

Cool cars on display in North Tonawanda

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Tonawanda, ran the concession stand, with proceeds going to its food pantry and groceries program for military veterans.

Ed Trowse of Pendleton has had cars all his life, so owning a vintage car was a natural progression for him.

"It's a 1932 Ford High Boy powered by a small block Chevy," he explained. The car was already built when he bought it, then he added special touches. "I made the convertible top and personalized the car myself." Home in his garage is an original 1969 Camaro Z-28 that he has had for 53 years.

Next to Trowse in the display area was Paul Vallas of Hamburg, who also exhibits a 1932 Ford with a small block Chevy motor. It took him four years to build it himself, with some delays beyond his control.

"Unlike some people who think it's a kit car, I bought a frame and a body, then I built it from there," he said. "You build it to your own taste and everybody tries to do a little something that makes theirs a little more unique."

"But you also can build your car to match a period of time," Vallas said. "My car is more of a traditional car that was made very popular in the '50s, early '60s. Mine is what they refer to as a traditional hot rod."

He said he bought a reproduction chassis.

"The body is metal, which is a big deal," Vallas said. "Trying to find an original '32, I'd have to sell my house. First of all, they're nonexistent, and if you do find one, and somebody has it and is knowledgeable, it's just so much money. They refer to those cars as 'Henry steel.' Henry Ford made the cars."

He said the top-ranking value among show cars is a "Henry steel car" - a car with some history, perhaps made in the 1950s, having won certain car shows. Vallas said that kind of car is beyond the reach of the average guy; next after that, he said, is the traditional hot rod with metal reproduction chassis; ranking after that are the fiberglass classic cars, which can be equally beautiful but less costly.

Vallas frequents a number of Western New York car shows.

"The biggest one I know is in Eastern Hills Mall - they it have once a month," he said. "I think there was a thousand cars there."

Vallas said another themed

event, "Cars and Coffee," is gaining popularity locally. There are eight more of this type of cruise scheduled on Sundays throughout the summer at 2565 Young St., Niagara Falls.

Bob Slomba of Wheatfield rebuilt a modified 1953 Chevy Suburban that came out of South Dakota.

"It's rust-free, it has a new Chevy V-8 motor in it, all-new suspension, navigation, back-up camera, leather interior. It's a nice hot rod," he said.

Slomba also rebuilt a 1971 Chevy pickup, originally from Texas, that has been modified with all new technology. It also sits low to the ground as is the trend with these cars.

"It's all in how you present the vehicle," he said. "We put it down on the ground, that's what's in today." The vintage look is also easier for vintage car owners to get into, some would say.

Bill Slomba of North Tonawanda parked his pristine 1956 Chevy next-door to the vehicles of his cousin, Bob.

"It's got a 355 Chevy motor, fuel-injected," he said. "It's lowered, it's got a newer interior, it's got a stainless exhaust, it's got a four-speed automatic transmission. Overdrive ... it's been done since 1996."

Slomba said it's fun to drive.

"You go down the road, people give you thumbs up ... it's gets a lot of attention," he said. Slomba noted '55, '56 and '57 Chevys are referred to as "Tri-fives." "It was a real popular vintage."

James Tiede of Niagara Falls was one of a very few who drove a military vehicle he owns to display for cruise night. Tiede was in the military service for 30 years as a combat engineer in both the Army and the Air National Guard.

His is a 1990 tow truck/recovery vehicle that weighs 37,000 pounds when empty. It has six-wheel drive.

"It is capable of going through 7-plus feet of water," Tiede said. "Its top speed is about 67 mph."

He said it has a central tire inflation system, whereby its tire pressure can be dropped from 90 pounds down to 20 pounds so it can go through rivers, streams, mud and sand. It automatically fills the tires back up using the air compressor off the truck.

The truck was rebuilt in 2009 and sat for over 10 years until Tiede bought it. He owns two more cargo trucks.



Top: Ed Trowse shows off his 1932 Ford at "Cruisin' at the Wurlitzer" on Monday evening. • Platter's Chocolate mascot Sammy Sponge, aka Brandon Samol of Grand Island, poses with Emma Nist at Cruisin' at the Wurlitzer. Platter's Chocolate Factory and the Monday car cruises are both located at 908 Niagara Falls Blvd., North Tonawanda. Platter's is one of the sponsors of the cruise nights.



Another tradition at car cruise nights is the rat rod, a throwback to the era of the 1920s to the 1950s. Wikipedia says it's a custom car with a deliberately worn-down, unfinished appearance, typically lacking paint, showing rust, and made from inexpensive or cast-off parts.

Exhibiting their rat rods on Monday were Louis Gardiner, Jeff Wolf and his son, Eric, all of Pendleton.

Gardiner drove his 1938 Dodge pickup and Jeff Wolf brought his 1945 Chevy pickup. Gardiner chuckled as he called his 350 small block, 4-barrel Chevy motor-powered truck "extremely loud."

"Nothing is original on this," he said. It's got a home-

made frame."

Gardiner said the cab was cut out and dropped to set lower. It's an automatic three-speed.

Wolf's pickup sits on an S-10 frame and is lowered 4 inches on springs. It has a 383 stroker 500-horsepower engine, and all the sheet metal is original, from 1945.

"It runs pretty good," he said. "I've been into hot-rodding for 30 years or so, and I wanted something I didn't have to polish. So

I built this. I have a shiny car at home, and ever since we built this, I've been in this, instead.

On Monday, June 19, Cruisin' the Wurlitzer will feature one of many special events this season: A night of open wheel, gassers and race cars. Cruise nights continue through Sept. 25.

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