





**FAR LEFT:** Hyundai's director Bob Stephenson, who is working on their upcoming Genesis RWD sedan, is a Cars and Coffee regular, and is shown here behind the wheel of his 1969 Torino Cobra fastback. **CENTER:** Flawless 1969 Camaro looks right at home among the exotics and sports cars. **LEFT:** GTOs are a staple of Cars and Coffee; here is beautifully restored 1966 owned by Doug Watt.



# CARS AND COFFEE

Every Saturday morning Southern California's collector car royalty assembles

**TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD TRUESDELL**

**THE COLLECTION OF ZIP CODES THAT MAKES UP ORANGE COUNTY IN CALIFORNIA IS AMONG THE RICHEST IN AMERICA. COMBINE THIS WITH A CULTURE THAT WORSHIPS THE CAR AND YOU HAVE ALL THE INGREDIENTS IN PLACE FOR A SPECIAL KIND OF WEEKLY CAR SHOW.**

For more than five years, Orange County's musclecar connoisseurs, along with car junkies of every possible stripe, gathered each Saturday morning at the crack of dawn at a small strip mall overlooking the Pacific Ocean south of Newport Beach, and made the weekly Crystal Cove a legendary event (Musclecar Enthusiast, September 2003). Unfortunately, the shopping center's management didn't think it was such a good idea and in the fall of 2006 withdrew the welcome mat, forcing the group to find a new home.

Into the breach stepped Freeman Thomas, Ford's head of Advanced Design, and John Clinard, who represents Ford's Public Affairs efforts on the West Coast. Together they offered the group a new home, the slightly less picturesque parking lot of their offices (which is also the U.S. home of Aston Martin, Jaguar, Land Rover, and Volvo, along with Mazda in a separate building across the parking lot) about 10 miles inland, just off of Interstate 5, north of the Irvine Spectrum Shopping Center. Ford controls their own facility and could hold the event without interference, and in September 2006,



**FAR LEFT:** This 1969 Z28 Camaro looks like it's ready for the grid at Mid-Ohio. **CENTER:** A 1964 Mercury Comet, done up East African Safari Rally style. **LEFT:** Coke bottle Chargers are always welcome, especially this black 1969 model, looking picture-perfect with its Magnum 500s and redline tires. **ABOVE:** This past August Cars and Coffee was the host of the largest gathering of Ford GTs ever, part of the annual national meet. That's designer Camilo Pardo's personal white Ford GT in the foreground. Over 100 Ford GTs were part of the festivities.



**TOP LEFT:** This 1965 GTO “El Camino” caused a double take. **TOP RIGHT:** E-bodies are a Cars and Coffee staple – check out this spectacular 1971 ‘Cuda convertible. **CENTER LEFT:** When Chrysler arranged for the new Challenger to make a Cars and Coffee appearance, word leaked out and it was surrounded by several vintage Challengers, including a Plum Crazy 426 Hemi hardtop. Dodge could have sold 500 copies that morning, one for each spectator. **CENTER RIGHT:** Ford’s Director of Advanced Design, Freeman Thomas, is not adverse to bringing out some real eye candy from the Ford garage, in this case the 2005 Shelby GR-1 concept, once expected to be the successor to the Ford GT. **LEFT:** Here’s a real sleeper, a turbocharged Buick Regal, basically a Grand National in a plain wrapper.

Cars and Coffee was born.

While the location can’t compare scenically to real estate overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and the noise from the southbound traffic on nearby Interstate 5 is a somewhat intrusive guest, everything else is just about perfect. The event took some time to gather steam, but now, more than a year later, more than 300 cars make an appearance each week. And while some of the attendees are regulars, they typically own multiple collector cars — among them hot rods, musclecars, and exotics — so the mix is constantly changing. With the possible exception of long-standing events like Pebble Beach, and high-profile auctions, you’re not likely to see such an eclectic group of high-quality cars at any one place at any time, certainly not on a regular basis each and

every Saturday morning.

Throw in the fact that the area is home for major facilities for virtually every auto manufacturer marketing vehicles in the US, whose many employees own some really interesting vehicles themselves, and you have all of the ingredients for one mighty fine car show, making Cars and Coffee one of the world’s most exclusive show and shines.

And even though it’s held on Ford’s property, it’s anything but a Ford-specific event. Car culture notables like Overhaulin’s Chip Foose, racing legend Dan Gurney, Tonight Show host Jay Leno, and Car Crazy’s Barry Mequiar have been sighted prowling the grounds.

“Cars and Coffee is all about the cars,” says Ford’s Clinard. “And while spectators are always welcome, this is an opportunity where all sorts of car

enthusiasts can bring out their cars to share with other enthusiasts, enjoy what others bring, no matter what is their particular interest.”

If you’re a petrol head and are planning a visit anytime soon to Los Angeles, Cars and Coffee is an essential element to any travel itinerary. The location, 7905 Gateway Blvd. in Irvine (which can be found online using Mapquest or Google Maps), is just minutes from John Wayne/Orange County Airport and is about an hour south of Los Angeles International (given that traffic is considerably lighter before sunrise on Saturday than it would be during the week at rush hour). For additional information on Cars and Coffee, Donut Derelicts and other Southern California automotive events visit Dave Lindsay’s web site, SoCal Car Culture at [socalcarmaculture.com](http://socalcarmaculture.com). ■