

Bertha Benz



In 1885, German engineer Karl Benz built the world's first automobile powered by an internal combustion engine. The vehicle, called the Benz Patent-Motorwagen, was a three-wheeled machine with an engine capable of producing only two horsepower. Although Benz received a patent for his automobile in 1886, he struggled to find buyers for his machine as he had never tested it over long distances; he had only driven it around his shop in Mannheim.

Benz's wife Bertha decided to take matters into her own hands. On August 4th, 1888, Bertha told her husband that she and their two sons were going to visit Bertha's parents in Pforzheim, 60 miles away. She did not tell Karl that she intended to get there in the Patent-Motorwagen. At 5 o'clock in the morning of August 5th, Bertha and her sons set out on the world's first road trip to Pforzheim.

It took the trio 12 hours to drive the 60 miles. Bertha stopped at a pharmacy for ligroin, a petroleum product, to buy fuel for the automobile (the pharmacy still exists and is known today as the world's first gas station). She also solved several problems along the way, including unclogging the carburetor using a hat pin, insulating the ignition wire with a garter belt, and asking a blacksmith to nail leather pads onto the brake shoes to improve the patent-motorwagen's stopping power (thus inventing brake linings).

Bertha and sons returned to Mannheim three days later, having proved that automobiles were a viable invention. Bertha Benz's road trip in August 1888 truly set the world in motion.

For Kids!

