

ORPHANS FOR ORPHANS

FANS OF BRANDS FROM THE PAST RAISE FUNDS FOR CHARITY

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LARRY EDSALL



■ The archetypal late '50s/early '60s fin on left is on a 1960 Studebaker Hawk belonging to Neil and Ruth Bell. Emblems (and a fun license plate) on the facing page are from a 1940 Packard, 1979 AMX, 1948 Nash and 1956 Fiat 600, which are also shown on this page and the next. Others on this page are:

1937 Pontiac Super Chief : Larry and Linda Owen

1965 Plymouth Belvedere II : Paul Lejman

1964 Pontiac Bonneville : Howard Ives, Tom Bodmer

1940 Packard Model 160 Super 8 : Marvin Price

1963 Studebaker Wagonaire : Peggy Stinson

1963 Studebaker Avanti : Chuck and Chris Collins

Google “orphan car show” and the first five links that pop up on your screen are for the big event staged annually for the last 16 years in conjunction with the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum just west of Detroit in Michigan.

Scroll a little further down the page and you’ll find other shows for classic cars whose manufacturers no longer are in business being held in places such as Golden, Colorado; Yellow Springs, Ohio; Forest Park and Branson, Missouri, and in Bothell, Washington.

But we scanned half-a-dozen pages of Google report and didn’t find what may be the oldest of those orphan car shows, the one staged for the last 22 years by the Valley Roadrunners chapter of the Veteran Motor Car Club of America.

Not only is the show—held in late October in Los Olivos Park in Phoenix—the oldest of the orphan car shows, but its focus is not only cars. It also raises money for the Sunshine Acres Children’s Home, the so-called Miracle in the Desert which since 1954 has provided a home to some 1,600 children in the Phoenix suburb of Mesa.

The idea for the Phoenix Orphan Car Show came from Valley Roadrunners member Dave Albani, said club president Andre Lange.

“Dave had a Hudson. I had Nashes, and other club members had different kinds,” Lange said. “We looked around for a place to have the show and got a permit from the city. It’s been the same day and the same location every year ever since.”

At first, the Orphan Car Show was the Orphan Car Picnic, held on the grass under the park’s olive trees. Later, howev-



KEEP RIGHT >>



■ Whole volumes have been written tracing the intertwined and evolving Nash, Rambler and AMC brands (as well as Willys, Kaiser, Henry J and Frazer, plus some brushes with Packard and Studebaker along the way). Four of the six cars on this page are of Nash-Rambler-AMC lineage.

1964 Rambler Marlin : Paul Ward

1956 Oldsmobile Ninety-Eight : John A. Clark

1979 AMX by AMC (with the DONTLAF license plate on prior page) : Manny and Becky Athans

1956 Fiat Canta 600 Elabogata : Eric Lynn

1948 Nash : Joe Livingston

1966 AMC Ambassador station wagon (which carried the Rambler name through 1965) : Paul Ward

er, the city parks department restricted the cars to the park's paved parking lot.

Sunshine Acres always has been the financial beneficiary of the show—money coming from entry fees paid by the participating car owners—and for several years the show would end with a parade, with the cars driven from Phoenix to Mesa to present the money and to show the cars to the children. However, that ended when privacy laws were enacted to protect orphans' identities, Lange said.

As many as 125 cars have participated in the Phoenix show. This year there were 99 on display, though not all of them were true orphans.

Exceptions are made, Lange said. Corvairs, for example, because while Chevrolet remains in business, its sporty rear-engine car—supposedly unsafe at any speed—has a cult-like following.

And because the money goes to a good cause, some club members are so eager to participate, they want to bring a classic car even if its maker is still in business. However, such cars are few and far between, in a lot filled with the likes of Hudsons, Frazers, Kaisers, Plymouths, Pontiacs, Studebakers, AMCs, Oldsmobiles and Edsels.

Another thing that makes the Phoenix Orphan Car Show special is its homemade trophies—whimsical works of art made by club members, often from components recycled from trophies they've won in previous years.

"We want people to pre-register their cars so we can make a trophy that fits," Lange said.

"Everybody," he added, "likes to get trophies." ■

