

ROAD TRIP

Scenic drives

South Africa is an important country to manufacturers for testing series production cars. An adventure tour on one of the most beautiful coastal highways in the world shows which emotions cars can elicit in observers.

By Michael Thiem; photos by Laurent Burst

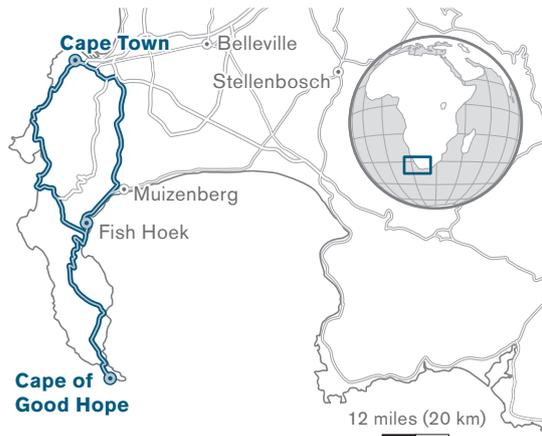


The ostrich also takes a good look—and continues eating. On the drive across the Cape Peninsula the observers are as varied as the spectacular scenery.



DREAM ROADS IN AFRICA: CAPE PENINSULA, SOUTH AFRICA

It's best to drive the route in a clockwise direction. Start the 110-mile (180-kilometer) stretch from Cape Town on the east side, head toward the Cape of Good Hope via Muizenberg, Kalk Bay, and Simon's Town. Enjoy the drive! Return the same way until Fish Hoek. Chapman's Peak Drive on the west coast provides a brilliant finale at dusk.



Say cheese! The full-grown South African ostrich, however, obviously knows that already. For he uses the narrow green strip separating the thundering Atlantic surf from the coast road of the Cape of Good Hope nature park as a catwalk. Almost as if he were being directed, much too pretty, in fact. Fynbos is what the vegetation on the Cape Peninsula's protected reserve is called.

South Africa is the mecca of disguised car prototypes. Much of life here revolves around the fascination of four-wheeled transport.

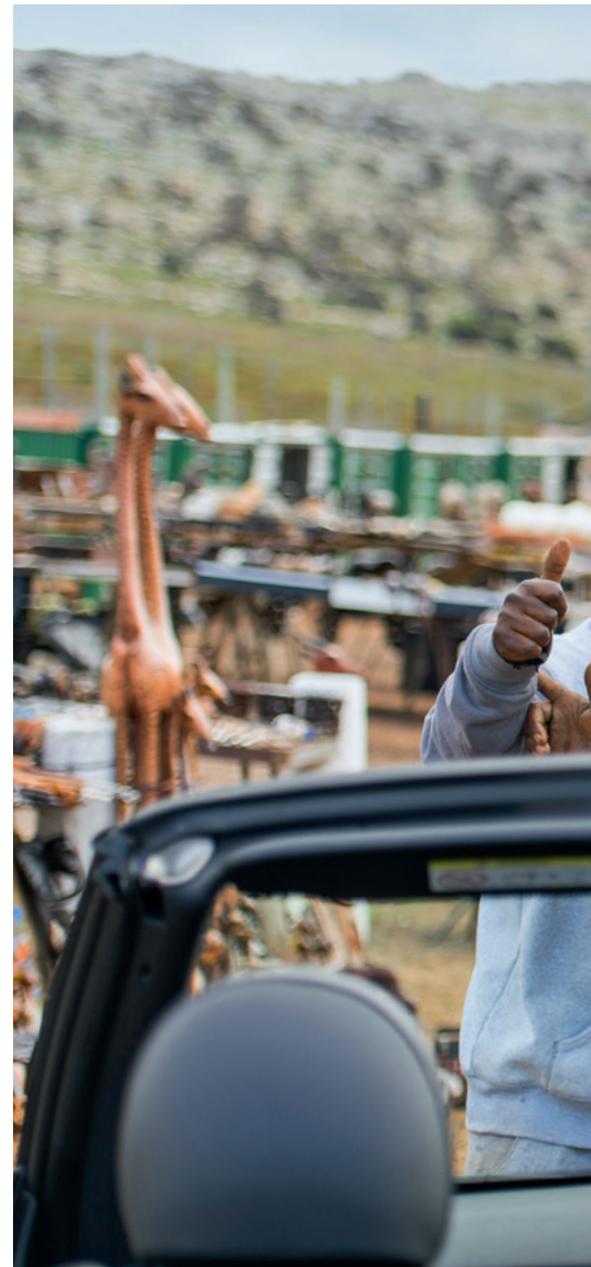
That means "fine bush" and denotes low shrubs. More than 2,000 species of flora—including heather and orchids—can be found here. The ostrich loves this abundant bounty and doesn't let anyone watching him disrupt his meal.

Certainly not the impressively tall waves that break thunderously on the flat rocky

cliff formation. The flightless bird repeatedly stretches his long neck into the air and checks the situation by twisting his head in jerky movements. And then continues eating. It is the animal's form that especially fascinates us. The wild spectacle that nature is putting on display enhances the sense that a completely extraordinary moment is taking place. The ostrich disappears, withdraws from view.

Form follows function in the animal world, too—and inspires the observer. Car designers are also familiar with this symbiosis. It is precisely what they work toward, after all. The Mini Cooper S on the shoulder is a product of this philosophy. Aesthetically pleasing and powerful. Like the ostrich.

Welcome to South Africa, a country where many are fascinated by vehicles. The automobile industry is an important employer. Around 36,000 people work in production. 600 German companies have taken up residence in the country, among them nearly all the major car manufacturers and suppliers—from Volkswagen to Mercedes to BMW. South Africa is considered a mecca for disguised car prototypes. During Europe's winter, many relocate their series testing to here. That speeds up development. The time zone corresponds to central European daylight savings time. All conceivable basic condi-



tions, including the most diverse road surfaces and temperatures, can be found out in the open here.

The first impression is decisive

An important factor of what are known as drive-by tests in market research is not measurable, however: subjective feelings, the emotional aspect of the car design. The first impression is decisive, like this moment at the shoulder of the M65 just before the turn-off to the nature reserve area of the Cape Peninsula. The street vendors' delight can't be

Posing for the post: the souvenir vendors are enthusiastic about the car. They post the images on the Web afterwards.



A sport, an attitude to life: passion is an integral part of surfing.

planned. When they see the Mini Cooper in Pepper White, which is also made by Wörwag, they flip out.

One of the vendors is Washington Guuama. He is from Zimbabwe, lives just 6.2 miles (10 km) away in Redhill and makes a living selling all kinds of lovely and not-so-lovely souvenirs. "A lot of cars drive past here. Few of them catch your eye and stick in your memory," he reports. The Mini Cooper definitely stands out above the crowd. The paint on the rear spoiler, bumpers, and other mounted parts are from Wörwag. Guuama likes →





DREAM ROADS IN AUSTRALIA: GREAT OCEAN ROAD

Around 7.5 million tourists roll along the Great Ocean Road between Torquay and Warrnambool, one of the best-known coast roads in the world. Spectacular scenery and locations steeped in history line the 150-mile (240-kilometer) route.



→ the color, and the car, too. “It has a fabulous quality, it’s simply an unusual vehicle,” he gushes and pulls out his smartphone. He and his friends ask people to come around for a photo shoot. Only then does he admit with a grin: “My favorite color is actually red. Ferrari Red. But Ferraris are rare here.” Color is emotion and therefore tends to be subjective. Just a matter of taste.

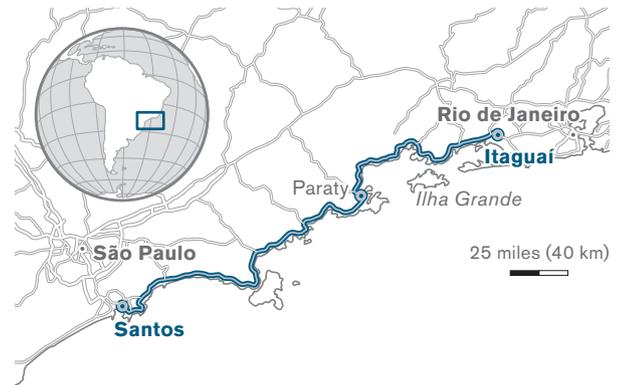
The dynamics are a different story. They are assigned numbers. Output, engine displacement, acceleration are hard, physical facts. But it is the application, the driving itself

Table Mountain behind the photographer, Cape Town below: two horizons at one glance.



DREAM ROADS IN SOUTH AMERICA: COSTA VERDE, BRAZIL

Brazil's Atlantic Coast is nearly 4,600 miles (7,400 kilometers) long. The section between Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo— around 372 miles (600 kilometers)— is said to be especially beautiful. There are fabulous beaches, the charming colonial city of Paraty, and the Ilha Grande off the coast with its hills and protected Atlantic rain forest.



that turns horsepower into driving pleasure. The approximately 25-mile (40-km) coastline of the nature park on the peninsula promises a true orgy of the senses. It forms the natural habitat of the mid-engine sports car. Bend binger. Here roadsters become "roadstars." It's not for nothing that this stretch of asphalt is considered one of the most beautiful coast roads in the world.

Those who do the complete Cape Tour in a clockwise direction can marvel at the rocky cliffs of Chapman's Peak, especially in the late afternoon as the sun slowly sets. An

open convertible provides the best views of the route. But caution: wild baboons are also waiting for just such moments. There's a reason for the numerous roadside signs warning of animal assaults. Intelligent use of power makes a lot possible.

Raw power at the Cape of Storms

Nature flexes its muscles at this corner of the Earth. Its unbridled energy can even be felt wrapped in a weatherproof jacket here at the Cape of Good Hope. The wind blows relentlessly during the winter months. Tour guide

Gavin Clayton points out that the spot is also called "Cape of Storms." The coast road on the way to Africa's southwestern tip is almost at sea level. The waves often lash many feet high against the cliffs. Surefootedness is an absolute requirement. Not every two-legged creature is as steady on its feet as the ostrich. It's hard to imagine what those forces of nature must be like 185 miles (300 kilometers) farther out on the open sea. That's where the *Flying Dutchman* is thought to have sunk. And not only that ship. The rocky reefs and storms where the Atlantic and Indian →

Driving pleasure: the coast roads on the Cape Peninsula are among the most spectacular in the world.



→ Ocean meet have been dreaded by seafarers from the year dot.

Power is only one aspect when marketing a car. Last but not least, it always depends on how well you convey a certain attitude to life. Passion is an integral part of every cabriolet. Fun, panache, cult—it's all familiar to Melody Hey from her daily work. She runs a school for future

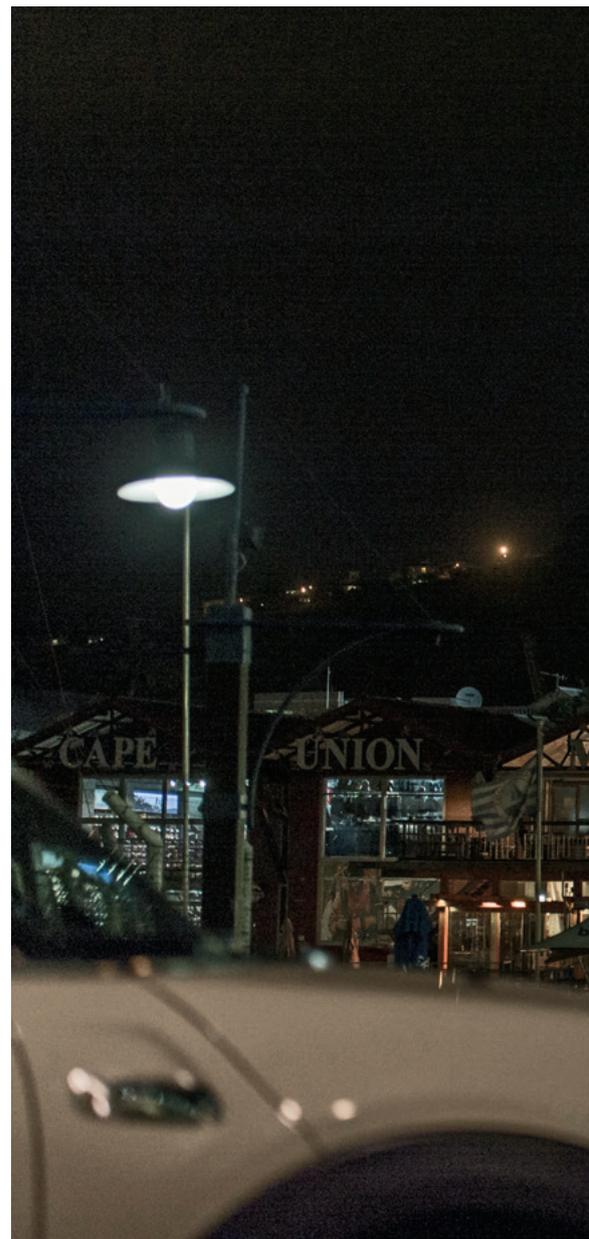
Fun, panache, cult: the joy of elegant locomotion connects car drivers and surfers.

surfers, the Surf Emporium, in Muizenberg. The town is well known for its colorful beach houses. In the seventies the government had economical housing built here on the outskirts of town. Today they are sinfully expensive. Idyllic beaches, picturesque cliffs, and a perfect ambience for water sports.

The surfing school was opened 13 years ago. Meanwhile, what began with a sun umbrella at the beach has become a very successful business. At first the school offered courses

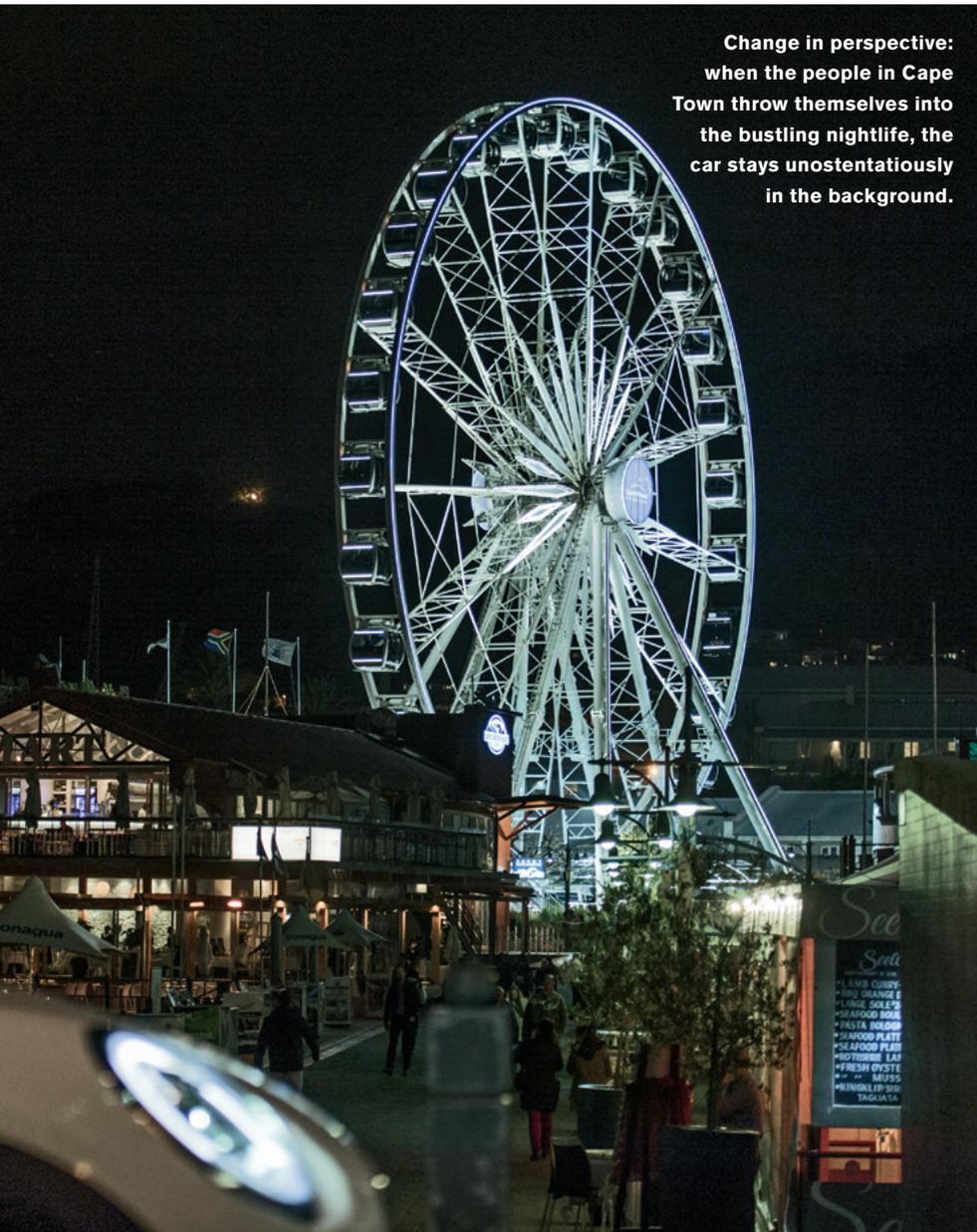
only to girls. Today, boys come here as well to learn how to get on the board and—ideally—stay on it. “The conditions at Muizenberg Beach are optimal. The waves roll in uniformly, there are no dangerous currents,” says General Manager Hey and points to the fifteen teenagers who are taking part in a three-day trial course. They are already standing on their boards after a few hours. Alfonso Peters is a good teacher for them. He is considered one of the most talented long-board surfers in South Africa, and he has the sport to thank that he found his way out of Cape Town's troubled Manenberg district. Hey likes to see convertibles in the car park in front of the school: “I like these cars, even if there are surely more practical vehicles for transporting surfboards. But Minis and Beetles, too, for example, are so nice and iconic.”

A side trip to the Cape of Good Hope is perhaps less “culty” but more of a tourist attraction. Everything there ultimately revolves around a wooden sign. Everyone has themselves photographed behind it. It is the moment when a car becomes secondary. Even if it's parked only a few meters away. The visitors join the others patiently waiting in line and check the memory chips in their cameras. The eyes are fixed on the motif. No one pays attention to the car. No one? A 14-year-old Japanese boy has broken out of



the line to touch the leather interior. “Cool. I like it,” he beams. A short time later his father calls to him: “It's our turn. Come here now! We have to take the picture.”

Many start on their way back directly to Cape Town once the obligatory photo has been shot. A change of scene. It is just after 6 p.m. The day is drawing to a close in Cape Town's “V&A Waterfront” by the harbor. The artificial light from the Ferris wheel, restaurants, bars, and ships outshine even the car's sparkle. Center stage now belongs to the nightlife enthusiasts. The car is swallowed by the darkness bit by bit—and becomes a silent watcher enjoying the sights. ■



Change in perspective:
when the people in Cape
Town throw themselves into
the bustling nightlife, the
car stays unostentatiously
in the background.

Car Clinic

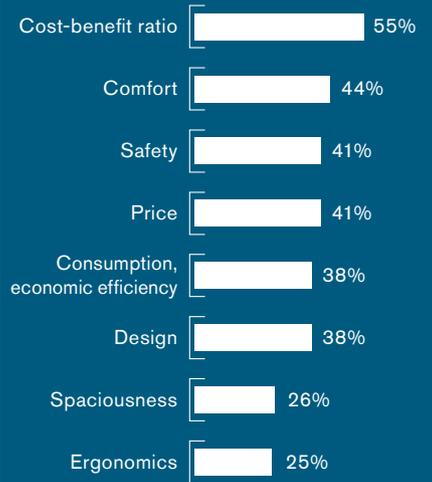
The name is misleading: usually cars are not worked on in the Car Clinic. This pseudo-Anglicism instead refers to a market research methodology that helps car manufacturers with product development. They are primarily conducted by external institutes. Cloaked in strictest confidence and elaborate secrecy measures, it permits representative testers to inspect a prototype or disguised concept car according to numerous criteria, test it, and compare it to rival products.

The principals hope these studies will deliver neutral assessments such as: How does the model come across to the testers? What effect does the form have? Do drivers feel comfortable in the new interior? What would they be willing to spend on it? Are the colors appealing? How do potential buyers get on with the control elements?

If sense of space, visibility, and driving behavior are tested, it's referred to as a "dynamic" Car Clinic. Furthermore, drive-by tests make it possible to capture spontaneous emotional reactions to the design.

STUDY

What is critical when buying a car?*



* Aral study: new car buyers in Germany 2015; multiple answers possible

DREAM ROADS IN EUROPE: RING OF KERRY, IRELAND

The coast road in Ireland's southwest stretches 110 miles (179 kilometers) past extensive glacier valleys, delightful villages, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Additional highlights are the restored stone forts Cahergall and Leacanabuaile. One of the most picturesque Irish cities, Killarney, serves as the start and end point of the route.



INTERVIEW

“We’ve learned to improvise”

Michael Krüger is an old hand at Wörwag. He has worked for the company for 35 years, 13 of them in Cape Town. He has long since become accustomed to life in South Africa, and is not planning to return to Germany.

Interview by Michael Thiem; photos by Laurent Burst

Mr. Krüger, how did a native of Swabia end up in Cape Town?

I was young, and didn't have a family yet. I didn't mind traveling for days at a time. In fact, I have always enjoyed traveling. When Wörwag started becoming more international, I did a lot of projects abroad. In 1991, one of them took me to South Africa for the first time.

Now you're older and have two children, and you're intending to stay?

I feel at home here. By the way, I'm currently the longest-serving employee at Wörwag. I've been with the company for a good 35 years now.

“South African customers expect German quality too. And we have to be present for that.”

The company has changed a lot over this period. It has grown and is now represented in many countries. Do you remember what the beginning of this internationalization process was like?

Of course. After my apprenticeship as a paint lab technician I started working in Stuttgart in 1984 in base coat development, and then transferred relatively quickly to the technical field service. I was sent to Canada, the USA, Mexico, and then to South Africa. I would get a call, and jump onto a plane.

One of those jobs took you to Johannesburg. What project was that?

It was an automotive supplier who was painting the bumpers for the Mercedes C-class, and we were supplying the paint.

Was that the start of the company's success story in South Africa?

It was the first small step. We didn't get established in the country until 1999, with the second version of the C-class. The supplier in East London shifted to water-based paints. We started testing them and it worked out right away. Suddenly we were in the game.

How much pioneering work did you do?

A lot. Back then we usually communicated by fax and by pager. Modern technologies have made things considerably easier. We also had to improvise a lot more in our everyday production work.

When Wörwag decided to start a subsidiary in Cape Town in 2003, you probably didn't have to think twice about staying, right?

Indeed, I was on board from the start. We found a strong production partner in Cape Town with Duram, although no companies had any experience with plastic coatings at the time. We supplied the know-how. Ever since then, Henry Pienaar and I have been overseeing production, sales, and service.





How important is Cape Town for Wörwag?

We are small but successful here. South African customers expect German quality too. And we have to be present for that. Mercedes and BMW are the only companies here that use water-based paints, and we supply that type of product. Just like everywhere else in the automotive industry, quality is the number one factor in South Africa. Daimler, for example, makes nearly all of its C-class models in East London. The site received an award as the best supplier plant for the Group. Our paint certainly had something to do with that.

What are the biggest challenges in producing paint in South Africa?

We've learned to improvise. Sometimes we might not have a full staff because the public

MICHAEL KRÜGER

helped set up the Wörwag subsidiary in Cape Town. He has been working as a key account manager in South Africa since 2003 and feels at home in the country. Krüger (51) is married to a South African, and has two sons (9 and 7). He is also a passionate motorcyclist. "I don't miss Germany. I have everything I need here: family, the sea, mountains, great cities. My life is here."

transport system breaks down. When that happens, I do the paint myself. Or there can be power outages. But we still always meet all of our deadlines.

What products are produced or sold in Cape Town?

Here in Cape Town, we specialize in the production of water-based primers and clear coats in collaboration with our partner Duram. In addition, we sell base coats and hardeners, as well as coloring the base coats. My colleagues and I monitor production and make sure the formulations are followed. All the raw materials come from Germany. We determine the coloring process and monitor the tones here.

How are the connections with Germany?

They're great. My contact in Stuttgart is Sigurd Tetz from International Technology Management. We make the decisions ourselves, as far as possible. We solve a lot of problems right on the spot. ■