



Esteemed Engines

WAAAM Traffic Jam honors vehicles restored with love

Story and photos by
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News editor

A sports car and a delivery truck that were literally resurrected from Gorge pastures drew honors Saturday at a well-attended car show.

The deep-blue 1973 Dodge Challenger owned by Tony and Melissa DelCarpine won People's Choice at the second-annual Traffic Jam at Western Antique Aeroplane and Automobile Museum.

The hundreds of visitors to the two-day event voted on their favorite, and the Challenger won.

Among the 15 sponsor prizes were two other local entries: the West Side Fire Department's 1932 Dodge tanker, now a gleaming white with a varnished water tanker on the back, and the 1935 Chevrolet Coca-Cola truck restored by Gary Fisher and friends in the open-hood "rat rod" style favored by their friend and former owner of the truck, the late Heath Nickel.

"The show was a big success," said Donna Davidson, WAAAM assistant director. A total of 120 vehicles entered the show, up 20 from last year. Moving the event from October to July brought better attendance, and Traffic Jam is tentatively scheduled for the same weekend in July 2014.

Events also included an 80-vehicle cruise through the streets of Hood River, followed by a showing of a drive-in movie at WAAAM, Friday night.

On Saturday, the Friends of the Historic Columbia River Highway started at WAAAM with their parade through the Mosier Twin Tunnels.

Husband and wife Pat and Pat Brothers of Bridal Veil brought their vintage Rolls Royce and Thunderbird cars, and allowed visitors to "pay to drive" the rare vehicles, along with a Model A they have on loan at the museum, with proceeds going to the museum.

In the second-annual Model T "build up" event, this year's team finished in 2 minutes, 59 seconds, beating last year's mark by 35 seconds. In the "build up," the team goes against the clock to reassemble the separate parts of a Model T body. Team members were Andy Anderson, Don Ferency, Ocean Ortiz, Dave Schneeberg, Steve Tolson and John Krecklow.

John Roberts of Hood River brought his vintage kids' pedal cars, giving the youngsters hours of vicarious fun during Traffic Jam.

But Traffic Jam's focus is on the lovingly restored vintage and classic vehicles of Hood River and beyond.

The award-winning West Side truck is the department's oldest piece of original equipment; it sat untended for years at WAAAM until last year, when a group of firefighters restored the Dodge, and donated it back to the museum.

Fisher said he retrieved the Chevrolet



TRAFFIC JAM people and cars, from top: convertible 1963 MG and 1952 Austin draw admirers on the green at WAAAM; West Side Fire's beloved 1932 tanker; 1973 Challenger with DelCarpine family (Melissa and Tony and son, Zach); at left, the 1911 steam-powered Aultman Taylor traction tractor, used in agriculture to help power threshers and other devices. WAAAM is looking for volunteers to help clean and restore the 16-horsepower tractor. Below, Don Dalgarno's 1960 Midget Racer.



RESTORE

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Coca-Cola truck from a local field after purchasing it from his friend George Ramirez. It was Ramirez who had bought it from Heath Nickel, who was owner of Grumpy's Hot Rods, later Nickel's Hot Rods, and had a passion for "rat rod" cars and Harley Davidsons. Nickel died in 2010 at age 41 before he could achieve his dream of restoring the vehicle.

Fisher said he has since been contacted by Nickel's father, Kenneth, and daughter, Rosemary, who thanked him for fulfilling that dream.

The Coca-Cola truck and Challenger were both rescue efforts: Tony DelCarpine bought the car online and then went to a field near Roosevelt, Wash., and towed it home.

Both were labors of love, and Tony DelCarpine was involved in both. (DelCarpine Automotive, founded 12 years ago, was the event's signature sponsor.)

Also helping on the Chevy truck were Tony Freas, Brian Hoffman, Ron Sullivan and John Schlosser. They finished the project this spring, installing a 1959 Cadillac engine and employing interior

replacement parts such as seats that came out of an airplane.

The "Smith and Wilson" Coca-Cola's distributor name is still visible on the right door. Fisher said the truck is now operable but the exterior will be kept as is, and it will be displayed at WAAAM "after we take it to a few more car shows."



The Coca-Cola original fleet number (704) is in the door frame, and Fisher added a new-yet-old touch: a Coca-Cola bottle opener next to the passenger door.

Fisher and friends toasted their prize Saturday by uncapping bottles of vintage — and warm — Coca-Cola.

Tony DelCarpine was visibly moved when his award was announced, and said he appreciated the recognition for the hard work that went into the restoration.

"It was fun for them to get the People's Choice Award, because they went a long ways in making this event happen," Davidson said.

The DelCarpines also received a commemorative Traffic Jam jacket, provided by Northwest Graphic Works of Hood River. Donna Davidson of WAAAM announced that the customized jacket will be presented to the People's Choice winner every year.

The DelCarpines acquired the Challenger seven years ago, when their son, Zach, was 10. Tony had help in the project from Melissa and Zach, who said he has yet to drive the car.

Asked if his dad would ever let him drive it, he replied, "He'd better!"

Participants Award went to Lonnie and Deborah Moss, of Battle Ground, Wash., for their 1932 DeSoto convertible coupe, one of 160 produced, which the Mosses purchased on eBay — from someone who kept it rusting in a barn.

The vehicles on display came from far and wide, including a 1957 Chevy Nomad owned by Joe ("Joemad" reads the plates) McManus of Merlin, Ore., and a 1960 Midget Racer restored by its owners, Don and Dee Delgarno, of Longview.

The racer was not resurrected from a pasture or barn.

The Delgarnos found it in a chicken house.



ABOVE: Tad Johnston's two yellow Buicks, including the hard-to-find 1961 Invicta, foreground. At top, Chevy Coca-Cola truck restoration crew, from right: Tony DelCarpine, Gary Fisher, Tony Freas, John Schlosser, Ron Sullivan and Brian Hoffman. At center, the jacket patch won by DelCarpines for the People's Choice award. At right, colorful hoods in Hood River. Inset: hood ornament on 1952 Austin.



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