

Car Rental Adventures

I didn't think I was so dumb

by Bob Kocher

We all hear about car rental screw ups and unhappy experiences from family or friends. But I usually think those disheartening rental mishaps happen to someone else. No, not me. My car rentals for the most part have been routine.

So as I tell the following story bear with me because it started out as just a normal Avis car rental. I had been in France driving for four days on the 2014 Annual Guild of Motoring Writers P&O Euro Classic Rally. That might make you think I know something about cars. Sometimes!

Let's set the stage. For over 25 years when I looked out the window on Monday morning, there was a new car in my driveway, sometimes more, awaiting my test driving. My job was testing and writing reviews on new cars.

The carmakers have car pools of new vehicles in most major markets and have different vehicles delivered to auto writers each week. And there are new car launches all over the world all the time. I usually attended as many as I could as well as the media groups' rallies. That is where the carmakers bring all the latest vehicles for me and the other auto writers to test, most often at a race track like Road America or Pocono Speedway.

Wow, you're thinking. I must have had a great driving life. I can safely say with no bragging that I have driven just about any new car you can name. Shouldn't that make me an expert? Guess again!

So back to the Avis rental car. My wife Connie and myself had landed in Munich, Germany, and had reserved a rental car to go on some vacationing in Germany and Austria. And two of our children were flying in there to join us.

We went to the Avis counter and everything was ready for us. We had reserved a 2014 Infinity, a car I had driven many times over the years and knew it would be a good touring vehicle for our trip.

We headed to the parking spot and it was right where it was supposed to be. At this point our great vacation started to go south in a big hurry.

First, before we drove out of the somewhat dark, tight parking spot we needed to set the navigation for directions to our hotel. But we could figure no way to get the navigation system to turn on. And of course the owner's manual was written in German, which was no help to us. And there were no Avis employees anywhere that

we could see. So after about 25 minutes my wife said even though it will be costly we could use the GPS on my iPhone. It worked and we were ready to drive off.

That's what we thought. The car wouldn't move because the parking brake was on. So we started looking for the lever to release the parking brake. You guessed it, again no luck. We couldn't find it.

I have a 2002 Kia at home and on the left side of the dash there is a release. My Audi has a parking brake release in the center console. My Lancia has a parking brake release via a handle you use for putting the brake on or off in the center console.

So let's think back at all the cars I have driven . . . Most parking brakes have some kind of lever on the dash or console for releasing the brake. And my big question is when was the last time you even used the parking brake?

As usual my wife/navigator came to the rescue and said, "Let me look on Google." And there was the answer; the parking brake was on the floor left of the brake pedal. You push in on it and the brake releases and you're on your way. I had thought this was old technology. That's right, what do I know?