

Hot Pin Ups & Cool Cars on Grand

Story and photography by Kurt Lightfoot

It looks like a Hollywood production taking place on Escondido's Grand Avenue: Beautiful women in retro pin-up-style hair and clothing, the beauticians who created the pin-up style, classic 1957 red Cadillac Eldorado convertible, professional photographer creating action and giving direction, light reflector to soften shadows, and a gathering crowd.

Below: A typical night scene during Cruisin' Grand.

This energized scene, shown on the previous pages, is the result of the convergence of three Escondido creative forces: Shadow Boudoir, Studio 158, and Cruisin' Grand.

Cruising for a Photo

Thanks to sheer luck I stumbled onto this incredible scene. It's a Cruisin' Grand late afternoon and I'm walking on the shady side of the street looking for photo stories that might be happening on the sunny side. The photography logic is to have the sun to my back and dramatic lighting on my subjects. With the instincts of a photojournalist I meander along studying the numerous cruise-night vignettes. Usually the best I get from this strategy is an opportunity to catch a very special mix of cars in front of an interesting backdrop drawing a few car admirers and sometimes unusual behavior. Cruisin' Grand provides dozens of those vignettes every Friday night, April through September.

Creating a Scene

But this night the scene was special. This perfect photojournalism moment was created by photographer Heather Middleton of Shadow Boudoir, with hair and makeup by Studio 158, owned by Julianne Jones. The gathering crowd formed spontaneously in reaction to how exciting the scene was — hot pin-ups and cool cars — the all-time American iconic combination. You can see such scenes in magazines, but it's very rare to stumble on it live in Escondido.

The production was the brainchild of photographer Heather Middleton. She does pin-up photography as part of a repertoire of styles for her Shadow Boudoir photography business. She initiated this production to create images that communicate her talent. She needed hair and make-up artistry in the perfect pin-up-style so she recruited the help of Julianne Jones of Studio 158. Together they brainstormed the project and came up with the Cadillac convertible (owned by a friend of Julianne's) — the perfect iconic car for the pinup narrative. Check out the fins.

Draws a Crowd

The biggest surprise in the scene is the dynamics of the seven people crowding in — elbowing in — on Heather and her assistant. They're surrounding Heather, apparently to frame the scene the way her camera is. Two people are out in the street. Five cameras/cellphone cameras in the crowd are mimicking what Heather's camera is seeing. Everyone in the scene is "switched on." This little crowd's dynamism is testimony to how compelling hot pin-ups and cool cars are.

From my point of view, the whole thing is like a Norman Rockwell illustration of how fascinating humanity is and how alive iconic American car culture is today. A car culture brought to us every Friday night throughout the summer by Escondido's Cruisin' Grand.

