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AUTOS

Stylish 'orphans'

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 BY [DAN JEDLIKA](#) AUTO WRITER

Fascinating cars many people have never seen or even heard about gather once a year at the big Orphan Auto Picnic auto show, which has been annually held here for 12 years.

Car buffs recently spent a weekend gazing at high-priced classics such as 1930s Duesenbergs at the Pebble Beach car show in California. At the same time, Chicago area residents saw cars that are arguably as interesting at the show here, which is for "orphan" autos no longer made.

When was the last time you saw a 1950s Edsel, Packard, Studebaker or Hudson on the road, let alone a racy 1930s Auburn Speedster? They were at the show here, along with cars such as the cute 1952 Henry J. An economy model far ahead of its time, it was named after its builder, industrialist Henry J. Kaiser, who also built the 1946-55 Kaiser to battle American auto giants.

"Some say the Henry J cost so much money to develop that it caused the downfall of Kaiser's auto operation," said the car's owner, Bill Latham, of Willow Springs. "This is the 1952 Henry J Corsair DeLuxe with a six-cylinder engine. It easily keeps up with traffic."

The orphan car picnic is a laid-back, family style afternoon event to which visitors bring their own food. (Soda is free.) There's no admission fee and it's held at a private picnic area in Aurora and sponsored by the Chicagoland Corvair Enthusiasts club. Contrary to what one might expect at an old car show, those who brought cars or came to see them at the Orphan Auto Picnic were from a variety of age groups--from young families to senior citizens.

The show here drew about 300 people and nearly 150 orphan cars. Those are autos or car model lines that haven't been made for at least the last 10 years. For instance a Ford Mustang doesn't qualify for entry to the event, but a 1960s Ford Falcon does.

Cars at the show ranged from Ford Motor Edsels and Chevrolet Corvairs to the tiny British 1956-61 Berkeley sports car with a three-wheel design and a license that read "Yes Jus 3." (A more popular four-wheel Berkeley also was made.)

"The three-wheel model never was officially exported to America," said the car's owner, Bill Elliott of Wauconda. "It gets more attention per dollar than any car made."

Parked near the Berkeley was another tiny car, the 1951 Crosley Super Sports

The Webb Boys
Volume advantage-

sports car made by another wealthy industrialist, Powel Crosley Jr., who also owned the Cincinnati Reds baseball team.

"The Crosley sports car did well in major races," said the Super Sports owner, Chicagoan Jim Welther. "There were many Crosley models, including a station wagon, and I've owned 30 of them."

Carolyn Hudon was just as proud of her 1971 Volkswagen Karman-Ghia, which she found "behind a barn in Pennsylvania 12 years ago." Hudon said she remembers when the 1956-74 Karman Ghia was a popular college car and said she owns nine of them "because my father wouldn't let me have one when I lived at home because there was no room in the driveway for it."

Also at the show were several Ferraris, including a zoomy 1969 Ferrari 365 GT coupe. This model was made from 1967 to 1971 and doesn't remotely resemble current Ferraris.

"Teenagers go crazy when they see this car's V-12 engine," said owner Bill Rosen, a Crete resident. "I often drive it and work on it myself because, after all, it's just a car despite its exotic nameplate. A Ferrari may seem out of place here. But, what the heck, this model qualifies as an orphan model."

One problem with most Chicago area summer car shows is that you see the same types of old cars at them.

"There typically are 1957 Chevrolets, various Corvettes and 1960s muscle cars such as Pontiac GTOs," said Claypool—a nationally known Corvair expert who operates the 'Vair Shop repair facility for Corvairs in Frankfort.

"Those shows are fine," said Claypool, who's also a veteran member of the Chicagoland Corvair Enthusiasts club. "But our club felt about a dozen years ago that it'd be fun to hold an event that drew orphan cars, besides Corvairs. Most folks never see these autos anymore, although older baby boomers, to name one group, remember many of them from their youth."

Chicagoland Corvair club members got busy contacting car clubs with a variety of orphan autos to see if they'd be interested in a general orphan car show. It also passed out fliers about the orphan show at old car shows. The first orphan car event was successful and word soon spread about it. It's become larger and more popular each year—although it's mostly a word-of-mouth show.

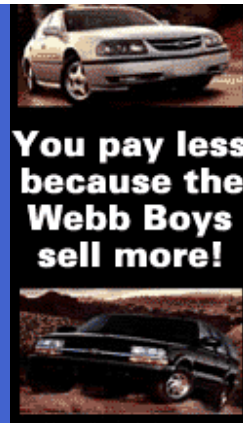
Claypool said many people are afraid to take their old cars to shows because the vehicles are in just average condition. But he said any auto in decent shape that qualifies for the Orphan Auto Picnic is welcome and that there's no car judging or trophies at the event.

"One nice thing is that nearly all the orphan cars are driven to the show from various Chicago area locations, whereas many Pebble Beach show cars are brought in enclosed trailers and are rarely driven," Claypool said.

"My 1950 Hudson with a six-cylinder engine moves right along with 70-mph tollway traffic," said Aaron DelMonaco, of La Grange. "Lots of people don't know that Hudsons won many NASCAR races in the early 1950s, when the race cars were in nearly stock condition."

Parked near DelMonaco's Hudson was George Nell's 1952 Hudson Hornet, which has an eight-cylinder engine. The Hornet was a legendary NASCAR race winner. There also was a rare 1946 Hudson pickup truck, which was a factory produced hybrid model derived from a Hudson auto. Owner Henry Richter of Batavia said Hudson sold the pickup only to its dealers so they could haul parts with it.

Naturally, there were many Corvairs at the event. One was a slick 1965 Monza coupe owned by Dennis Arendt, of Schaumburg. Arendt noted that Chevy made



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the 1965-69 version of the Corvair with a Corvette-style independent rear suspension to enhance handling.

The Corvair had a rear-mounted engine. Another Corvair owner at the show, Jim MacDonald, of Munster, Ind., said many younger people are surprised when he opens his car's "hood" and see no motor--just a front cargo area.

"They stare hard and then ask where the engine is," MacDonald said. "But Chevy built 1.7 million Corvairs from 1961 to 1969, so a fair number of people remember the car. It really was done in by the successful new Ford Mustang, not Ralph Nader."

Edsel owners at the show also said many recognize their car. It was made only from 1958 to 1960, but its unusual extroverted styling has led it to be featured in movies and television commercials.

"I still hear old jokes about the Edsel from those who recall when it flopped, but an increasing number of people respectfully regard it as a distinctive 1950s car," said Don Herring, a Winfield resident who brought his Edsel sedan to the show. "This car belonged to my wife's grandfather. It's a member of the family."

Al Teeple, of Zion, who brought a slick yellow 1954 Packard convertible, said a good number of people recognize the Packard because it was one of America's most prestigious cars and has been featured on the History Channel and displayed at many car shows.

One of the neatest cars at the show was the 1935 Auburn Speedster, which was produced by the same outfit that made the classic 1930s Duesenberg and Cord.

"I began buying classic 1930s cars in the 1960s and got this Auburn in 1964 for about \$350," said Paul TerHorst of Mundelein. "Modern cars just aren't as distinctive as the old ones."



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