

It's heaven

Auto aficionados gather to celebrate

By Tom Baer
staff writer

Diane Dodson might have been getting ready for a day at the beach. Among her beach things was a Styrofoam cooler of canned refreshment. "Have a soft drink," she said. "I'd offer you a beer, but it's warm and it's a little early for that anyway."

It was just before noon last Friday, and Diane and her husband Jerry were just settling in for a long weekend, not on a sunny beach but in the fluorescent glow of the lower level of Detroit's Cobo Hall, site of the 32nd annual Autorama — just about heaven for custom car zealots from across the nation.

The Dodsons, Farmington residents, had two beautifully restored cars, a 1928 Ford roadster pickup truck and a 1932 two-door Ford sedan, to add to the list of more than 500 gleaming motor vehicles on display for the three-day showing.

here for competition," said Jerry, who entered his cars in the Autorama's show class. "It's just the enjoyment of the thing . . . of having the old cars around."

"You use your old cars in the summertime and put 'em away in the winter," he said. "This (the Autorama) is a chance to see your summertime friends again."

Restoration of old cars is the avocation of Jerry, a white-collar Chrysler employee, and Diane, who works in a bank.

"My first car was a '31 Ford and I've been buying them ever since," said Dodson, 39. "I never was one for buying a new car when I could have an old one and do the same things with it."

The shiny black pickup, one of the famous Model-A Fords, is in mint condition, including the convertible top, a "cost-reduced" option that Henry Ford offered in 1928.

"Basket case" were the words Jerry used to describe the condition of the

truck when he bought it seven years ago.

"IT TOOK two trailers and three pickup trucks to get all the parts home," he remembered.

The 1932 sedan, whose chestnut brown paint comes from the Chrysler Corp., has been made into a "hot rod" by the inclusion of a 1977 302-cubic-inch Ford engine, an automatic transmission and oversize tires.

"We finished it in August and drove it to Oklahoma City and back," Dodson said, the pride showing in his voice. "We just like driving it around."

Jerry, a member of the Michigan Hot Rod Association, which helps sponsor Autorama, also likes drag racing. "I just like horsepower," he said.

He met his wife at a drag racing meet in Tulsa, Okla., in 1973.

Surprisingly, Dodson said he hasn't had that much trouble funding the restorations.

"I do everything myself except for

the painting," he said. "I do stuff for other people, and sometimes they pay me in old parts instead of cash. I don't have \$5,000 in my '32 Ford right now. There are people who have \$30,000 in the same kind of car."

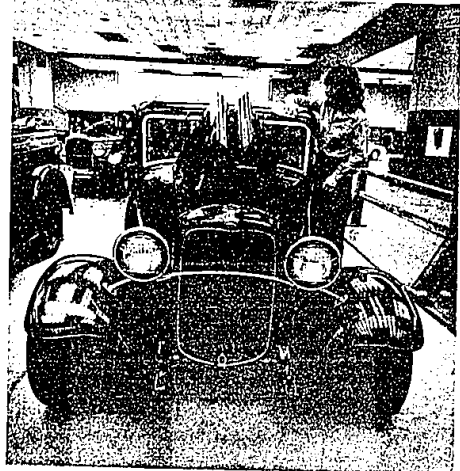
Dodson, who has judged entries in previous Autoramas, is a big fan of the annual event.

"If you're a car enthusiast, you shouldn't miss it," he said. "It has everything you would want in auto movies. It's not just hot rods."

ANOTHER AUTORAMA entry with a local flavor was "The Great Getaway," a sleek, low dragster, owned by Frank Targanski of Farmington. The race car, which finished a quarter-mile in 8.32 seconds — 163 miles an hour — at the Milan Dragway last summer, is powered by a 428-cubic-inch Dodge Hemi engine.

Worth about \$50,000, the dragster has several local sponsors, including

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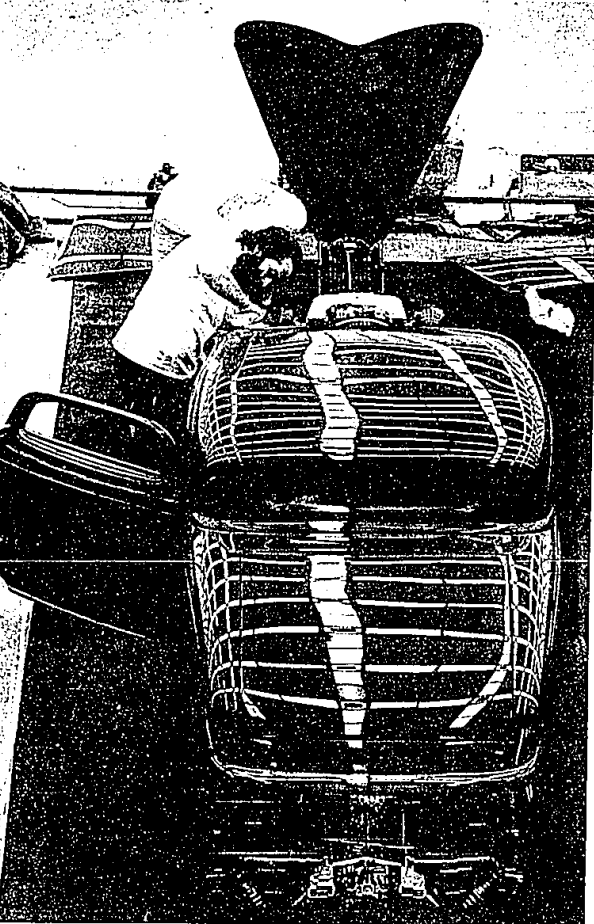
Diane Dodson runs a cloth over the 1932 Ford she and her husband Jerry showed at the Autorama last weekend.



Getaway dragster

The pride of the Milan Dragstrip, "The Great Getaway," a powerful dragster owned by a Farmington man, finished a quarter-mile in 8.32 seconds at 163 miles an hour during a run last summer. The dragster is powered by a 428-cubic-inch Dodge Hemi engine. It was one of more than 500 custom vehicles on display at the 32nd annual Autorama last weekend at Detroit's Cobo Hall.

Photos by
Randy Borst



A bearded Gary Weisner works on the engine of a 1934 Ford hot rod owned by Bob Reed of Poteau, Okla., last Friday in preparation for the Autorama custom car show at Cobo Hall.

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