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STYLE



Inda Gantsky/News Tribune

Ron Clark works to fix the hubcap on his 1938 Ford Coupe at his garage in Jefferson City. After the dents were hammered out, Clark repainted the logo onto the center using a small brush.

Slower way of life

Old Car Club shares history, love of restoration as the club evolves

By India Garrish

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What began in 1970 as a meeting of 36 car enthusiasts in a parking lot on Missouri Boulevard has over the years grown into the Mid Mo Old Car Club, now boasting around 120 members. On Saturday, MMOCC celebrated its 52nd annual Old Car Round Up and Show, which brings in old cars from all across Missouri.

Its members meet to exchange ideas, information and parts to fellow admirers of antique vehicles — and to restore versus replace, making a search for parts into an enjoyable pastime. MMOCC members aren't required to have a fully constructed vehicle to join the club, just an interest in old cars — and while this has evolved with the next generation, a sense of nostalgia is still embedded.

Stories on wheels

Each car club member who owns a vehicle makes an effort to log its background. Many have scrapbooks, histories taped on garage walls, photos of themselves in their younger years with the car. All of the vehicles come with stories.

MMOCC co-founder Wes Scott has found evidence suggesting his 1931 Dietrich Speedster could have originally belonged to Spirit of St. Louis pilot Charles Lindberg. Scott has collected photos ranging from the first photo of the car in May 1931 to one of he and his wife, Betty Scott, with the car present day.

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India Garrish/News Tribune

Josh Schubert, left, poses with his 1930 Ford Model A, which he worked on with mentor Wes Scott. The car was restored from just a chassis, engine and driveline to a drivable vehicle, after days working on it with Scott in his garage.

“Vehicles are a part of history; we can connect to a different way of life. These things are reminders of our parents, our grandparents, of the generations before us and the technologies of the past — a slower time, a simpler time, that you just don’t see today.”

Mid-MO Old Car Club member Josh Schubert

Car club:

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Member Stu Dunkel keeps a binder of each visit to the shop for his 1967 Ford Mustang, piecing together records of his car's timeline — as the original owner of the car, he remembers driving it down Route 66 during the Summer of Love in the 1960s and packing his children in the backseat for daily drives. Actor Steve McQueen's wife, Barbara McQueen, signed its air cleaner lid during an event, as Dunkel's car resembles the famed film "Bullitt."

Member Ron Clark could tell you all of the backgrounds of his three old cars — the difference in mechanics between old car horns, the reason the lock is on the passenger side of his 1938 Ford Coupe, and every feature of a flathead engine.

Even for those who bought the car as nothing more than a chassis, engine and driveline can appreciate its history. When Josh Schubert, 21, gained an interest in '60s Mustangs, Scott asked him "Yeah those are nice, but wouldn't you like to get a real old car?" That led Schubert to finding a 1930 Ford Model A and rebuilding it with Scott. He has enjoyed learning about the car and the reactions it gets when he drives it.

"Wherever I go, everybody asks 'What is that thing?' or 'What year is it?'" Schubert said. "If we really get to talking about old cars, you'd be absolutely astounded at what's become of them."



India Gantsh/News Tribune

Stu Dunkel goes through records of his 1967 Ford Mustang at his home in Jefferson City. The photo in the foreground shows him around 1977 with his car at a barn in Springfield.

seeing what the car has seen over the years. It is a reminder of when vehicles were built to be repaired, not replaced, and although safety standards have improved, a time when they were easier to maintain.

"Vehicles are a part of history; we can connect to a different way of life," he said. "These things are reminders of our parents, our grandparents, of the generations before us and the technologies of the past — a slower time, a simpler time, that you just don't see today."

that creates a challenge for the younger generation — a car that cost \$3,000 30 years ago might cost \$25,000 today. He said there's a "continual churn" in the car industry, figuring out what will be valuable in the years to come and investing in that. But, he believes, the car club is still designed for them.

"When I joined the club, all the members were my age. Today, when I go to a club meet-

ing, all the members are my age," he laughed. "When we bought (the '67 Ford Mustang), it was designed for the 25 year old. In my opinion, this is still designed for a young person; they just can't afford them anymore."

This points back to the appeal of restoring parts of a car to make the whole. Schubert bought his '30 Model A for \$800 on Facebook Marketplace and has added enough parts to put 2,000



India Gantsh/News Tribune

Nate Fuller stands in front of his 1957 Chevrolet Belair showing a shirt, which also features a Belair. In this Aug. 19 photo, the '57 Chevy had been painted and some modifications had been made, but a month later, it was on the road and ready for Saturday's MMOCC car show.

miles on it since last spring. He said to be involved as a younger person, it has to be more than a hobby.

"It takes a lot of enthusiasm; a lot of time and devotion to work on these things," Schubert said. "You gotta do maintenance, and some things are fairly odd. I think the guys in the club really like to see our enthusiasm."

Fuller added: "There's a difference in being interested in a car because they think it's pretty and being interested enough to own one, especially at these prices."

There are now categories at car shows for vehicles built in the

1990s, which means more young people can participate. And while at one time the women who participated in car shows were just wives of car owners, there are now more female car owners moving over to the left seat and as engineers and owning holdings in collectible cars.

Schubert hopes the club continues evolving and growing, because when the rubber hits the road, it's a great source of community.

"They're incredibly supportive and fantastic friends," he said. "Everybody wants to help everybody out; that's the way they were raised."

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astounded at what's become of them."

Rewing up the next generation

The shared passion for old cars creates community. Members identify each other by what cars they drive, and they meet every weekend for coffee and to talk cars at one of their shops. They swap parts and tackle mechanical problems one member is facing, challenging their ideas or offering advice from experience.

"You get to know a lot of people," Fuller said. "A lot of times, it's people you would've never met before."

As long as old cars can run, you'll find clubs at car shows across the country, swapping parts, in cross-country drives chugging along backroads. But in other ways, they have changed — like making resto-mod updates (which preserve the original style of a car while adding newer modifications).

Similar to making a resto-mod car, clubs are keeping what's classic while making some updates for younger members.

Many of the car club members agree: The future of clubs is in the next generation. MMOCC hosts a \$1,000 scholarship opportunity — that is announced during its yearly car show — for people enrolled in a technical school, community college or a four year college who show interest in the automotive field.

Schubert, one of the youngest members of the club and who in 2020 was a recipient of the scholarship, said he sees interest growing and evolving among people his age — for example, he said female car enthusiasts on apps like TikTok favor JDM's, or Japanese Domestic Market vehicles.

Dunkel recognizes the prices for old cars has gone up, and

Imagining a different way of life

There is an understood slowness to old cars: Some of them don't surpass 40 mph on the highway; sometimes they're unreliable and don't travel well. But for many MMOCC members, their slowness harks back to a slower way of life. As children in a post-World War II era, some remember building their cars out of necessity. One member remembers his dad letting him and his friends search for parts in a junkyard — they were allowed to build a car "as long as they made it safe."

Nate Fuller grew up with a generational love of cars. His grandfather had a vast knowledge of car history and his father had two 1957 Chevrolets in his Illinois home. Now, he has built several '57 Chevy's, reselling some of them, and goes on every car cruise he can during the summer. He recently bought a Chevy for \$1,000, complete with a smashed front end, a broken windshield and no seats — today, it's in one piece and painted cherry red.

Scott said the goal often with his cars is to fix the mechanics and paint them, but he will occasionally leave the original paint to "get it roadworthy, but still leave it just like it came out of the barn."

"There's a lot of people who want to look at the car to see how things were originally," he said "Imagining what it was like back then." Schubert said that's what can be so attractive to the people who remember the cars from their childhood and history buffs like himself. Sitting behind the wheel of a rumbling Ford, you're