

Motor City offers host of auto activities

Here's a sampling of Detroit-area events during American Automobile Centennial Week, June 16-23:

- June 16-Nov. 24: **The Car and the Camera**; automotive exhibit at the Detroit Institute of Arts; (313) 833-7900.
- June 17-22: **Antique Automobile Club of America**; auto show at Hyatt Regency, Dearborn; (313) 937-2497.
- June 18: **Automotive Hall of Fame**; dedication ceremony, time capsule burial, Automotive Legends and Leaders luncheon, Dearborn; (313) 832-1990.
- June 19-23: **Graham Owners Car Club**; auto show at Holiday Inn, Livonia; (800) DETROIT.

- June 20: **Greektown Cruise-In**; party atmosphere; antique and classic cars gathering to form "largest" drive-in ever; 1950s meal served; 800-DETROIT.
- June 22, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.: **The Great American Cruise-In**; Michigan State Fairgrounds; billed as "the largest gathering of antique and classic cars in history"; (888) AUTO-100.
- June 22, evening: **Centennial Gala Dinner**; Cobo Center; historic tribute to men and women who built automotive industry; Jay Leno shares car stories; \$200 per plate; call (313) 567-5004 for invitation.
- June 23, 1-3 p.m.: **Auto 100 Parade and Auto 100 Birthday Party**; parade of 2000

antique and classic cars through Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties ending at the Michigan State Fairgrounds; birthday cake, entertainment, car exhibits, kids' activities; (888) AUTO-100.

Other auto festivities and ongoing events:

- June 27: **Great North American Auto Race**; overnight stop in Southfield for expensive and exotic pre-WWII cars; finish line in Canada; (800) DETROIT.
- July 4 weekend: **Mini Grand Prix**; mini race cars driven by local celebrities; children's activities, live entertainment; New Center area; (800) DETROIT.
- July 19-21: **Oakland County Hot Air**

Balloon Festival; classic cars cruise the streets in Davisburg as the sky fills with hot-air balloons; (800) DETROIT.

- August 4: **Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance**; display of classic cars; Meadow Brook Hall, Rochester; (810) 370-3140.
- September 7-8: **Old Car Festival**; autos of the 1930s-1950s, dancing, singing, and food; Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village; (313) 271-1620.
- Through September: **National Automotive History Collection**; includes art exhibit celebrating the automobile; Detroit Public Library; (313) 961-4500.
- Ongoing: **Motor City Exhibition** at Detroit Historical Museum; interactive

displays and videos; (313) 833-1805.

- Ongoing: **Auto Baron Home Tours**; Henry Ford Estate, Fair Lane, (313) 593-5500; Edsel and Eleanor Ford House, (313) 884-4222; Meadow Brook Hall, (810) 370-3140; and Fisher Mansion, (313) 331-6740.
- Ongoing: **Motorists Hall of Fame and Museum**; new and vintage racing vehicles, hands-on displays; Novi Expo Center; (810) 349-7223.
- Ongoing: **Plant Tours**; walk through the Ford Motor Co.'s Wixom Assembly Plant; written requests only, call (810) 344-5358.
- Ongoing: **The Automobile in American Life**; exhibit at Henry Ford Museum featuring the 1896 Duryea; (313) 271-1620.



All in the family: Walt Norris and Colleen McDonald learn from each other.

STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HEWLEY

Auto dealers experience a changing job

BY RENEE M. SNOGLUND
SPECIAL WRITER

"The most dramatic change has been going from the image of an individual in a plaid suit with a cigar and feet on the desk to a business person seriously interested in the business," Walt Norris said about his profession.

Norris has been in the car business since 1959 and owns three dealerships: Livonia Chrysler-Plymouth, Century Dodge in Taylor, and Holiday Chevrolet in Farmington Hills.

A self-described "hip shooter," Norris said he's learned a lot about dealing with customers from his daughter, Colleen McDonald, the dealer principal at Holiday Chevrolet. "And I don't say that in nepotism," he added.

His most important lesson? "The most unreasonable people are the most easily converted with patience." Although Norris said he has mellowed over the years, it seems his daughter still has more patience.

"I'm a very patient person. He'll say I'm too patient," said McDonald. "When he sold cars in the late '60s and '70s, everything was different. Rather than, 'This is the way it is,' it's, 'How would you like it to be?'"

McDonald, who started as a dealership switchboard operator 14 years ago, makes sure her own dealership doesn't scribble on the "extra," like washing a car after every service or finishing a job ahead of schedule. "You want to go beyond their expectations," she said.

Brenda Massey also is the daughter of a

successful dealership owner. Her father, Don Massey, owns a national mega-dealership, Don Massey Cadillac, based in Plymouth.

Selling cars wasn't Massey's first career choice. She was director of nursing at a psychiatric hospital for several years. However, when her father suggested another family member become involved in the business, Brenda decided to give it a try.

"I promised myself I would do it for a year even if I hated it," she said. That was in 1987. She has been selling Rolls Royces and Bentleys ever since, and the last two years were record sales years.

"I really enjoy selling these cars because you meet people who have set goals for themselves and meet those goals," she said.

Like Colleen McDonald, Brenda Massey's selling style differs from her father's. "I could never be as flamboyant as he is," she said. "They broke the mold with him."

Massey admires her father's loyalty to his customers. "I have never heard my dad complain of a customer, even at home. I think that's why he's so successful."

When Irma Elder took over the dealership after her husband died in 1983, she discovered she enjoyed running Troy Ford and Jaguar of Troy. "What kept me on was the interest, the excitement."

Although Elder was one of the few

female dealership owners at the time, she said she experienced no discrimination. "When they see that you are not just a figurehead, that you are part of the organization, you earn their respect."

Elder believes women in car sales could learn one lesson from their male counterparts: "Rejection is not part of our world. We may talk to 10 customers and not sell a car."

Elder also concurs with McDonald and Norris that the entire nature of the dealership business has changed, has become more service-oriented. "Twenty years ago, there wasn't the competitiveness."

Russell Shelton was only 9 years old when his father, Bud, started a car dealership in 1958. "I don't know if I helped or hindered," he said of his early attempts at car washing.

Shelton, owner of Shelton Pontiac-Buick in Rochester, said selling cars is hard work.

"You've got to be up every day. This is hands-on. You can't run this by remote control. It used to be easier to sell a car. We used to be able to sell by the hood of the car."

What makes selling difficult? Paperwork, government regulations, and pleasing the customer, of course. "We've raised their level of expectation and now we have to live up to it," Shelton said.



Russell Shelton

Car lovers recall their first vehicles

BY RENEE M. SNOGLUND
SPECIAL WRITER

That sleek body, those soft leather seats, that four-in-the-floor transmission — ah, such sweet memories.

Judy Murphy of Birmingham hasn't forgotten her first car, a 1955 black Chevrolet Bellair convertible with red leather upholstery. "Whatever they had in 1955, it had," she said.

She went to a party the night she got it. "After I got there all I could think of was that car in the garage. I've never had a car that I've been so excited about."

Livonia's mayor, Jack Kirksey, loves cars. He's owned 33, including a 1957 Volkswagen he once drove through the South.

When he stopped for an oil change at a rural gas station, the overalls-clad attendants gawked. "I told them the car came from Germany, but that I didn't care for the German music. They told me I could always go and buy an American radio."

Kirksey's first car was a 1937 Chevy he bought in 1947 at age 17. He and his brother Bob drove it to Florida. On the way home, the brothers decided to take drive 100 miles, then switch.

Bob drove five tortuous miles through small towns, then turned the wheel over to Jack and drove in the back seat for some sleep. After driving only a half-hour, Jack hit the turnpike. "When I woke Bob up he couldn't believe we did 100 miles."

Paul Seaphorn of Redford Township also was 17 when he bought his first car, a green 1940 Ford. "The first gear was gone. I had to start it up in second. After school one day I got a ticket for drag racing. I went to court. The judge dismissed the ticket because he said you couldn't drag without first gear."



Proud owner: Now Livonia mayor, Jack Kirksey has always liked cars, including his first — this 1937 Chevy.

Did you know ... ?

BY MARY QUINLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

• In 1912, GM introduced the electric self-starter in its Cadillacs. This began the demise of the hand crank. More women began to drive.

• First parking meter: installed in Oklahoma City in 1936.

• What a pain it was to purchase fuel prior to the first gasoline station opening in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1912. Coal merchants, lumber yards and hardware stores sold gasoline.

• Firsts in Detroit: March 6, 1896, a car built by Charles Brady King appeared on the streets; June 4, 1898, Henry Ford demonstrated his first horseless carriage, the Quadricycle, a vehicle propelled by a four-horsepower, gasoline-powered engine; independent auto dealership established in 1898 by William E. Metzger; stoplight and stop sign appear in 1914.

• Diego Rivera, a Mexican muralist, captivated by Ford Motor Co.'s Rouge industrial complex, painted murals on four walls at Detroit Institute of Arts.

• For sale: brand new 1908 Ford Model T — \$800.

• In 1909 the Hudson Motor Car Co., named after department store magnate J.L. Hudson, was the world's largest producer of six-cylinder cars.

• The United Automobile Workers was formed in 1935.

• Arsenal of Democracy — the title earned by Detroit during World War II. Car plants produced 92 percent of the vehicles, 87 percent of aircraft bombs, 75 percent of aircraft engines and 56 percent of the tanks used by American military forces.

• What a race! In 1896, a Riker Electric Stanhope, cruising along at 24 mph, won the first auto race run on a track.

• Camden, N.J. is the site of the first drive-in theater in 1930.

• Chrysler Corporation was first with the tailgate window washer system.

• The Dodge Brothers became famous for building the first car to drive into and out of the Grand Canyon.

• In 1928, General Motors initiated the practice of an annual model change.

Drive-in restaurants serve up nostalgia

BY MARY QUINLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

Some summer nights the air stood still. Heat glazed the sidewalks. The kids on the block needed to cool off. Ditto, their parents. To the rescue: the A&W Drive-In.

Nine siblings led by mom and dad squeezed into the stuffy car. No one had to be called twice for the root beer run.

"When we were kids an A&W root beer was a treat. The ice-cold mugs really topped it off," said Cathy Diroff, one of the willing participants.

Diroff, a Westland resident, fondly recalls the days some 30-plus years ago when her dad drove the clan to the local A&W on Schoolcraft in Detroit.

"My favorite part was the taste of the root beer. We all liked the carhops who brought the drinks to the car on a tray and attached it to the window. I still go to A&W."

Orders for Big Burgers and foot-long hot dogs keep carhops

moving at the Plymouth Daly's Drive-In.

"We have a couple of boys who are carhops. They do real well," said Rita Grace, owner.

Grace, who has been in the Daly's restaurant business for almost 25 years, describes her customers: "If they're my age, they are bringing their kids, because that's what they did. People like (the car service). It's always worked well. I think it's a nostalgic thing."



BY MARY QUINLEY FOR CLOUTIER

The Big Boy craze began more than 60 years ago in Glendale, Calif. Closer to home in the late 1930s, three Elias brothers opened the Dixie Drive-In in Hazel Park.

"Thousands of people say they used to stop at Big Boy's. This is the place where (guys) met their first girlfriends. The drive-in was how this company really took off in the '40s and '50s," said Tony Michaels, Big Boy vice president of market-

ing. Pat Enderle of White Lake remembers the Big Boy near the Greenfield and Grand River intersection in Detroit.

"It was a great spot. It was the hangout, the place go if you had wheels or your friends did. Drive-in restaurants were a blast. They were a social event. Everybody was there. Going to Big Boy was the freedom of being on wheels — a passageway to adulthood," she said.

Enderle's 17-year-old son, Ryan, has a very similar attraction to a hangout his mom once frequented, sans curb service. Some things never change.

Usually I go if there's nothing better to do. I go with my friends. It's a place we can go to and stay without ordering a lot," the high school junior said.

A handful of Daly's and A&W drive-ins offering curb service are scattered around metro Detroit. Yet you'll have to travel to Albion for the only Michigan Big Boy with car window service.