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By Mary Rodriguez
staff writer

Joy riding has come a long way from a souped-up Chevy cruising Telegraph Road.

Today's casual commuters can cruise in style as romantic as a carriage ride on the back roads of Northville or as adventurous as ballooning at 3,000 feet above Kensington Metro Park. Cash in hand can make it happen — hot air ballooning, limousine rentals, carriage rides — even jet planes at your disposal.

Gordon Boring, who operates the Wicker Basket Balloon Center in Plymouth with his wife, Margaret, likes to take customers ballooning over the Highland, Milford and Brighton area.

"There's rolling hills and lakes, with lots of wildlife to look at — rabbits, deer, red fox," he said.

Although freezing temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns make winter the least desirable season for ballooning, Boring and other balloonists offer the service on an abbreviated schedule this time of year.

Baskets can hold two, four or six people, plus the pilot. While the experience takes three hours from start to finish, air time is about 1½ hours for a standard ride.

"Wind is a big factor. Anything over 10 knots, we don't fly," said Ray Pini Jr., who operates Captain Cutty and Crew with his father, Ray Sr.

'(Altitude) depends on visibility. Even tree top level is nice. You can see wildlife.'— Ray Pini Jr.,
Captain Cutty and Crew

and cousin Dave Pini, out of Rochester.

"Normally, we fly at about 2,500 or 3,000 feet; 12,500 feet is the legal limit without oxygen required for pilot and passengers," he said.

At 3,000 feet, passengers can see downtown Detroit, a distance of about 26 miles. At the high end, all of southeastern Michigan is visible, Pini said.

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The temperature is 3 degrees cooler for every 1,000 feet of altitude, Pini said — another reason why winter is a less desirable season for balloonists.

"Just bundle up warm and the overhead burner provides a little heat," Pini said.

Although passengers stand for the duration of the flight, Pini says they are too busy taking in the scenery to notice a lack of seats. Champagne caps the end of each balloon experience. Flight time is either at sunrise or an hour before sunset when wind speeds are the calmest.

Boring charges \$120 a person and has gift certificates available, which he says are very popular. Pini charges \$125 per person. Advance deposits are required.

EARTHBOUND joy riders might prefer tooling around town in a limousine, where choices range from Rolls Royces to Lincolns — equipped with every luxury imaginable.

Farmington Hills-based B & M Leasing has two stretch limousines, a Cadillac and a Lincoln, both with color TV, stereo, tinted windows, videocassette recorder, bar with champagne and a sun roof.

"Three hours is the minimum rental. Most (customers) have a destination in mind, but some just want to drive around town," said Doris Buzze, manager.

Customers with a destination are usually headed to hockey games, concerts, the theater or downtown restaurants this time of the year. And it's usually a special occasion, like a birthday or anniversary, she added.

"Business isn't bad, but it's mostly weekends now," she said. "It really heats up in May with proms, homecomings and weddings."

Six people are the maximum number Buzze will allow per car. The charge is \$35 an hour for the Cadillac and \$40 for the Lincoln, because it's bigger.

Classy chassis

Balloon to jet rentals give new meaning to 'cruising'



John Stanford and his horse Gravy have been involved in a lot of marriage proposals. Stanford's Steppin' Out Carriage in Northville has provided the romantic setting for guys to pop the question to their favorite gals.

STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

If someone just wants to cruise the metro area, that's OK. But trips out of town might incur additional expense, Buzze said.

Currier & Ives' famous winter scene with sleigh riders dashing across snowy hills and valleys makes winter look inviting. But locally, sleighing is a scarce option.

"We did offer sleigh rides, but now it's too icy. If we get a meltdown and then fresh snow, we may offer it again," said Margaret Johnson, spokeswoman for Greenfield Village.

John Stanford, who operates Steppin' Out Carriage in Northville, plans to add sleigh rides to his carriage service next winter. Meanwhile, he'll make do with his two single horse-drawn carriages.

"I have a two-seater carriage and an Amish two-seater courting carriage," said Stanford, who wears either Amish attire or a tuxedo to drive his customers to their destination.

"SOME GUYS rent a carriage to propose to their girlfriends," he said, adding that he can't really hear the conversation between passengers because of the clip clopping of horse's hooves.

A horseshoer by trade, Stanford got into the carriage business when he was asked to provide taxi service for a wedding, and then another wedding.

For four years, he operated a carriage taxi service on Monroe Street in Greektown, but discontinued it last year. Now he concentrates on his home turf — Northville, where he owns a 15-acre farm — and nearby communities, like Plymouth.

"They might want to go to dinner, or just ride by the historical park (in Northville). Some bring champagne," he said. "I've been all over."

Mid-January to the end of February is usually the slow season because of chilling temperatures, but hardy souls still request a carriage ride in winter, he said.

The city of Birmingham offered carriage service until the end of 1987, when Mary Quinn, owner of Crown Coach, was forced to close for financial reasons. Liability insurance and workers' compensation were too big a burden for the company, which operated four horse-drawn carriages Thursday through Sunday.

Her departure was preceded by Brookdale Carriages, owned by Alfred Stephens of Bloomfield Hills, who went out of business last summer.

John Hopkins has operated Banbury Cross out of Plymouth off and on in recent years. An allergy to horses has greatly curtailed his business, according to his friend, John Stanford.

IF YOU HAVE more than a Sunday afternoon drive in mind, Aircharter Service at Oakland-Pontiac Airport may be the answer to your transportation needs.

"We charge by the destination," said Valerie Oliver, office manager. "We can go anywhere in the continental U.S. and Canada."

The four-year-old company has aircraft ranging from a single engine plane to a Lear 24 jet, which can seat six people comfortably.

"Our clients lean to corporate since you're leasing the whole plane, not just buying a seat," she said.

But clients have chartered for whimsical things, like dinner at a Traverse City restaurant. Charges range from \$200 to \$2,000.

"It depends on where you're going and for how long," Oliver said. "The advantage over commercial airlines is that we can fly anywhere, not just to big cities where you generally have to rent a car to get to your destination."

"We go on demand. Anytime of the day or night, seven days a week."

Ultimately, riding in style is in the eye of the beholder. For the thrifty conscious, there's Rent A Jalopy, where cars can be leased on a daily basis for \$15.50 with the first 40 miles free. (It's 12 cents a mile after that).

Business is great, said an employee named Lucille, who had to cut short a conversation because a customer was waiting for service.

The business, on Telegraph north of Six Mile, has 80 cars for rent, most late 1970s/early 1980s models, all makes included.

R.U. Syrius

Karlos Barney

ANOTHER CASE OF CLERGY MALPRACTICE!



"It's Mr. Fenster, he's calling from Hell. He wants you to sue his Pastor."

San Diego is coast's best kept secret

By Iris Sanderson Jones

Q: Now that I've seen pictures of San Diego during the Superbowl, I'm thinking about taking my wife there for a few days after a business trip to Los Angeles this spring. What do you suggest we do?

CJC,
West Bloomfield

A: I was in San Diego for the first time a couple of weeks ago, and I think it is a great place to go for pleasure and relaxation, especially after the traffic jams of Los Angeles. Why not take the Amtrak train from either L.A. or Anaheim. You might even consider stopping for a few hours at San Juan Capistrano, one of the 21 Spanish missions established along the southern California coast 200 years ago.

The train will take you into Santa Fe station in the heart of downtown San Diego. (If you fly in, the airport is just across the bay from the harbor, a few minutes drive from the city.)

Your hotel choices, other than the usual chain hotels, are the brand new Omni San Diego in the very heart of

town, the high-rise Marriott overlooking the bay, the grand old Hotel del Coronado across the bridge on Coronado Island, or the new-old Horton Grand downtown.

A note about the Horton Grand: A creative hotelier tore down two old hotels, saved the doorways, cornices and other irreplaceable parts and rebuilt the old bricks and windows into a new "historic" hotel that is now the rage of the city. The other historic hotel in town is the U.S. Grant. All the above will cost more than \$100 a night, except the Horton Grand, which is only slightly less.

IT COSTS less to stay in the chain hotels, motels and bed-and-breakfasts in Mission Valley or in Old Town, both closer to the San Diego Zoo, Balboa Park and the beaches. Most of these places are within 10 minutes drive of the downtown city.

There is decent public transportation, but I recommend you rent a car at least part of the time. The best first-view of San Diego is from Cabrillo National Monument, high on a cliff at the end of Point Loma, a peninsula that wraps around the end of

San Diego Bay.

With a little imagination, you can picture Cabrillo and other Spanish explorers sailing their high wooden ships into the bay while exploring

the Pacific coast only 50 years after Columbus discovered America. Seeing a "living map" like that

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MICKY JONES

There's plenty of lush greenery to see in and around the botanical building at San Diego's Balboa Park.