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Book Pair

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Submitted by Marsha D. Broadway

Women and Automobiles

Biography

Bingham, Mindy. *Berta Benz and the Motorwagen*. Illustrated by Itoko Maeno. Advocacy Press, 1989. ISBN 0-911655-38-7. 48 pp. **Grades 2-5.**

Brown, Don. *Alice Ramsey's Grand Adventure*. Illustrated by Don Brown. Houghton Mifflin, 1997 ISBN 0-618-07316-7. 32 pp. **Grades 1-3.**

Are you doing lesson plans on the development of transportation or getting ready for a family road trip? These biographies of adventuresome women will add spice to both classroom instruction and family reading and increase appreciation for modern automobiles and roadways.

In Mannheim, Germany, Karl Benz is experiencing all kinds of problems with the Motorwagen he developed two years ago. The Bürgermeister passed a law holding Karl responsible for any accidents it causes, which limits how often and how far he drives it. Also, everyone who sees it laughs. Berta, Karl Benz' wife, and her two teenage sons hatch the perfect plan to give the Motorwagen the publicity it needs in order to be taken seriously. Early in the morning, before the sun is even up, they sneak away from their home for a sixty-mile trip to Pforzheim to visit the children's grandmother. With son Eugen at the wheel, they set off with no road maps, no covering over their heads, and no luggage because there is no room. In Bruchsal, Berta sends a telegram to Karl telling him of their vacation. The three travelers buy ligroin, a dry-cleaning fluid used as fuel, at pharmacies; clear a clogged fuel line with

Berta's hat pin; have a worn-through leather brake lining repaired by a shoemaker; and repair a broken cable with Berta's garters. As people hear about the approaching Motorwagen, crowds gather in the towns to cheer the family on. In Pforzheim, Berta cables Karl with news of their safe arrival and a request for a new set of chains. A proud Karl complies, and Berta and her sons take Grandmother touring for five days before returning home. Thanks to Berta, the Motorwagen gained the publicity it needed.

Alice Ramsey, her friend Hermine, and her two sisters-in-law set off from New York City on June 9, 1909 in a Maxwell touring car for a cross-country adventure. With no road maps or road signs and only a guidebook of the eastern United States, they begin. Alice drives, measures the fuel in the gas tank with a stick, and lights the headlamps with a match. Through towns, by farms, over bumpy railroad tracks with stops for rain and mud, the foursome have to split up mid-trip to lighten the car. Hermine, Nettie, and Margaret travel by train to rejoin Alice in Sioux City, South Dakota, but Alice is determined to "drive every inch of the way even if it kills me!" J.D. Murphy from the Maxwell Company rides with Alice so she will not be alone. After the women reunite, they cross the Platte River on the railroad bridge, follow telephone lines in hopes of finding the next town, and struggle with a hot engine across the Sierra Nevadas. As the Maxwell rolls off the ferry into San Francisco, Alice Ramsey becomes the first woman to drive across the United States. The trip has taken fifty-nine days. Over the next seventy years, Alice will make the trip thirty more times.