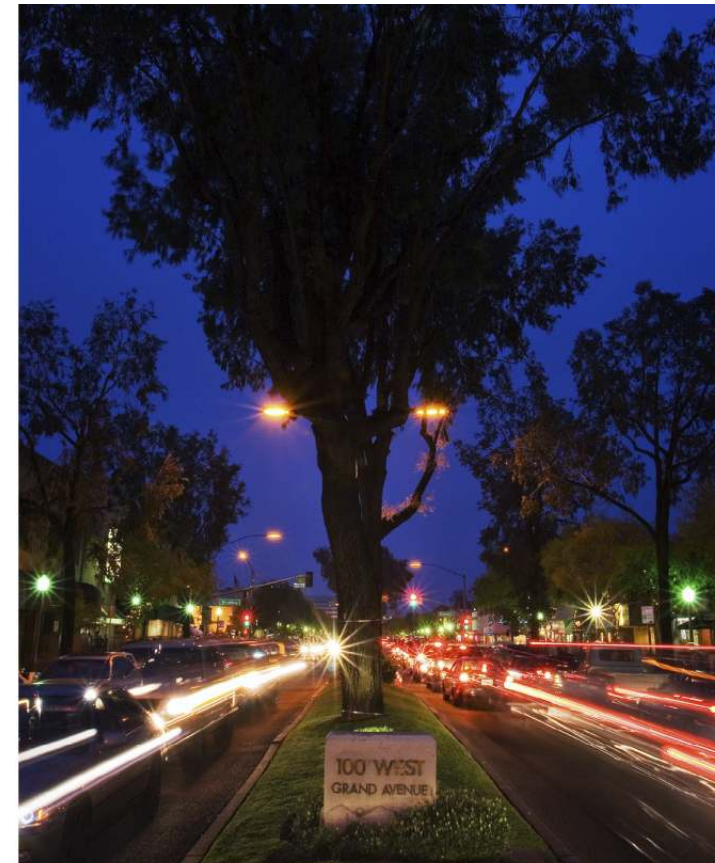


America's Cruisin' Art & Culture



Story and Photography
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Today's hot rod and custom car cruisin' success is the result of the appeal of its art form — an art form that tugs at our cultural DNA, pulling us to times and feelings that are familiar, friendly, exciting, daring and romantic. Those core feelings are why Cruisin' Grand in Escondido is so popular, Friday after Friday, all summer long. People feel it in their bones — feel it in their souls? — without having to think about it much.



But the mission of this article is to think about it. It's through the lens of art and culture that we can see more deeply and clearly into the appeal of Cruisin'.



Like Jazz and Rock-n-Roll the founding aesthetics of hot rods, custom cars, and muscle cars emerged organically. Hot rod car culture aesthetics originated in the 1920s-1930s when the working guy had access to cheap used cars that they could modify for performance — the original hot rods. And nothing exemplifies the commitment to those original aesthetics more than today's rat rods with their patinas and rust (although the surfboard shown here on Christian Davis' rat rod truck is definitely an idea from the Beach Boys era).

The quickest way to increase acceleration and speed came from pulling off fenders, running boards, roofs, hoods and anything else that didn't make it go faster. Rebellion, simplicity, directness, and power became the aesthetic principles that drove car culture from the hot rods of the '20s & '30s to the original Ford Mustang and Pontiac GTO of the '60s. We're as romantic about those aesthetics as we are about cowboys, the old west, and manifest destiny.

Today's hot rods echo the early aesthetic foundations from the '30s through the refinements in the '50s. We can see that in Chick Koszis' 1932 Ford roadster built by Escondido's Hot Rods & Custom Stuff, and Rick Trestrail's owner-built 1934 Ford 3-window coupe.

In today's customs we see all of the original aesthetics extended and expressed for today's sensitivities. A great example is Larry



Henderson's 1951 Henry J. Larry's award winning custom, built by Escondido's Super Rides by Jordan, merges the power and performance goals of the hot rod with the ethos of the custom.

Art needs an audience and that's why cruisin' venues became a necessary part of the culture. Cruise-night venues like Cruisin' Grand provide an old-town style of active cruisin'. Escondido's intimate boulevard is full of cars actively cruising all night long. There are an

estimated 5,000 spectators, and an estimated 500 hot rods, customs and muscle cars creating the reason to be there.

In 2011 Distinction/ArtHatch Gallery merged car art and Cruisin' Grand into a crowd-pleasing event called IMMORTALIZED. Escondido's Hot Rods and Custom Stuff arranged to have their clients' cars out front, the gallery featured some great car culture artists, and the street and the gallery were packed with car fans. Cruisin' art and culture has an audience.

A generation from now, America's cruisin' will still be an expression of art and culture. It will be an extrapolation from the 1930s through the '60s, but it will also be a surprising and creative integration of whatever the then-current forms of expressing power and performance are. Mid-chassis Tesla 3-Phase Alternating Current Induction Motor and 3rd-generation liquid-cooled Lithium-ion battery pack retrofitted into a 1932 Ford Tudor hot rod doing illegal burn-outs at Cruisin' Grand's Nitro Night? I hope to be there.

