

Out and Back to Volcano By Ron Petrich

If you live closer to the Sierras than to the coast foothills, or you just want a change of scenery some weekend (or weekday) morning, you might be interested in taking this drive. It mixes gentle cruising with some hardcore twisty roads, and the small town of Volcano is full of small gift shops, a bed & breakfast (The St. George Hotel), an outdoor theater, and plenty of coffee and pastry shops.

But the getting there (and back) is the highlight of this trip, at least for me. Start out at the McDonald's at the corner of White Rock Road and Sunrise Boulevard in Rancho Cordova. It's the one next to Costco. Take White Rock east to Latrobe Road in El Dorado Hills and go south. Recent development has made this turn a choke point, but you will soon be back in the countryside. Proceed south on Latrobe to the stop sign and turn left. This is Old Sacramento Road, and it will lead you to the town of Plymouth. Watch the speed limit (25) and the potholes in town. When you get to Highway 16 proceed straight across. A mile or so out of town the road comes to a Y. Keep to the right, this is Fiddletown Road. And for the next 30-35 miles you will be in sports car heaven. You will go from 800 or so feet above sea level to about 4,500 feet. As the elevation increases and you start to see more fir, pine and incense cedar, you can also pick out the bitter smell of mesquite and skunkweed. Slow down in Fiddletown and again watch the potholes.

Eventually you will come to a stop sign. This is Shake Ridge Road. A left will take you on a nice drive that will end up at US highway 88, but we want to go right. Proceed at a nice pace on this cruise part of the drive – the limit here is 45 mph. Follow the signs through the Daffodil Hill area, and proceed straight toward Volcano. You are almost there when you reach the top of Ram's Horn Grade, the twistiest 3 miles straight down that I know of. And if you successfully negotiate this part of the trip (you will!) you will enter into a meadow and the town of Volcano. Spend some time... or not, and then head back the same way in reverse.

Ram's Horn is much more fun going uphill, as any road would be in a front-engined RWD car. Try to wait at the bottom after no traffic has passed you in a while, so you can enjoy the jaunt up the hill. At the top, follow Shake Ridge to the Fiddleletown Road turnoff and go left. Be careful for the first 3-4 miles on Fiddletown as there are several off or even camber downhill turns. Be sure to slow down adequately. After this the road opens up in a gradual descent which can be enjoyed at a good clip. Then you can follow Old Sacramento Road back to Latrobe Road, and either White Rock Road or the freeway (US50) back to Sacramento.

That's it. I hope you enjoy this trip sometime during the next year. If you do, let me know how it went.