

The Industrial Tour of Houston

By Jim Heimer, Roving Correspondent
Photos by Jim & Kandace Heimer

Feel like a drive through the open country, basking in the rays of the sun, fresh air blowing through your hair, forest creatures frolicking along the roadside, the sounds of crystal clear streams gurgling and mingling with the roar of your Porsche engine . . .

FORGET IT - this is Houston!!!

How 'bout a drive through one of the world's largest industrial facilities, basking in the humidity of summer, petroleum byproducts blowing through your hair, 18-wheel oil tankers racing along the road, the sounds of the Houston ship channel mingling with the roar of your Porsche engine . . .

Well that's more like it, and that's what some 55 members of the Lone Star Region in about 25 Porsches encountered on their way to brunch at Clifton's by the Sea in Bacliff, Texas, just south of Kemah off Highway 146.



We met for this Meet-Drive-Eat-Drive event in a remote corner of the Houston Zoo parking lot in Herman Park on Sunday morning, August 5th, for the 50 mile drive to Cliftons. After a brief briefing on the route and an advisory that no traffic laws had been suspended, we lined up and set out. The group got broken up by the traffic lights leaving the zoo, but once on 288 heading south and then on 610 heading east, the train had assembled, and we proceeded in good order down 225 between the refineries and chemical plants that line the highway, until a couple of the turbos decided they needed some exercise.

As the "fast five" passed the nominal tour leader, many other models decided that they would join in the fun, so that by the time we approached the state trooper trying to write a citation on a truck he had pulled over to the side, Caymans, Boxsters, Carreras and Cayennes were swarming at a pretty good clip down all four lanes of the freeway.

But with a little bit of judicious braking, citations (unjustified though they would have been) were avoided, and by the time we had all turned off south on 146 a semblance of good order had been restored.



This was just in time for a short jaunt to the west along the water. There we paused to catch our breath and compare notes before proceeding on.

We ended up under the Kemah bridge, where we rejoined 146 for the 10 miles to Bacliff and Cliftons.



Porsche after Porsche rolled in and parked, attracting the attention of several passers-by,

who felt compelled to circle the parking lot in their pickups and SUV's.

Due to the traffic and the lights on the last couple of miles on 146, it took a few minutes for all of the vehicles to arrive. Then, after a brief pause for a Kodak moment, it was inside – out of the 94 degree heat and into the air conditioned comfort of Clifton's dining room overlooking Galveston Bay.



If you have been in Houston for some time, as several sitting near me were, you probably bemoan what has become of Kemah and the quaint oyster shell parking lots, \$1 long necks, and raw oysters by the dozen that used to be available in the waterfront eateries that perched on the bank of the canal. There is still an opportunity to return to those glorious days of yesteryear, but you will need to go to Bacliff to relive them, and Cliftons (OK, the parking lot is paved) is one such place.

Steak and eggs, snapper and eggs, as well as representative species of fresh gulf seafood in various styles was all available, and we pretty much worked over the entire brunch and lunch menus for about 3 hours of chewing and talking.



By 2 pm the damage had been done and the group disbursed, some heading on to the San Jacinto Monument and Battleship Texas, both of which were a short detour off the route back, and others just goin' home – maybe for a nap?

If you missed this event and are new to Houston or a long time resident who hasn't had the opportunity to be impressed by the chemical and petroleum industries that call the east side of Houston home, this is a drive you can easily do. Cliftons by the Sea, 100 Grand Avenue in Bacliff, is a worthwhile destination, either for the Saturday or Sunday brunch, or stop by in the cool of the evening for a drink and dinner on the patio, while the sun sets.



And watch your e-mail and the website for the next Meet – Drive – Eat event. Better yet, if you

have a favorite restaurant and know how to get there (the long way), you too could organize a trip. The club can help.

The entire trip is about 50 miles and will take an hour, depending on traffic.

The route we took was:

- From Houston, go south on 288 (or 45)
- Go east on 610
- Go east on 225
- Go south on 146 – several miles down the road, watch for the Port Road exit: take Port Road east to Toddville Road south; as you approach the Kemah bridge, follow the signs for 146 South to get on 146 going over the bridge.
- Continue south on 146 to 646 / Grand Avenue and turn left (east) at the light
- Cliftons
(<http://www.cliftonbythesea.com/main.htm>) is at the end of the Grand Avenue.

By the way . . .

There is another nice restaurant in the Kemah area that you will pass close to on this route. No, it has nothing to do with the boardwalk!!

As you pass under the Kemah bridge, instead of following the signs and turning right for the ramp to 146 South, continue straight ahead into the Marina and look for the Sundance Grill. It has a deck overlooking the channel with front row seats for watching the boats transiting between Clear Lake and the Gulf. Occasionally, someone's yacht will tie up at the Sundance pier, and the crew will come ashore to eat at the Grill.

And when you are finished eating, walk toward the water at the end of the Sundance parking lot and follow around to the left into the Marina. There, in the palm trees that line the narrow lane you can observe Kemah's population of Quaker Parrots. They are reputedly descendents of escapees from a New Jersey pet shop decades ago. They number in the 100's, and will be home in the evenings. At other times, you can still see (and hear) a few around the twig nests at the base of the palm fronds.