

# Cruisin'

## The Hot New Trend

text and photography by Tom Shaw

**A** couple years back, we reported on the trend back to street-driven musclecars in a cover story we called, "Driving Power." Now, a new but related trend is exploding across the country. It's called cruisin'.

Cruisin', which usually means attending informal parking lot shows, is the hottest trend to hit the car scene since overhead valves. In the last five or so years, local cruise nights have spread like wildfire. Some, like Detroit's gigantic Woodward Dream Cruise or the Scottsdale Arizona Pavilions (200-400 cars), are big, but most are smaller—say 50 cars or less.

Cruisin' is here big time. Look at these facts:

- The largest car-related event in the world (to our knowledge) is the Woodward

Dream Cruise (750,000 people last year).

- Virtually every city and town has one or more cruises.

- More people attend cruises than car shows.

Because they're local, informal and inexpensive, cruise nights have drawn a strong turnout from a broad cross-section of the car hobby. Typically, the ever-popular musclecars are joined by classic T-Birds, rods, customs, 1950s cars, modified street machines and ordinary passenger cars of all years that managed to survive. We find that most musclecar enthusiasts prefer the high-performance iron from the 1960s, but they still enjoy looking at the other cars.

One aspect of cruising that we feel is very good for the hobby is that it gives car owners

*What do you do when you want some great weekend car action without the hassle and expense of traveling to a big club's nationals? Easy. You go cruisin'.*

a good reason to get their machines out of the garage. A few years back, after the musclecar boom had cooled down, there were a lot of guys with great cars who had been active in the show circuit for several years, but felt that the show thing had kind of run its course. Looking for a new type of excitement, cruisin' was just what the doctor ordered. It's quick, close by, very casual and there's no schedule to keep.

So, now that we've told you that cruisin' is a hot new trend, we thought we'd tell you where some of the biggest and best cruisin' hotspots are. Keep in mind that this is just an introductory article, and we're showing you some highlights. Cruisin' is going on all across the country and this is just the tip of the iceberg.

### OLD TOWN, KISSIMMEE, FLORIDA

**Where:** Old Town, one mile East of Interstate 4 on US Hwy. 192, Exit 25A Kissimmee, FL (near Disney)

**When:** 1:00 PM to 8:00 PM every Saturday night, year-round. Cruise at 8:30 PM

**Info:** (904) 396-4888

This unique cruise has been growing for almost 10 years. It's open to 1972 and older cars in good condition. Cars show up for a parking lot show on the grounds, then at 8:30 they line up for a spin down Old Town's brick-surface Main Street. The event is simulcast on an AM radio station, appropriately named WGTO. Don "Big Daddy" Garlits has

been known to show up and take his place among the cruisers. This is a fun event that continues to grow.

Parking and admission to Old Town is free, and in addition to the cruise there are 75 specialty shops, eight restaurants and 13 amusement rides.



### Scottsdale Pavilions, Scottsdale, Arizona

**Where:** McDonald's at the Pavilions Shopping Center, 9140 E. Indian Bend Scottsdale, AZ 85256

**When:** 5:00 to 10:00 PM every Friday night, year-round

**Info:** Chris Gaughan, McDonald's manager (602) 443-0080

Most people call it simply "Scottsdale," named after the Phoenix-area suburb in which it happens, but this cruise by any other name would be just as incredible. Every Saturday night great cars from across the area head for Mark Kramer's Rock and Roll McDonald's. As the sun prepares to drop out of the Western sky and slip behind the desert mountains, the huge parking lot is transformed into a kaleidoscope of America's greatest cars. One by one they arrive and find their place, and by sundown the huge parking lot is alive with amazing cars of all kinds.

"It started out as just a bunch of gearheads bringing their cars out and it evolved into what the *Arizona Republic* [newspaper] and the local CBS affiliate here call one of the top-five things to do on a Saturday night in the Phoenix area," says Mark Kramer, owner of the Rock and Roll McDonald's that hosts the big cruise.

"The first night," Mark remembers, "maybe 10 or 12 cars showed up, the second night maybe 20, and about 90 days later we had 150-200 cars coming."

Now it's blossomed into one of the premier events of its kind anywhere in the country. On a nice evening there will be around 300 or more top cars and close to 5,000 people walking up and down the rows looking at the cars.

"I've never seen anything like this anywhere, ever," says John Jendza, a.k.a. Top Hat John, a popular Detroit columnist and TV com-

mentator who we ran into during our visit. "I've never seen this kind of quality, this many automobiles." Coming from a Motor City native who's been in the car scene all his life, that means something.

There are some good reasons why the Scottsdale cruise has grown so large. For starters, it's a very family-friendly atmosphere. The location is on the Salt River Maricopa Pima Indian Community and that means there's no alcohol, no firearms and no profanity.

Cruise founders worked with Mark to put in place fair and reasonable rules that are good for the event.

Off-duty police officers handle security and two guys work the parking lot control, making sure the right kinds of cars are out there.

"We try to discourage the wrong kinds of vehicles," Kramer explains. "We don't want lowriders or mini-trucks, we don't want the guys with the boom boxes and the bumping-up-and-down kinds of cars."

Other rules:

- "For Sale" signs are allowed in a car's seat, but not in the window.

- Cruisers are allowed to save one spot per car until 6:00 PM.

They're simple rules, but they're enforced and they're working. Naturally, that's been good for McDonald's business.

Says Kramer, "It's made us the busiest McDonald's in the country on a Saturday night. The car show accounts for 15-20 percent of my monthly sales."

Tom Kelley, one of the cruise's patriarchs, has seen engineers from GM's nearby Mesa proving ground show up in prototypes—a 502 big-block Corvette or Suburban.

Scottsdale is one of the best-run and all-around best cruise nights we've seen.

## Top-Ten Reasons That Cruisin' Is Hot

**1. You Actually Drive Your Car.** At some shows, especially far away shows, a lot of cars back off the trailer, back into the parking space, then go back into the trailer after the show. Not so with cruisin'. You drive there and back, and maybe take one of those impulsive detours to enjoy the sound of the exhaust, the feel of the steering wheel in your hand and the thumbs-up from onlookers.

**2. Cars Galore.** There are all kinds of cars at cruise night—plenty of restored musclecars, plus rods, 1950s dreamboats, street machines and modifieds, customs, and everything in between. It's a diverse crowd.

**3. Save Your Vacation.** You don't have to block out a week's vacation to get there and back. It's local, so just show up and enjoy, and save that vacation for a trip to the mountains or the beach or (wince) painting the house.

**4. The Price Is Right.** There's no road trip, no \$95-a-night motels and no 11-mpg dually pulling your trailer. You can have some serious fun without the serious price tag.

**5. No Club Politics.** There's usually no judging so there are no hard feelings about who won trophies and who didn't. Just show up, admire the cars and let others admire yours. What could be more simple?

**6. Leave Early And Stay Late.** You're on your own schedule, so get there whenever you want and leave in time to catch the movie if you want. It's entirely up to you.

**7. Buy and Sell.** Cruise nights bring out some great cars that you'd probably never see otherwise. We've seen some real sweethearts for sale, too. Since cruise night draws car enthusiasts, it's only logical that this is a good place to buy or sell.

**8. Feedback.** One of the most gratifying things about owning a musclecar is the response that it draws from others. There's nothing like watching someone's face light up when they see your car and get flooded with great memories. You hear from a lot of non-club enthusiasts who wouldn't attend a club show.

**9. Just Like The Good ol' Days.** You used to hang out at the drive-in with your pals. You still do.

**10. Good Clean Fun.** You could be snorting \$100 worth of nose candy a night, or gambling your life's savings away. But rather than get you off the street, cruisin' puts you on the street, and in this case, that's where good things happen.



**Woodward Dream Cruise**  
**Woodward Avenue, Detroit, Michigan**

**Where:** Woodward Avenue, Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge, Huntington Woods, Berkley, Royal Oak, Birmingham and Pontiac, Michigan

**When:** Saturday, August 15, 1998  
**Info:** Hot Line (888) 493-2196

This is the Big Kahuna. We've covered the Woodward Dream Cruise in *Musclecar Review* since its debut in 1995. Naturally, being in the heart of Motor City, zillions of cars of all types participate.

Along with the cars, each of the cities along the 12-mile route has a full day of activities and events planned. Car shows, live music, street dances, celebrity appearances, car-related displays, live TV and radio broadcasts, and just about every other kind of activity takes place during this beehive of excitement. Drawing an estimated 750,000 people last year, this is the mother of all cruises.

**Graffiti Night, Onawa, Iowa**

**Where:** Main Street, Onawa, IA

**When:** June 20, 1998

**Info:** (712) 423-2134-days  
 (712) 423-3837-evenings

Graffiti Night, now in its 14th year, was one of the pioneers of the cruisin' trend. There are no trophies, no judging and no schedule. Just bring your car, whatever it may be, and take your place among 500 or so others who come from the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois and sometimes farther. Onawa, Iowa, a small farming town of about 3,000, boasts the "Widest Main Street in the USA." The cruise started out at Michael's, a local drive-in just outside town, but it quickly outgrew it and had to move to the more spacious Main Street. Graffiti Night enjoys a casual, laid-back atmosphere.



**Cruisin' USA!**  
**MCR's New Sister Magazine**

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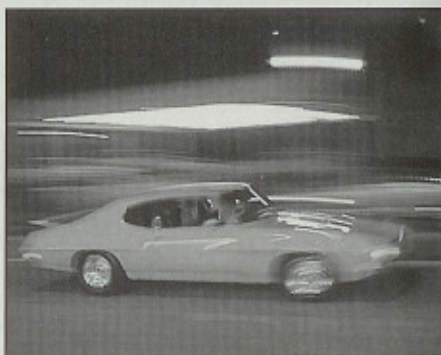
is the first magazine to capture the fun, flair and excitement of cruise night. In each issue we visit top cruise spots from across the country, sample the local cuisine and dialect, and bring you a thorough report on the cars, the people and all the unique elements that make each cruise special.

Also inside:

- *Cruisin' USA Allstars*—full-color features of the Kings of the Cruise.
- *Cruisin' Country*—color travelogues to spots of particular interest via routes less-traveled.
- *Top Ten Cruisin' Wheels* and other surprise features with a unique nostalgic twist.

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**Turkey Rod Run, Daytona Beach, Florida**

**Where:** Daytona International Speedway

**When:** November 27-28, 1998

**Info:** (904) 255-7355

Billed as "The Southeast's Biggest Car Show & Swap Meet," the famous Turkey Rod Run is no turkey at all. It's just called that because it happens the weekend after Thanksgiving. Inside the internationally famous Daytona Speedway, the infield is packed with over 5,000 rods, musclecars, customs—you name it. The Turkey Rod Run