

# drive-ins

**I** remember that I was supposed to be asleep in the back of a white VW microbus sometime in the mid-1970s. But the garbled words emanating from a window-side speaker, the sound of my parents munching popcorn and allure of a giant screen right outside the windshield kept me up, trying to sneak a glimpse at the far-too-mature film playing on said screen at the 81 Drive-In on South Ninth Street in Salina, Kan.

Fast-forward 10 years with my dorky friends crowbarred (no one was game enough to squeeze into the trunk) into my rust-brown 1975 Mustang II headed to the same drive-in for a showdown with Freddy Krueger in "Nightmare on Elm Street." We figured the nature of the fright night would chase girls into safe, albeit scrawny, teenage arms — and they did, only to guys who weren't us.

From the dancing sodas at intermissions to double features, the drive-in has been a staple of family nights out and of teenage initiation since Richard Hollingshead opened the first drive-in in Camden, N.J., on Tuesday, June 6, 1933. Since that time, millions of families have brought their own popcorn in grocery sacks, countless teens have necked, and myriad double features have played in fields of film.

By 1950 the places were flourishing, with more than 4,063 drive-ins operating around the country.

IT DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER ON A HOT SUMMER NIGHT THAN SHARING  
A DOUBLE FEATURE WITH THE TRUE STARS **BY MARK LUCE**



The drive-in became such a part of Americana that it routinely showed up in films: from Danny's unsuccessful courting of Sandy in "Grease" to the drive-in destruction in "Twister;" and not to discount, the abundance and fun of B-flicks, from "Bikini Drive-In" to "Dead End Drive-In."

For all the unmitigated and perhaps tawdry pleasures of drive-ins, higher real estate values and the birth of the cineplex have crippled the drive-in industry. After three decades of steady closings, there are but 419 drive-in screens today. However, there have been seven new drive-ins opened this

year and three that have re-opened. Residents in Ohio (36 drive-ins), Pennsylvania (34) and New York (32) should have the easiest time parking their cars and watching films, and the Web site [www.drive-ins.com](http://www.drive-ins.com) has a handy zip-code locator to a theater near you.

After the birth of our first son, Jen and I — at one point we were about a movie-a-week couple — ceased heading to the local cineplex, refusing to be "that couple" who took a baby to the movies.

One muggy August night, though, we packed a cooler with sandwiches and sodas and headed to the Boulevard Drive-In in Merriam, Kan., part of metro Kansas City. With a creatively made bed for infant Miles in the back seat, we cringed to the creepy "Signs" and laughed our way through most of "XXX." I experienced more than a blast of drippy nostalgia that evening, but I also glimpsed a bit of something that I can pass on to my sons — at least until they are teenagers.

*Mark Luce lives in Lawrence, Kan., where he secretly wonders if a mini-van would make a more comfy drive-in experience.*

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