

# "Adventure Capitalist" World Tour

reenters the US at Nogales  
and revisits us at Tempe



By Jim Rogers and Paige Parker, with editor's notes

*The "Millennium Mercedes": a car on a mission:  
a unique off-roadster takes on the world's potholes*

The Millennium Mercedes is a one-of-a-kind vehicle developed and built for Jim Rogers and Paige Parker for a historic, three-year journey around the world, which began Jan. 1, 1999 and ended Jan. 5, 2002. This first true All Activity Vehicle combines the comfort and styling attributes of the Mercedes-Benz SLK 230 sports car with the sturdy durability of the legendary Mercedes-Benz G-Series wagon. It helped Paige and Jim set a Guinness World Record.

The couple's dream of traveling in a luxurious, sporty convertible that also provided the ultimate in safety and

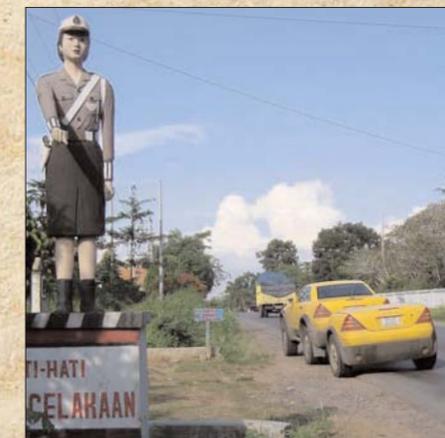
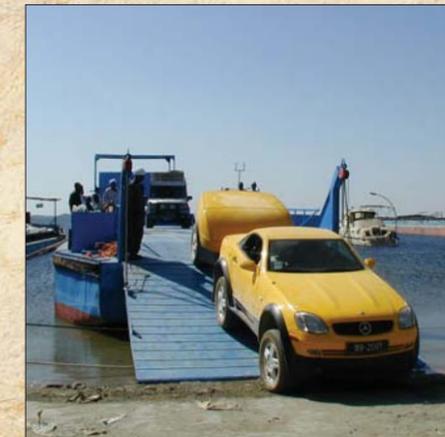
ruggedness was realized by California-based Gerhard Steinle and his team at Prisma Design International. Steinle is the former President of Mercedes-Benz Advanced Design of North America who founded his own design studio in 1997. Rogers developed the concept of merging a sports car body with the chassis and diesel engine of the G-series four-wheel-drive sport utility wagon, also known as der Gelaendewagen.

The two cars needed for the operation, together with a second long-wheelbase G-wagen which joined the adventure as a support vehicle, were donated by Mercedes-Benz of North America in a tribute to the unprecedented success of the Three-Pointed Star in the US market at the turn of the millennium.

It took three months to create an automobile worthy of its "Millennium" nametag. The team had to not only link the

mechanical components, but also to deal with the much greater challenge of connecting the vastly different computer and electronic systems.

The "Millennium" is powered by the proven, reliable 177 hp 3-litre G-Series Turbodiesel six-cylinder engine with a five-speed automatic transmission and a four-wheel-drive powertrain. For road clearance, the Sunburst Yellow body rides a full foot higher than a stock SLK. Specially designed full fender flaring and a step-up rocker system visually blend the hybrid's two characters, giving it a unique



identity. Prisma designed a matching trailer, since extra storage capacity is needed for a trip like this. Metalcrafters manufactured the trailer. Bridgestone supplied 265/60R-18 Dueler tires, which were mounted on original equipment Mercedes G500 18x7.5 alloy wheels.

The integration of a brand new Iridium satellite communications system with car phones provided by Motorola helped keep the couple in contact with the world. The Iridium system allows unlimited access to



The world is 24,000 miles around, but you can travel 150,000 miles by road if you set out to see enough of it, as indicated on the map above, showing the complete 3-year, 116-country tour taken by the authors.

Crossing Egypt's Lake Nasser by boat, the Millennium Mercedes disembarks at Aswan.

Statues of police officers, male and female, stand along the roads of Sumatra, Indonesia.

The tree-line streets of Nanjing, China, leading into the mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen.



The trip begins in Iceland. Narrow, wet, cold and rough at first, excitement still abounds, as does spectacular scenery. Warm, dry Arizona is years away.

66 satellites around the world at any time of day. Alpine supplied a navigation system and its disks for nine countries in Europe. Prisma designed a matching trailer for extra storage capacity. The special two-wheeled utility trailer echoes the lines of the original SLK and probably is probably the most charming accessory of this challenging undertaking.

### The last leg of the journey

Jim and Paige's 'round-the-world odyssey provides spellbinding reading, and the entire tale can be enjoyed in Jim's book of the trip, *Adventure Capitalist: The Ultimate Investor's Road Trip*. As we joined Jim for lunch in Tempe recently, we learned much about the pitfalls and rewards of such normally mundane tasks as parking your vehicle and gear overnight in countries you wouldn't even want to be

seen in during broad daylight; dealing with routine breakdowns or maintenance on African roads where "mud" and "ruts" are gross understatement, and "road" is, in fact, an overstatement; of developing routes based on shifting alliances and permissions across the Middle East and South Asia, sometimes not knowing the final path until a (possibly hostile) border was reached, even when protocol normally requires significant advance notice; of the gifts and courtesies which grease a transaction in a variety of cultures; and much, much more.

We were particularly interested in his reentry into the United States at Nogales, not long after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. From Paige's journal:

**11 SEPTEMBER 2001** - Every American will remember where they were when they

learned that an American Airlines plane, complete with passengers, flew into the World Trade Center. Jim and I were in Puno. I had just checked out of the hotel, when Jim ran over exclaiming, "A plane crashed into the World Trade Center." The hotel manager had found Jim at breakfast to share the wretched news and offer condolences.

Jim and I dashed to a room to watch Peruvian news cover the event and saw that not only had one plane crashed, but another one hit the other tower and a third plane flew into the Pentagon. We both shook our heads in disbelief. America was under attack. I spent the remainder of the day driving in a haze, full of wonder and dread. I drove by signs looking right at them, but not seeing them, as my focus was on America and the ramifications of this disaster.

Jim and I have seen evidence first-hand of anti-US sentiment on our world journey,



Takeshita Dori, one of Tokyo's pedestrian-only streets. This Angolan general blocked passage and forced the authors to a military camp, where they spent the night in their car; they were relieved to learn it was for one night only, and was for their safety, as the next bridge is known to be loaded with land mines each evening. Fellow travelers include ornately decorated and often-overloaded trucks in Pakistan, the ubiquitous Soviet-era Trabant in Hungary, and this three-wheeler in China. The Sahara offers considerably more elbow room than Tokyo. Youngsters in Kazhakstan are used to Russian cosmonauts, but the Mercedes was a whole new thrill.

but were they capable of this? But closer to home, where was the United States' multi-billion dollar Intelligence? How could the massive CIA and FBI departments not know anything of this horrible event? We could feed, educate and vaccinate the entire needy world for what America spends on Intelligence. And, three of our planes go down killing thousands...

Not until early evening did our short-wave radio receive a BBC signal, which told us that the Twin Towers had collapsed and a fourth plane had crashed in Pennsylvania. What a nightmare! What a devastating tragedy! Countless dead. Children to grow up without a parent. A new America is before us.

Already, the media speculates bin Laden is behind the attacks. I can only hope that

American politicians will look to hard evidence before annihilating Afghanistan and her poverty-stricken people. And, what in the world will happen to those Western missionaries, two Americans, on trial in Afghanistan? I can only imagine a certain death for them now.

But before jumping to judgment, let's remember that when McVeigh bombed the Oklahoma building, America's first response was to blame Islamic fundamentalists and we were dead wrong. And if America proves that Islamic radicals are behind today's horrible destruction, I hope, with all my might, that Americans will not blame all Muslims. The Koran doesn't condone the evil deeds committed today nor will the majority of Muslims.

Perhaps this will make Americans take a serious look at US foreign policy. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps - I could list a hundred potential outcomes from this tragedy. But, no matter the decisions made by our government on retaliation - and I fear a severely heavy-handed response creating more hatred in our enemies - nothing entitled anyone in the world to kill thousands of innocent civilians today. Absolutely no rationale - political or religious - can condone what the suicide bombers did on 11 September 2001 in the USA.

The shock and disorientation everyone felt during that period was magnified by





At risk from war, the authors searched for a boat from Cabinda to Luanda, Angola. Then they arrived at the Cabinda airport just as the door to a Russian plane was closing. After a request to the Russian general and crew, and just forty minutes of fetching the vehicles, packing and checking out of a hotel, the Millennium Mercedes was rolling aboard this Angolan military cargo plan.

being out of country, in South America, when the events struck. Jim and Paige's adjustment to a shifting world had to be absorbed during the long drive across South America, up its west coast, across Panama and up through the various nations of Central America, then the full south-to-north length of México, enjoying the people, cultures and scenery every step of the way, but also anticipating what could be one of the most anxious border crossings of the entire adventuresome trip. From Jim's journal:

**12 NOVEMBER 2001** – As we approached Hermosillo; the clouds looked like a child's etch-a-sketch.

One of the tires on the G-Wagen had a tear, but continued to hold proper air pressure. Still, we tried unsuccessfully to

have it vulcanized in Los Mochis, so we changed the tire instead.

If all goes as planned, we drive back into the US tomorrow, after spending 34 months exploring 114 countries. As many have written, travel is addictive. Perhaps, travel is one of the few genuinely good-for-you, all-natural drugs. The more I search, explore and uncover, the more I want to dig deeper, stay a little longer and visit just one more special spot. So many places pull me back; I am tied to them forever, and I love knowing this. To paraphrase a wonderful Mexican saying, "Once you've danced the dance, it is yours." Even now, before this journey is complete, I find myself thinking of the places I'll return. My mind is crammed to the brim with rich, vivid memories of people, terrain and food, museums and cathedrals, landscapes even. I imagine, upon return, much time will pass

before I can sort through everything jogging, and sometimes, racing around my head.

I've always been a dreamer, thinking of what next and when will I do this. But now, I often dream by reliving a wonderful experience from the last 34 months. Sure, I've moaned often about bureaucrats, tough conditions and much more, but the goodness I've experienced in 114 countries far outweighs any maddening situation or ridiculous, time-wasting, 50-year old statute we've dealt with, granted, with clenched teeth. Even the bad is now not so bad! Plus, stories of corruption, wars, bombs, small arms fire, pick-pockets, horrible roads, absurd laws enforced by ludicrous, self-important officials – all make for a much better story than utopia, which, by the way, we have yet to find. Poverty, illness, child soldiers, prostitutes, oppression of women,



A giant ant colony in Côte d'Ivoire foreshadows the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, currently the world's tallest buildings. A visit to Saudi Arabia begins with a clear warning that misbehavior will result in death, followed by a camel advisory and a fork in the road for Muslims only (to Mecca) or non-Muslims. With the car already loaded, the trailer joins the cargo in Oman. Fellow travelers from United Arab Emirates, in Muscat, Oman. On Kish Island, Iran, a young girl in headscarf enjoys rollerblading.

religious intolerance, dismal education, corrupt politicians, wasteful expatriates – have slapped reality hard in my face.

Today, though, I remind myself not to live in what I've learned – thinking, sorting, deciphering. There will be plenty of time for that in 2002. Fortunately, we have two months of exploration before us. Driving to Alaska in the winter will be rough, but no worse, we hope, than driving in Iceland and southern Argentina during their coldest, iciest months. Then, we head across the US, at the most trying time the country has faced mentally, not to mention the lackluster economy, in my lifetime, with farmers to politicians grappling with fear, outrage, disbelief, anxiety, patriotism, foreign policy and why others hate us. We still have quite a

ride in store between here and New York.

Thus, they approached the United States, crossing from Nogales, Sonora, into Nogales, Arizona. One detail had to be tended to, the swapping of their self-assigned international (or anarchic?) license plates, which featured the designation of the vehicle, 99-2001, for their original Alabama plates, to be street-legal in the United States. The days when even the most imposing authorities didn't seem to much know or care about such formalities were over.

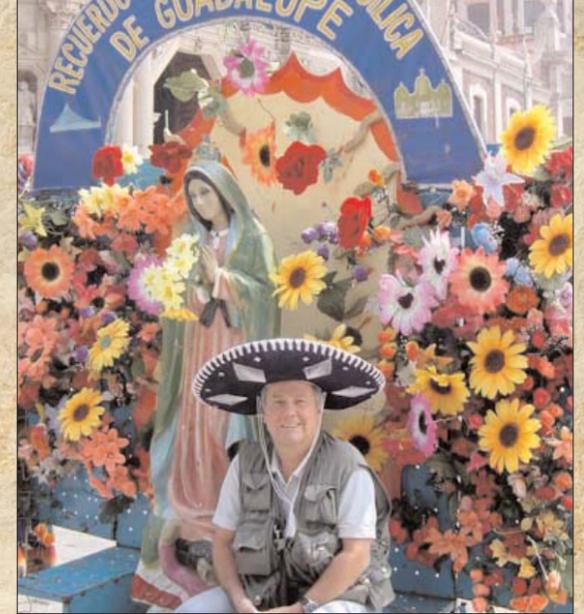
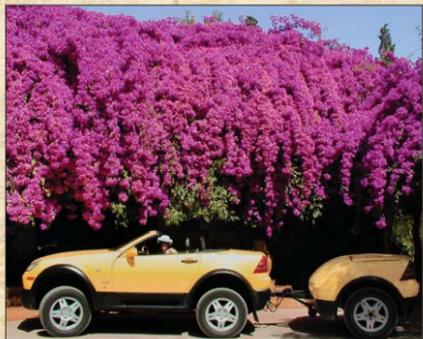
From Paige's journal:

**13 NOVEMBER 2001** – Arizona: our entry into the US for the first time since 28 December 1998 when we departed New York

for Iceland. Just like last night, I slept sporadically, as I am worried over border crossing. We've read and been warned that the Mexico/US border is on highest alert since 9-11, and we should expect a minimum five-hour wait. We have certainly faced longer crossings, so, perhaps, the recent anxiety is due to my imminent normal life in the US!

On our drive to the Mexican border, known as Nogales, the name of the nearest city, we were stopped a couple of times on the toll road at military and police checkpoints, where young male, uniformed officers routinely asked us our destination and the contents of our trailer. Once we reached Mexico's first border area, I asked about immigration and customs. Two officials





This trip can make your head spin. Or call your travel agent. It's hard to think of a better postmark than Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso (although Timbuktu, Mali, was also a stop). Crossing the Bosphorus from Europe to Asia at Istanbul (left center) and three mountain passes through the mountains to Erzincan, Turkey (upper right). Flowers add some color to the edge of desert north Africa, at La Gazelle d'Or, just outside Taroudant, Morocco. In central east Asia, three generations pose in front of their Mongolian yurt. More familiar civilization appears in Port Headland, Australia, at the hotel/motel/restaurant/club/pub of owner Wayne Nichols, shown with sons Austin and Jacob, and dog Bart. It's enough to fill a book. In fact, Jim has. Also see his website: [www.jimrogers.com](http://www.jimrogers.com)

advised us to proceed to the next border post. Once there, we found no office to have our exit marks stamped on our passports, nor did we see anywhere to turn in our temporary car permits. Finally, two poorly kept Mexican officials told us to return to the small office 21 kilometers back, and there we could do the proceedings to leave the country! Both men, one in his 50s and missing several teeth, and the other, younger and wearing dirty civilian clothes, showed outright glee in our having missed the proper office for the required, but mindless paperwork.

Wanting to confirm the guidance of the Mexican officials, I headed to the US side of the border, where an officer explained we

could enter the US without an exit stamp from Mexico, but we should turn in the car permit, as not abiding to our 30-day agreement might influence our future visits to that country. So, we returned 21 kilometers and found a small office, with no sign marking its function, and did the necessary paperwork for our car's departure to the US.

To be stamped out of Mexico, we had to drive into Nogales and find "any Mexican bank" to pay for our tourist cards, which immigration presented when we entered the country. Immigration officials are no longer entrusted to accept cash, so tourists are burdened to seek out a bank to pay the Mexican Immigration Department before

leaving the country. Immigration, why not collect the money upon arrival! Then, upon return to the final Mexican border point, the immigration office was locked and unmanned at 4:20 p.m., even though this is a 24-hour border. We could not turn in the ridiculous tourist cards! We'll send in the cards from the US and hope they reach Mexican immigration! Pure madness. Several times in Mexico, both Jim and I questioned how the country could be as prosperous as it is, given the inefficiency we experienced.

Remarkably, the US crossing was a breeze. We waited about five minutes, inching forward as cars, and people in them, passed through initial examination, before showing our passports to a young officer, who

September 11, 2001, found our travelers with local cholitas at the Cathedral in Puno, Peru. Jim knowingly strikes a tourist pose with the Virgin of Guadalupe at one of the many photo stands in the Basilica's plaza. Lower left, Jim stands before the Pyramid of the Sun, near Puebla and Teotihuacan, which Mexico proudly points out has a base as large as the more famous pyramid at Cheops in Egypt. The route from Guadalajara to Mazatlan passes through the town of Tequila, where the surrounding countryside is covered in agave plants, used to make the intoxicating Mexican national drink.

directed us to "secondary", since the Army officers at the secondary inspection were excited and intrigued by our car! We explained our last 35 months and they didn't search a thing. The male and female officers even allowed us to take photographs, which, I feel certain is not allowed.

Jubilant, I finally stood on US soil for the first time since 28 December 1998, the date we headed to Iceland. The most exciting, challenging and educational part of my life has just taken place, and I am not keen for my growth and exploration to cease, but, nevertheless, I am pleased as punch to be home again. Jim, who is a genuine nomad, does not share in my excitement. Maybe he will just keep traveling around and around the world....

From here, Jim and Paige enjoyed a fairly normal visit to Arizona, as normal as any visit anywhere in the US could be after three years out of the country. After staying in Tucson the first night, they visited their friend Nancy Prevo, who has kept in touch via email during the whole journey, then drove to the Valley of the Sun and checked into The Phoenician resort. The next day was spent in historic Old Town Scottsdale, seeing the tourist trappings, restaurants, galleries and shops of the southwestern United States from a perspective surely shifting somewhere between guest and host. On November 16, they were headed north to Alaska... well, to the Grand Canyon, actually. Again, the journal shares the times:

**17 NOVEMBER 2001** – Oh my goodness! Hard to contain my excitement and adoration of the Grand Canyon, one of the most spectacular sights/sites we have seen in the last 35 months! We woke at 7 a.m. to crisp, chilly weather (32F, 0C) and drove into town (we are staying on the canyon at El Tovar, the first hotel ever built here in 1905) to the airport and took a helicopter tour (50 minutes) over the canyon. Wow. I continually took photographs of the red, brown, gray and pink rock strata that date back two billion years; the youngest rock here is 250 million years old! Flying over we saw the massive depth (one mile), the confluence of the Little Colorado (turquoise in color) and the Colorado (muddy looking), the northern rim





Author/adventurer Jim Rogers and the Millennium Mercedes, an "off-roadster" combining the best of an open 2-seater with the rugged durability of an extreme off-road chassis, visiting Tempe AZ, as Jim retraces the Arizona leg of the round-the-world journey he took from 1999 to 2001 with his wife Paige Parker.



License tags used for the prior 34 months had no identification of nationality. They had the proper numbers, but it is often dangerous to identify one's nationality in many places Jim and Paige had been. At the US border, however, it was time to swap back to the original tags for both car and trailer, which are registered in Alabama, Jim's home state. Getting out of Mexico took two hours, but entering the US was a breeze compared to all the horror stories they had heard of border crossings since 9/11. What's that in the trunk? A map of their three-year journey around the world, back to the US after more than 34 months on the road (out of 36 ultimately) and 114 countries visited (out of 116), satisfies a border official. Neither Jim nor Paige had touched US soil since December 28, 1998. With glee, almost three years later, Paige posted their 115th country sticker, USA, on the G-Wagen. Near Tucson, Jim and Paige stopped by to see Nancy Prevo, who had e-mailed with Jim during the three-year journey. All-American cowboys and a steak dinner make a perfect welcome back to the US, Arizona style; they photographed both their American dinners. A group from Vanguard followed the adventure since the beginning, so Jim and Paige stopped by on their way through Scottsdale to meet Laura Swoger, Wendy Nelson, (Paige), Marianne Krnc, (Jim) and Connie Currie. At Grand Canyon National Park in northern Arizona, Jim looks through a brass Site Locator, donated to the park in 1922. As the day progressed – and the clouds along with it – the sweeping views over the canyon became more and more awesome. Paige's worldwide journal states, "Jim and I both loved our time at the Grand Canyon and rank it among the best sights/sites of our three-year world journey."

that receives much more precipitation so far more fertile, the southern rim that looks barren as desert, the massive peaks named after Indian gods (the first geographer who named them, back in the early 1800s, had a fascination with Asia and thought the peaks here resembled the temples there), the majestic colors and curvaceous formations at every swoop, and the countless trees in the park surrounding the 277-mile-long

canyon. Surprisingly, we saw no animals in the wilderness area, covered with tall, thin evergreens; I'm told the park service recently reintroduced condors in the northern rim.

After the amazing flight over the canyon, Jim and I walked part of the south rim for several hours, stopped for an ice cream in Grand Canyon Village, and, while eating our cones, sat with a couple of photo-friendly ravens. The village is a modern affair, but

began as a modest tent-colony meant for iron ore explorers. Developers soon realized tourism was more profitable than minerals and began building cabins and lookout points and offering mule rides into the canyon, a still-thriving tourist draw a century later. We stopped in the oldest curio shop, Verkamps, (opened in 1922 and still run by the founding family), where I bought an unusual, nine-stone silver ring, designed by Lynol Yellowhorse, a

39-year-old Native American (renowned for his jewelry described as "art"). No matter the hype of Lynol, I adore the ring and, every time I glance that way, I will remember the spectacular, stately Grand Canyon, where Jim and I enjoyed a utopian day.

Four nights in Arizona was surely a wonderful way to decompress and to enjoy the comforts and the mysteries the United States has to offer after such a long time on the road. We look forward to their next visit, any time. ■

**JIM ROGERS had his first job at age five, picking up bottles at baseball games. He founded the Quantum Fund, which gained 4,000% in ten years, while the S&P rose less than 50%. Jim retired at age 37, but has never stayed idle. Jim is author of *Investment Biker* and also his journal of this trip: *Adventure Capitalist: The Ultimate Investor's Road Trip*, published by Random House (ISBN 0-375-50912-7). More information is also available online at [www.jimrogers.com](http://www.jimrogers.com)**

## Technical Specifications

**ENGINE:** Six-cylinder 3.0-liter turbodiesel, four valves per cylinder, 22:1 compression

**POWER:** 177 hp @ 4,400 rpm

**TORQUE:** 244 lb.-ft. @ 3,600 rpm

**TRANSMISSION:** Mercedes-Benz five-speed automatic

**DRIVE SYSTEM:** Full-time, four-wheel drive, three differential locks from Mercedes-Benz G-Series

**CHASSIS:** Mercedes-Benz G300 Short Wheelbase (160 inches) (4 meters)

**RIDE HEIGHT:** Approx. one foot taller (30 cm) than stock ride height of standard SLK

**FUEL CAPACITY:** 146 liters (38.5 gallons)

**FUEL RANGE:** 1,000 kilometers / 620 miles

**COMMUNICATION:** Short-wave radio and walkie-talkies

**WHEELS:** Mercedes-Benz aluminum alloy, G500 V8-7.5 inches wide/18 inches tall

**TIRES:** Bridgestone Dueler HP0680 P265/60R-18

**BODY:** Steel-framed body constructed of composite fiberglass. SLK Sunburst Yellow paint scheme including fender flares enlarged around wheelwell openings. Newly designed rocker panels with integrated step, front and rear bumper skirts.

**INTERIOR:** Black leather

**TRAILER:** Custom made, two-wheel trailer sits on leaf springs and utilizes electric brakes and the same 18-inch tall wheels used on the lead vehicle. It houses a spare tire, drinking water, medical supplies and a spare fuel can. The rear compartment holds luggage.