



# Perris News

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## Rods & Rails Event Delights Visitors and Classic Car Enthusiasts

A record number of antique cars, motorcycles and visitors help make last week's Rods & Rails Festival in Perris the most successful in the 10-year anniversary of the celebration that kicks off a summer of fun in the City.

More than 2,000 people came to the Orange Empire Railway Museum to take in the show, which featured more than 100 classic cars and motorbikes.

Those not interested in hot rods, coupes, sedans and convertibles rode trains and trolleys, took in a wild west show and learned about how the potato helped shaped the Perris Valley.

"This is our City, this is a great event and we are proud to be part of it," said Mary Tortomasi, operations manager at Perris Valley Airport. "We love Perris."

Tortomasi set a booth at the festival, pitching tandem parachute jumps, the airport's indoor skydiving tunnel and promoting an event in September for breast cancer research.

The event features what she called the largest-ever women's precision parachute jump, with 180 women from around the world jumping in formation to promote cancer research.

Classic car owners from throughout Riverside County came to the festival to display the tender loving care that's standard operating procedure for such vehicles. Take Paul Durbin of Hemet, for instance. He brought his 1957 Chevrolet Bel-Air to Perris in a trailer that includes wall-to-wall carpeting. The car stays inside a special garage with wall to wall carpeting. Durbin drives it just 50 miles per year—just around the venues at classic car shows. The matador red vehicle has just 61,000 miles. The body and engine are the same the day they left the factory. Not a single piece of the Bel-Air has been restored.

"The engine has never been taken apart," he said.

Durbin knows everything about his vehicle, including when it was made—Tuesday, Dec. 17, 1956, just in time for the 1957-model year. The car sold new for about \$2,900. It came with a vinyl interior, bench seating, a four-barrel carburetor, duel exhausts and a 283-cubic inch engine that managed just 15 mph.

Durbin said the car is valued at \$200,000. He said he enjoyed his first trip to Rods & Rails.

"It's a nice show," he said.

Neil Thompson, of Corona, thought so too. He brought his 1930 Buick Roadster to the car show.

"It's really neat," he said. "It's great. I'm loving it. This is my first time to come to Perris. I will definitely be back next year."

Thompson's car featured a rumble seat, three-speed transmission, a 331-cubic inch engine capable of 90 mph on the roadway. Muscles provided the power steering, he said.

"It's really a fun car to drive," he said. "It's a comfortable ride."

There were plenty of options for visitors seeking other sorts of entertainment. Trains and trolleys rolled along on tracks. A group of Old West gunfighters staged shootouts. A blacksmith stoked a fire and forged horseshoes. A group from the Perris Valley Historical and Museum Association took time to talk about the potato and its impact on Perris.

Association member Katie Keyes said Perris and the surrounding communities were settled by farmers. The railway that ran through Perris took their crops to market. When potatoes were king from the 1920s to 1960s, high school students worked in packing sheds to earn spending money.

"It was a main crop," Keyes said. "It helped to settle the (Perris) Valley."

Vince Agnifili, president of the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce and CEO of the Southern California Fair, said events like the Rods & Rails Festival bring the community together and spur economic activity. Hotels, restaurants, gas stations and other businesses benefit from people driving to and from the festival, he said.

"It brings people together," he said. "You tend to like to do business with people you know."

**See a short video**



Neil Thompson of Corona in front of his 1930 Buick Roadster.



A lucky youngster sits behind the wheel of the classic Buick.

But in those days, gas cost just 20 cents a gallon.



Paul Durbin in front of his 1956 Chevrolet Bel-Air. The vehicle has just 61,000 original miles.



Volunteers discuss the early days of Perris during the Rods & Rails Festival, which drew more than 2,000 people.