

Enough About Golf, Let's Talk Automobiles!

By STEVE GARSKE
Par Aide Products Co.



Enough about golf for a month. My true passion is in automobiles, particularly fast sports cars and old American iron.

Living in Minnesota only allows one a few months to enjoy top down driving so car enthusiasts wait more than half the year to get their ride out on the road. During the off months, some will change out parts, some will begin a new project and others like me will just wax and dream, yearning for the warm weather and most importantly, for a big thunderstorm to wash away the road salt. Quite frankly it is not so different from the golfers who anxiously await the course openings and the opportunity to try out that new putter or driver.

Local car shows begin in early April indoors, but actually get going on a weekly basis beginning in May. To be sure, they are popular and busy. Up here, within about 30 minutes are three small towns that literally rope off their main street for the cars. Generally there is an age requirement for the vehicles, usually

1964 or older vintage. Some will stretch it to 1972 to include the American muscle cars that followed 1964. My friends and I try to make as many as possible, usually determined by whose car is currently running!

However the grand daddy car show of them all in Minnesota is the annual Back to the 50s car show. Held in late June, it attracts cars from all of the surrounding States, Canada, and some travel even farther to be at this event. This year right around 11,500 vehicles were registered, all 1964 or older! This event is held in our Minnesota State Fairgrounds which, needless to say, is quite large. Cars are parked everywhere, including the grass. (Through the years many have wondered why the vintage hasn't been raised which would then allow for Ford Mustangs and Chevrolet Camaros and the rest. Quite simply, the facility could not come close to handling that volume.)

Rather than try to describe the eye-popping beauty and true sensory overload in seeing all of these hot rods and vintage American cars (and some foreign), I have sent a past year CD along for the editors to put on their website for you to see. You can also simply go to the Minnesota Street Rod Association website, www.msra.com.

This event begins on Thursday with registration at a local headquarter hotel. All drivers need to pick up their registration materials at this one location and, of course, this means the car show begins there, creating quite a traffic issue that no one minds.

The Fairgrounds open the next morning at 8:00. The first ones in will have slept in their car having queued the night before at around 3:00. As my buddies and I are not quite so anal as to where we park on the grounds, we generally caravan in a group of three or four cars and don't arrive till around 8:30. The day is filled with watching cars slowly cruising the crowded streets, walking to see as many as the feet will allow, listening to oldies bands and engines, and generally just taking it all in. The organizers have it well coordinated with activities galore for all visitors, having started this event in 1967!

All of the vehicles must leave the Fairgrounds each night by 23:00 and there are a few drivers who will leave the grounds and queue on the street awaiting the 08:00 opening the next morning. There are stories of drivers being sound asleep and having everyone behind pulling around and passing by. Saturday repeats Friday, and Sunday it happens all over again ending mid afternoon.

For one great weekend the city of St. Paul is awash of hot rods and vintage cars. For the older folks it brings back many a memory. For the young it is an eye opening look back at the way it was.

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