



Cruising

For one magic day in Detroit, true enthusiasts

IT HAS BECOME THE ULTIMATE CELEBRATION OF AMERICA'S CENTURY-LONG LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE AUTOMOBILE; DETROIT'S WOODWARD DREAM CRUISE HAS NOW GROWN INTO THE WORLD'S LARGEST SINGLE-DAY AUTOMOTIVE EVENT. HELD OVER THE SAME WEEKEND AS THE FAMED PEBBLE BEACH CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE, IT IS THE BLUE COLLAR, GRASS ROOTS COUNTERPOINT TO ITS ESTEEMED CALIFORNIA COMPETITOR. THIS IS NOT ABOUT WHITE GLOVED JUDGES AND STRATOSPHERIC AUCTION RESULTS. RATHER, IT'S AMERICAN-STYLE CAR CULTURE AT ITS MOST FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL.

Even an afternoon downpour of almost biblical proportions and the prospect of \$3 a gallon gasoline did little to dampen the spirits of the estimated 1.2 million attendees who, along with 40,000-plus vehicles, clogged Woodward Avenue. The party snaked from the heart of the Motor City to 16 miles north to Pontiac

with most of the activity centered on the northern Detroit suburbs of Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge, Huntington Woods, Berkley, Royal Oak, and Birmingham.

Established 11 years ago, the Woodward Dream Cruise started as a one-time fund-raiser for a children's soccer field, but in the years since, it has

grown to the point that while officially a one-day event, cruisers from all over North America arrive up to a week early to stake out their spot on Michigan's legendary Woodward Avenue. Back in its '60s heyday, Woodward Avenue was the clandestine testing ground for the performance gurus at all of the Motor



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WOODWARD

invade the city that put the world on wheels

City's manufacturers, which helped to cement its reputation as Ground Zero of the musclecar era. Such beasts as the original Royal Bobcat Pontiac GTO, cars that helped define the breed, were spawned here as well.

This year, the festivities unofficially kicked off on Friday evening when Ford unveiled a new Chip Foose creation, the Stallion, part a line of limited edition musclecars based on the current generation Ford Mustang. This was followed by a charity auction on eBay of a reproduction of a '32 Ford Dearborn Deuce Convertible,

immortalized by the Beach Boys in Little Deuce Coupe, which was followed by a charity concert headlined by America's favorite surf band.

Rather than attempt to crash the Ford party, we were quite content to stake a spot on the second floor balcony at the Birmingham Borders book store, where cruisers stopped in front of our "reviewing stand" and allowed us to snap their picture. It should be noted that this particular Borders has an outstanding automotive book section, quite possibly the best we've encountered in any book store not specializing in automotive books.

ONE OF EVERYTHING

Saturday dawned cloudy, yet cruisers were out in force at sunrise while the lawn chair brigade staked out their favorite vantage points to view the range of cars and trucks cruising by. The Woodward Dream Cruise is best typified by the old adage, "run what you brung," as you would find everything from rust bucket Pintos to million dollar hot rods with everything in between, cruising Woodward Avenue side-by-side. An early morning shower certainly put a damper on things and kept the initial crowds well below the expectations established in



prior years, but by noon the sun was shining brightly and both cruisers and spectators were out in force.

While all of the OEMs had a major presence along Woodward Avenue (Chrysler and GM) or nearby (Ford), the true spirit of the Woodward Dream Cruise is the incredible variety of special interest cars that form the backbone of the event. In Ferndale, at 9-mile, Fords and Mustangs especially, ruled the roost. In fact it was there that we spied the car that can arguably lay claim to the birth of the modern musclecar, a 5.0-liter '79 Ford Mustang, this one resplendent in its unique silver, orange and black Indy Pace Car trim, a one-owner car owned by Al Rogers.

Walking north on Woodward we encountered what was probably the most unusual car on display, a 1947 Chrysler Saratoga Zippo lighter car. First built in 1947-48, it disappeared



in the '70s and was recreated in 1999 to mark the company's 65th anniversary and commemorate the 50th birthday of the missing original. A running and driving work of the commercial customizer's art, it was quite a sight to see cruising up and down Woodward.

Between 12- and 13-mile, alongside the cemetery was, appropriately enough, a collection of ghoulish professional cars, complete with coffins and corpses. Also along the same stretch were several Mopar clubs where we encountered an ultra-rare, one-owner '67 Dodge Charger "White hat" special, red with a black vinyl top, owned by Brian Veit. This car was so well documented that Brian had, as part of his presentation, a photo taken back in the '60s, when he was only five years old.



ATTENDING THE 2006 WOODWARD DREAM CRUISE

With the third Saturday in August now established as the official Woodward Cruise Day, you can start making your plans right now to attend next year's event. Mark August 19, 2006 on your calendar.

As can be expected at an event that draws more than one million people, finding a hotel room is always going to be an issue, so book early. The official Woodward Dream Cruise web site woodwarddreamcruise.com/ has a helpful link to visitor

The intersection of Woodward and 13-Mile was dominated by a massive Mopar presence as vintage Mopar and AMC (who had their own circle of honor this year) hot rods vied for attention with contemporary SRT musclecars from Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep. Just north of 13-Mile, Chevrolet used the occasion to show off a collection of HHRs, hoping that the car will garner the same support from enthusiasts that made the PT Cruiser such a success. And the Blue Oval Boys had staked their claim in Birmingham north of 14 mile, showing off a collection of classic Ford muscle dating back to the immediate post war

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era when hot rodding, as we know it, was born. Late in the afternoon the skies opened up again and some vintage iron, some of which had probably never seen a drop of rain, was caught in the monsoon. It was quite a sight to see the die-hard cruisers driving their works of art through a storm that may have seemed as if they were driving through a car wash.

NOT EVERYONE IS A FAN

While the Woodward Dream Cruise has been an unprecedented success, it is not without its detractors, mostly local residents who believe that it's not worth the traffic, noise and inconvenience to their lives. Several hot spots of discontent have surfaced, most notably in Ferndale around 9-Mile where a theater marquee proclaimed "Welcome Cruisers, Thanks For Nothing! Woodward Residents & Businesses."

The other area of discontent is voiced by long-time cruisers who feel that the car manufacturers and the supplier community, both with long-stranding roots in the area, have usurped the true sprit of the Woodward Dream Cruise with

ABOVE LEFT: From our vantage point on the balcony of the Borders in Birmingham, a great place to watch the cruisers while sipping a latte [A WHAT?! — Ed.], several cruisers stopped to allow us to get some photos on Friday night.

MIDDLE TOP RIGHT: In walking between 12- and 13-Mile, a stretch loaded with Mopars, we encountered Brian Veit's '67 Dodge Charger White Hat Special, a car that's been in his family since new.

MIDDLE BOTTOM RIGHT: This full-sized Chrysler ragtop illustrates that anything goes on Woodward on Saturday morning just after the showers stopped.

BOTTOM RIGHT: At the Hot Wheels booth we spied this ultra clean '65 Ford Galaxie ragtop sporting a teardrop hood.



information. You can also use travel portal web sites such as travelocity.com, expedia.com, orbitz.com, priceline.com along with the major hotel brand web sites to book rooms up to a year in advance. If flying, rather than driving, Detroit is a Northwest hub so they will have the most available flights (bankruptcy permitting). But to get the full benefit and effect of attending the Woodward Dream Cruise, consider driving or trailering your car. Several car clubs organize caravans to the event; a search on Google is sure to turn up one that will make sense for you.



their massive exhibits and attendant hospitality tents. In talking with some cruisers, it was apparent that they resented some of the interlopers who they felt were there just for free food and booze and whose presence added nothing, and just made it even more difficult for the real enthusiasts to have the chance to see everything in a day.

And with massive local and national coverage, the Woodward Dream Cruise provides a valuable vehicle for the anti-car lobby. In this case it was the tree-huggers at the Sierra Club who organized a parade of hybrid-powered Civics and Priuses to take their message in front of the TV cameras. They got a big thumbs-down from the spectators lining both sides of Woodward Avenue and by early afternoon they were gone.

In an event of this size and scope, law enforcement had a very visible presence yet for the most part, kept a low profile during the day and into the early evening. But starting at 9 PM, the motorcycles corps comes out in force to sweep Woodward clear of cruisers and by 10 PM the street is virtually deserted, with activities moving to the bars, side streets and private parties. If the residents really have a beef with the way things are organized, is that it is hard, with several key streets and intersections blocked off, to get to their homes if they're located within five blocks on either side of Woodward. ■



ABOVE: Not everyone is enamored with the idea of the Woodward Dream Cruise. Some local residents wish that it would all disappear.

BELOW: Part of the huge police presence. On Friday and Saturday night they had Woodward cleared of cruisers by 10 PM.



As the sun started peaking out from the clouds, more musclecars hit Woodward including this later Hurst Olds colonade hardtop. Check out the vintage Ford cop car heading north on Woodward in the background.