



Remember When.....

A fun romp through the decades as we approach our club's 45th anniversary in July 2020.

Here is the last installment of Remember When. I hope you have enjoyed a look back at history as we approached our 45th anniversary as a club. The culmination of our celebration will be the picnic, scheduled for July 11th. See everyone there!

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Judges scrutinize 1955-57 Chevrolets entered in a private Classic Chevy Club exhibition in Springfield this weekend. Judges look for evidence of “elbow grease” and deduct points for regular grease stains or other imperfections in the gleaming vehicles, some of which came from as far away as California and New York for the event.

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Chevy classics gleam from the past

By Mike O'Brien

The News-Leader

One of the most unusual automobile shows ever assembled in the Ozarks is breaking up today.

The featured marque is familiar – Chevrolet – but this show spotlights only models manufactured in 1955, 1956 and 1957.

Even more unusual, however, is the fact that you haven't been invited.

Unlike most exhibitions of collectible hardware, this weekend's Classic Chevy Club gathering has been, for the most part, closed to the public. No advertising, no admission tickets, no souvenir programs.

It's not been an easy secret to keep. The 340 eye-catching vehicles have been difficult to hide.

CCC members and their families – most from the Midwest and mid-South, but some coming from as far away as California and New York – overflowed the sprawling Howard Johnson' Motor Lodge complex and claimed another 100 rooms at the adjacent Holiday Inn.

Appearance judging was conducted Saturday morning on a rear parking lot at North Town Mall, drawing curious glances and admiring stares from shoppers and passersby.

A drag strip near Rogersville was leased for private performance runs Saturday afternoon.

And many of the vehicles paraded through local drive-in restaurant lots in a Saturday night cruising session.

When cornered, the car-owners prove to be eager to talk about their four-wheeled treasures. "It's not that we're unfriendly," assures Dave Julian, president of the 52 member Springfield chapter of Classic Chevy Club, which boasts more than 63,000 members in all 50 states and 25 foreign countries.

"It's just that we're very serious about our cars, and what we try to accomplish by getting together like this isn't always understood by the public and doesn't really lend itself to accommodating big crowds."

Indeed, the Saturday morning judging is conducted amid a quiet air of almost solemn reverence.

The 163 cars entered in the "Show and Shine" competition are arranged in neat rows, their engine compartment hoods, trunk lids, passenger doors and even gloveboxes all standing open for inspection. The gleaming paint and sparkling brightwork turn the black asphalt parking lot into a brilliant patchwork quilt of color and chrome.

The show judges circulate slowly among the vehicles, talking in hushed tones and making notes on scoresheets carried on clipboards.

The cars are clustered by year of manufacture and by method of preservation:

*Factory Original, retaining at least 80 percent original parts.

*Unrestored Original, carrying no more than 30 percent non-original components.

*Restored Original, allowing extensive replacement of parts but with careful attention to authenticity.

*Contemporary, with one major change from original specifications permitted.

*Modified, with up to four modifications allowed.

*Custom, deviating five or more times from Chevrolet's original specs.

A 1,000-point-maximum scoring system is employed. Judges fill out a checklist that demands scrutiny of 63 aspects, ranging from overall paint finish (up to 60 points) to the legibility of the decal that lists directions for operating the jack (6 points tops).

The judges work in teams of three, poking into every nook and cranny and comparing notes about what they find. Lively discussions sometimes develop. Did a 1956 sedan have a cloth or vinyl headliner? What is the correct width of tire whitewalls for a '57 convertible?

Does the absence of a glassmaker's trademark prove a door-window is non-stock?

"Most of these cars are so near-perfect that you've really got to look for the little things in order to be able to score a winner," says George Greene of Independence, serving as a judge for the 1956 Restored entries, most of which, despite their 30-year age, look as if they just rolled off a new-car dealer's showroom floor.

Greene's attention is diverted by a moan from beneath a gray and white '56 sedan – the entry of Springfield CCC chapter president Julian.

"Ooooooooooooooh," comes the voice of another judge, whose legs are jutting from under the car. "oh my...". "Is that a Yes 'Oh my' or a No 'Oh my?'" Greene inquires.

"Come down here and see for yourself," replies his teammate, Martin Boehringer, who later reveals he was exclaiming in admiration of the attention Julian has lavished upon the car's undercarriage.

"His car looks better underneath than my car does on top," says Boehringer, who lives at Spanish Lake, a St. Louis suburb.

Is rating other cars an inspirational or depressing experience for the judges, most of whom also are car-owners and exhibitors?

"It usually inspires me," says Wayne Steinbeck, the third member of the judging team, who lives in Florissant, also near St. Louis.

I want to restore a '56 hardtop. I have one at home, waiting. I'm learning a lot now so I can apply it to my own '56. I'm seeing what the other guys are going right and learning from the other guys' mistakes."

Not all of the entrants, nor even the judges are, in fact, guys. Emma Krumm of Haysville, Kan., is among three women working as judges Saturday.

“When you grow up with a brother who’s a mechanic and then you marry a man who’s interested in cars, you can’t help but get caught up in it yourself,” explains Krumm, who, with her husband, Gene, owns three 1955 Chevrolets, including one she drives daily.

“My brother taught me about the parts and my husband actually got me to working on the cars – so eventually I started judging too. They break you in gently – start you out on Customs and Modifieds, where you just have to see whether it looks nice and is done tastefully. You have to work your way up to the Restored and Originals. It took me a while, but now they trust me.”

Joyce Reaves of Horn Lake, Miss., is another who adopted-or at least adapted to-her husband’s hobby. “He had a ’55 and kept trying to get me interested in it. I fought it as long as I could, but eventually I got hooked, too.”

Making her first round as a judge Saturday, under the tutelage of veteran judge Dennis Long of Council Bluffs, Iowa, Reaves takes some good-natured ribbing. “What do you think of that grille?” asks Long, testing Reaves after he’d given the front of the car a thorough inspection himself. “Well,” answers Reaves, poking a finger into the chrome grating to check for grime, “It looks clean.” “There you go again,” chides Long, “using those technical terms...”

Cleanliness virtually is a religion among Classic Chevy Club exhibitors. Many put in long hours Friday night and early Saturday washing and polishing their vehicles, inside and out, topside and bottom. Buckets and chamois cloths dot the motel grounds, along with store-bought containers of name-brand soaps and detergents – plus some bottles of home-brewed guarded secrets. One commercial product put to surprising use is Pledge furniture polish, which enhances the sheen on painted chassis underpinnings.

Looking over the Springfield activities this weekend is Doug Morehead, the 38-year-old Orlando, Fla., car enthusiast who started Classic Chevy Club in 1974. “We knew the club would get big,” says Morehead, who was in elementary school when 1955-56-57 Chevys were rolling off the assembly lines. “But we didn’t know it would get *this* big – or, frankly, that it would grow into this much work.”

Managing the club is a full time endeavor for Morehead, who is assisted by a staff of 40, a half-dozen of whom are in Springfield to help organize this show. CCC also has a busy parts business, and recently has gone into commercial car restoration – practicing for profit what the club preaches for fun.

One of the first restored vehicles to roll out of Morehead’s Florida shop is a 1957 Chevy convertible that will be given away after a year-long, countrywide raffle promotion. (The raffle is one CCC event that is open to the public. But the ticket price is \$5 each, while club members can buy chances for \$3 apiece.)

The brilliant red raffle prize is valued at \$40,000 – a price tag rivaled by many of the member-owned cars on display.

What is the allure of these cars that would prompt such investments and hard work? “Everybody has his own reasons for getting involved” says Morehead. “But it mostly comes down to the fact that these cars are classics, by any definition of the word.

“In 1954, Chevrolet didn’t offer a V8 motor. And, really, the cars weren’t very attractive – they had that ‘pregnant rollerskate’ look. “Then in ’55 the Chevys came out lowered six inches, with a V8 that made them fast and a new front suspension that made them handle well. People liked the way they looked, and they liked the way they went. “But by ’58 they’d added another 500 pounds, put in a different engine and made other changes that brought that particular era to an end.

“Chevy still makes fine cars,” Morehead says, “but there’s a certain magic about ’55-’57 that sets them apart. People recognize that, and that’s why this club has grown into what it is today.”

Classy plates for classy cars

In addition to demonstrating their mechanical skills, members of the Classic Chevy Club also showed off their cleverness in personalized license plates affixed to their cars in Springfield this weekend.

Bearing the colors of several states, some of the more memorable tags read:

NVMY 56 CRUZR 57 IMA 55 NIFTY-SIX SLIK 55

CRUZN 56 5T5 FAN URMV 56

The scholarly owner of a 1955 model confirmed its origin in Roman numbers: **MCMLV**.

And a racy-looking ’57 convertible bid a sassy **BYE-BYE** from its rear license plate.