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Rods and Rails Draws the Crowds

The annual Rods and Rails show in Perris was an event that offered something for everyone.

There was the usual collection of classic cars in all shapes and sizes—1920s roadsters, 1930s sedans, 1940s, 1950s station wagons, 1960s muscle cars and plenty of models like Nash, Studebaker and Henry J no longer in existence. For fans of two-wheel transportation, motorcycle enthusiasts put their Harleys and Indians on display at the Orange Empire Railway Museum, which once again hosted the 16th annual Rods and Rails.

Visitors more interested in learning about Perris' railroad past had plenty of chances to get up-close looks at the museum's collection of vintage engines and freight cars and to ride and to take trolley and train rides.

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Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Tonya Burke in front of a classic car at the 16th annual Rods and Rails festival—an "event that offers something for everyone."

For the kids, there was face painting and potato decorating, for historians the date featured the celebration of the pioneer Villegas family, who helped put Perris agriculture on the map and for fans of the Old West, the day included a mock shoot-out staged by western gunfight-reenactors. Musical entertainment was provided by the Eastside All Stars and JoJo Smiles from the Maryjane Girls. There was a teen talent show that featured a variety of song and dance acts.



Perris City Councilman David Starr Rabb chats with Dayton Taylor, who brought a restored 1934 travel trailer to Rods and Rails.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch said Rods and Rails has become a signature event for the City, an extravaganza that draws upwards of 5,000 visitors. It's also a showpiece for the railway museum, which boasts one of the largest collections of working trains and trolleys in the U.S. Vintage cars and vintage rail transit made for a great vibe.

"Our staff has done a superb job in putting on a superb event," Busch said. "The weather is great, people are having a good time and I expect a record turnout. Everybody can find something to like, no matter what your taste. It's also helps get the railway museum needed exposure. Hosting this event here makes it available to everybody. This bodes well for Perris."



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and Deputy City Manager Darren Madkin chat during the 16th annual Rods and Rails festival in Perris.

Mayor Pro-Tem Tonya Burke voiced similar sentiments.

"There could not be a better place to host this event," Burke said. "There's a historical feel with the Orange Empire Railway Museum and there is a modern vibe with the Metrolink (train and stations) coming to Perris later this year. It's a link between the past and the future."

Burke added that Rods and Rails is "truly an event everyone can enjoy."

"It's got food, music, cars—something for everyone," she said.



Classic cars of all descriptions are one of the trademarks at Rod and Rails.

City Councilman David Starr Rabb said he was impressed visitors came from Orange County and elsewhere in Southern California to take in the show.

"We have a lot of people of different ages enjoying the day and having a good time," he said. "Kudos to our staff for their diligence in making this a great event."

Perris resident Mike Inman attended Rods and Rails in his 1951 Plymouth Business Coupe, a car designed for traveling salesmen. The car was a basic model that sported a huge trunk—ideal for over-the-road sales reps to store their wares. It came with a 263-cubic inch engine, a radio, no air conditioning and averaged about 20 miles per gallon of gasoline.

Inman's car came in evergreen—a standard color of the time. He said he like Rods and Rails because the show caters to blue-collar working guys and women as well as high-end car collectors.

"This is the kind of show that caters to people who work on their car in their garage and get their fingernails dirty," Inman said.



Retired Marine David Boone, of Temecula, works on his 1927 converted Model T Ford Coupe, one of more than 200 classic cars and motorcycles at Rods and Rails 2015.

Retired Marine David Boone, of Temecula, attended Rods and Rails for the third time this year and said he loves the show and the venue. Boone brought along his 1927 Ford Model T Coupe, which he transformed into a souped-up hot rod that always draws lots of attention from fellow motorists.

"I love it here," Boone said. "I like the atmosphere, the vendors. It's got a real festive atmosphere. There's a lot of young people here and if you get tired of looking at the cars, you can always ride the trains!"

Boone's ride started its life as a \$400, 4-cylinder, 25-horsepower ride with a top speed of 35 to 40-miles per hour. All Fords of that era came in one color: black. The 1927 coupe was a no-frills car—no shock absorbers, no radio, wooden-spoke wheels, wooden floor and roof.

Today the car boasts a 1972 Chevy 350-cubic inch engine, a dash from a 1932 Ford, lights from a 1940 Dodge as well as numerous other modifications, including artillery shells and anti-aircraft rounds fitted into the engine. Boone said that with all the modifications, the car will top 110 mph but gets only 9 miles per gallon.



Members of the pioneer Villegas family, which arrived in Perris in 1924, were honored for their contributions to the region's agricultural industry.

Randy Zeal of Menifee had good things to say about Rods and Rails as well.

"Super nice people," he said. "I gonna come back in the future. This show will be on my calendar."

Zeal brought his 1952 Henry J "Gasser," a model that sold originally for \$695 and could be purchased through the Sears & Roebuck catalogue. Like many Rod and Rails enthusiasts, he's radically remade his ride. Gone is the 70-cubic inch stock motor, replaced by a 383-cubic inch monster. There's also a high-performance transmission, a roll cage and a bright-orange paint job.

Zeal said driving a hot-rod takes him back to his days in Huntington Beach, when he and his high school buddies "went to work built cars and raced them until 2 a.m. on Beach Boulevard."

"It was a fun time and reminiscing about it is fun as well," he said.



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