Orphan Car Show 2017

The 2017 Orphan Car Show was a splendid fall day full of interesting old cars and good fellowship. The field held over 200 cars, from the oldest of the brass era, to the most recent orphans from the Detroit 3.

This year the show had more cars from recently orphaned makes, such as Oldsmobile, Plymouth, Pontiac and Mercury. There were many striking examples of these makes.

Older Chrysler orphans were well represented also. There were enough DeSotos to stock a dealership, including a striking 1932 DeSoto coupe. Another DeSoto, a 1942 coupe, took the Judge’s Pick trophy. A 1957 Imperial 6 window sedan, in original unrestored condition, was awarded the best Orphan of Chrysler trophy. This same car has been designated a national treasure by the Historic Vehicle Association, and recognized nationally.

Our traditional orphan makes were also well represented. Hudson, Studebaker, Packard, Crosley and AMC all showed many cars, all of them a treat to the eye. An especially nice Packard Caribbean convertible was shown, along with several long-wheelbase Packards both pre- and postwar.

There were a number of older Hudsons, including a 1923 Sports Phaeton Super Six. This is an extremely rare Hudson, and it had been fitted with aftermarket supplemental air springs. Another Hudson Super Six sedan took home the Hudson trophy.

Ypsilanti’s home town car, the Corvair, turned out too. One of the more interesting Corvairs was a rare Lakewood Station Wagon, which also won the Corvair award this year.
Foreign makes were represented, with cars from Citroen, Panhard, Triumph and Austin Healey. An Austin Healey 100-4 won the coveted British trophy this year, and an exotic Citroen SM took the non-British trophy. A very rare, at least in this country, Panhard PL17 was also shown.

Brass era cars were well represented. The Ann Arbor car, a truly rare car was represented, and took home a trophy for best Pre-War independent. Another brass era car, a 1912 EMF 30 snagged the best Brass Era prize.

The pass-in-review, a major feature of the show, had some new commentators this year. Bob Elton and Ed Ostrowski did most of the commentary, joined by Jim Wagner in the afternoon.

By the end of the day, everyone agreed that it had been another great Orphan Car Show.

“Sidetrack gift cards are the proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy”
- Benjamin Franklin
World War II pilots Ron Norris, Sam Lambdin and Bob Lowrey had taken jobs with Kaiser Industries, the parent company of the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation based at Willow Run. During a pilot meeting in 1948, the Chief Pilot of Kaiser Industries asked if anyone was interested in being a Kaiser-Frazer dealer, as several locations were available including Ypsilanti.

The present owner of Cutler Motor Sales, who was a friend of Joseph W. Frazer, was not selling a lot of Kaisers. Cutler was selling about fifteen cars per month when he could have been selling one hundred cars a month, since he was the dealer closest to the Factory Headquarters.

Ron, Sam and Bob purchased the dealership, located at 334 E. Michigan Avenue at Grove St., in late 1948 for $40,000 from the Kaiser-Frazer Sales Corporation, which had purchased the property from Cutler. Putting together enough money to operate it, the three partners signed a $40,000 note to Kaiser-Frazer which appears in Kaiser-Frazer Corporation financial documents. The partners would pay Kaiser-Frazer in full in less than three years. Bob Lowrey left the partnership by 1950 and returned to being a pilot. Ron and Sam were excellent dealership operators and promoters which contributed to their success selling an “Independent Make”.

When the “Henry J” compact car was introduced, they sold the first one produced to the “Bomber Restaurant”. The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum has a photo of Ron Norris and Sam Lambdin delivering the car to Yale Averill, Bomber owner. The picture is autographed on the back as 1st Ypsilanti Delivery, autographed by Henry J. Kaiser. Other notable Ypsilanti businesses purchasing Henry J cars were Haab Brothers Restaurant and Mellencamp’s Men’s and Boys’ Wear.

Kaiser-Frazer Corporation stopped making cars at Willow Run in June, 1953. With the introduction of the 1954 Oldsmobile models, Ron Norris and Sam Lambdin would partner with Maurice Obermeyer who held the Oldsmobile franchise at 310 W. Cross St (the former Nash dealership). Oldsmobile moved to the much larger Michigan Avenue location, and was named Obermeyer Oldsmobile. Maurice Obermeyer sold the dealership franchise to Mal Petty in 1956. Ron and Sam sold the property.

The Buick franchise was available in 1958. Ron & Sam got the franchise and purchased a building at 1122 E. Michigan Avenue, which became Ron & Sam Buick, a very successful dealership. During the early 1960’s Ron & Sam Buick obtained the American Motors franchise for Ypsilanti.

Ron Norris and Sam Lambdin lived in Ypsilanti and their children attended Roosevelt school. In 1963, Ron Norris and his family desired to return to their native state of Florida. Ron purchased a small American Motors dealership located on US-1 at Titusville, Florida where the main road ended coming from Cape Canaveral.

Because of the fantastic job Ron Norris and Sam Lambdin had done with Buick, it did not take the Buick Division of General Motors very long to award Ron the Buick franchise for Titusville, Florida.

Hundreds of construction workers with very large pay checks, and a large inventory of the most desirable new Buick models, created a huge market for Norris Motors. Today Norris Motors still calls Titusville home with a much larger and modern facility operated by Ron’s son and grandson selling Buicks and GMC trucks.
Corvair Stability Test

This is a rare photograph of a Corvair undergoing a sidewind stability test. Note the small rocket strapped to the side of the car, simulating the force of a sudden gust of wind.

Corvair’s unique rear engine design caused a lot of controversy about the stability of a car with almost two thirds of its weight on the rear wheels. While there were other rear engine cars at the time, such as VW and Renault, none of them were as large, or as tail heavy, as the Corvair. Also, none of them sold as well as the Corvair, at that time. Many more people were exposed to oversteering cars for the first time, and it alleged that accidents resulted.

GM, and others, tested the Corvair repeatedly in an attempt to either dispel or confirm these allegations, and the picture above shows one of the tests GM did while the Corvair was still in production.

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Funds will go to enhancing the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum
Perfect Attendance

This 1937 Terraplane, owned by Bob & Mary Elton, has been at every Orphan Car Show, since the beginning. It has never missed a year. A few years ago, when Bob had a broken arm, Jim Curran drove the car for him, including the pass in review.

It is shown, in this picture taken at the 2017 Orphan Car Show, with a display of dash plaques from every Orphan Car Show through 2016. The car has even won a trophy for Favorite Hudson, in 2008.

Bob & Mary bought this car in 1979, from the 3rd owner, as a basket case. Over the next few years, Bob restored the car, and has driven it ever since. It has not been repainted, or restored again. When it was restored, the brakes were upgraded with brakes from a later Hudson, and radial tires added.

Are there any other perfect attendance cars out there? Let us know!
YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE HERITAGE MUSEUM

100 E. Cross Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734.482.5200

MUSEUM HOURS
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