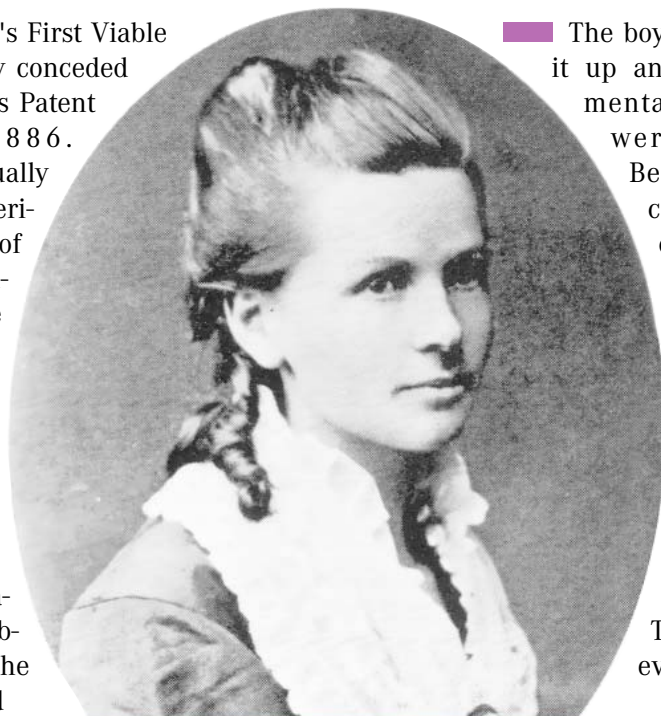


The title of the World's First Viable Automobile is generally conceded to belong to Karl Benz's Patent Motorwagen of 1886. StarTuned's editor actually had the chance to experience driving a replica of this engineering landmark built from the original prints, thanks to Mercedes-Benz and Hemmings Motor News. Sitting way up high on a not-so-stable three-wheeled chassis gave us a true appreciation of the courage exhibited by Bertha Benz, the inventor's wife and mother of their two sons, when she took her famous ride.



## Bertha Benz's Famous Ride

It seems that Herr Benz didn't have iron-bound faith in his own creation, so had never driven it farther than about 20 km. There were other impediments such as frightened horses and outraged citizens. Frau Benz, however, whom her husband later described as "fearless and courageous," was unfazed by such concerns, and had great confidence in Karl's achievement. Since her husband didn't seem about to prove that it could withstand a long trip, and, by extension, that travel by automobile was a practical proposition, she was determined to prove it herself.

So, one morning in August, 1888 she roused their two sons, 15 year-old Eugen and 14 year-old Richard, out of bed while Karl was still asleep, and together they pushed the Model 3 out of the shop and far enough down the street so her husband wouldn't hear it start. As you might expect, the boys were deeply into the details of their dad's contraption, so were pretty good mechanics. Bertha left a note for Karl saying that they'd gone to visit her mother, who lived in Pforzheim, but not mentioning that they intended to do so in the Motorwagen.

The boys had no trouble firing it up and mastering the rudimentary controls, so they were off. Apparently, Bertha's notion of the country roads that led out of Mannheim wasn't very precise, so their route was circuitous at best. This added distance meant that the five-liter fuel tank was woefully inadequate, and Frau Benz had to stop at several pharmacies to buy benzine.

The cooling system was even more demanding than the carburetor.

Since it wasn't pressurized, water simply boiled off to

the tune of well over a liter per kilometer, which necessitated numerous refills at farms, wells and ponds along the way.

By evening, they hadn't quite made it to Bertha's mother's house, so they stayed at a hotel. Meanwhile, Bertha was thoughtful enough to send Karl two telegrams during the day to let him know that they were the ones who'd taken the car, and that they were safe.

The somewhat mischievous trio returned to Mannheim within a few days, and the round trip added up to an astonishing 180 km. One can only wonder what Herr Benz's reaction might have been when his wife burst in bearing newspaper accounts of the excursion. Talk about mixed emotions! She'd stolen his car, but she'd done it out of her faith in his work, and garnered publicity to boot. The boys were one thing – teenagers are usually up for anything, the riskier the better, and better yet if it involves mobile machinery – but what spurred a demure German housewife to motor around the countryside on marginal roads at up to 12 mph? Every man should have a wife who believes so strongly in him.