a show just for us.

We had been told that we needed to be up earlier Friday morning for a special event. So at 6:30 AM we were all lined up outside of the hotel in our cars, ready to go. A police motorcycle escort then led us through the walled streets of the old city, up and down some very narrow streets and then into the plaza at the base of the Western Wall. We then were permitted to park our cars on the plaza, for a group photo. As a friend of ours said to us, "This is so special, this photo could be on the front page of the New York Times". I think that locals were just as impressed to see our cars parked in such a special place, they viewed our cars just like it was a car show except the it was 7:30 in the morning.

We had just enough time to organize for a group photo and then the powers that be needed us to move on. Again, we had a police escort as we drove out of the old city and departed from Jerusalem. We spent the morning driving many different small, winding hilly

From the top: The humbling view from the Beresheet Hotel across the ancient lands of Mitspe Ramon. A remarkable collection of automobiles and an even more remarkable collection of license plates. The Americans: From the left are Sonoma and Will Clark's Porsche 356 C Cabriolet, Marcia and Ira Wagner's 280 SL and Patti and Pat's 220 SE.



roads, just enjoying the scenery and that we were doing all of this in Israel.

We had a wonderful lunch at an outdoor restaurant/nursery located in the hills outside of Jerusalem and then headed back to Tel Aviv for our final run of the event. All participants returned to the Orian warehouse, shipping point for the foreign cars. As we arrived, we were surprised to find that the "Five Club," Israel's antique car club, had gathered together more than 130 cars from their club along with hundreds of members to greet us as we pulled into the parking lot. As we entered an MC would announce our names, the country we

Ronit waits in the OSCA she will share with Elad and Shoshi and Amir in their Roadster share the dawn visit to the Western Wall of Jerusalem's great temple. And a farewell from many enthusiastic vintage car aficionados of Tel Aviv's Five Club.

were from and the type of car we drove. Then the crowd would cheer and clap for each of us. We then added our cars to their car show, spent the next two hours looking at their cars while they looked at ours and just doing what car nuts do at any car gathering. It was very special way to end the event.

Quote from Ynet, the most watched news website in Israel:

"For those in the know, this was quite simply the most impressive car event ever witnessed in Israel. To some that might sound like an exaggeration, but for Israeli car connoisseurs, at least those who managed to join the extraordinary convoy at some point, this event was equivalent to seeing a once-off appearance of the Beatles, Queen, Elvis Presley and The Rolling Stones on stage including band members supposedly brought back from the dead."

Learn more at: www.holyland1000.org

