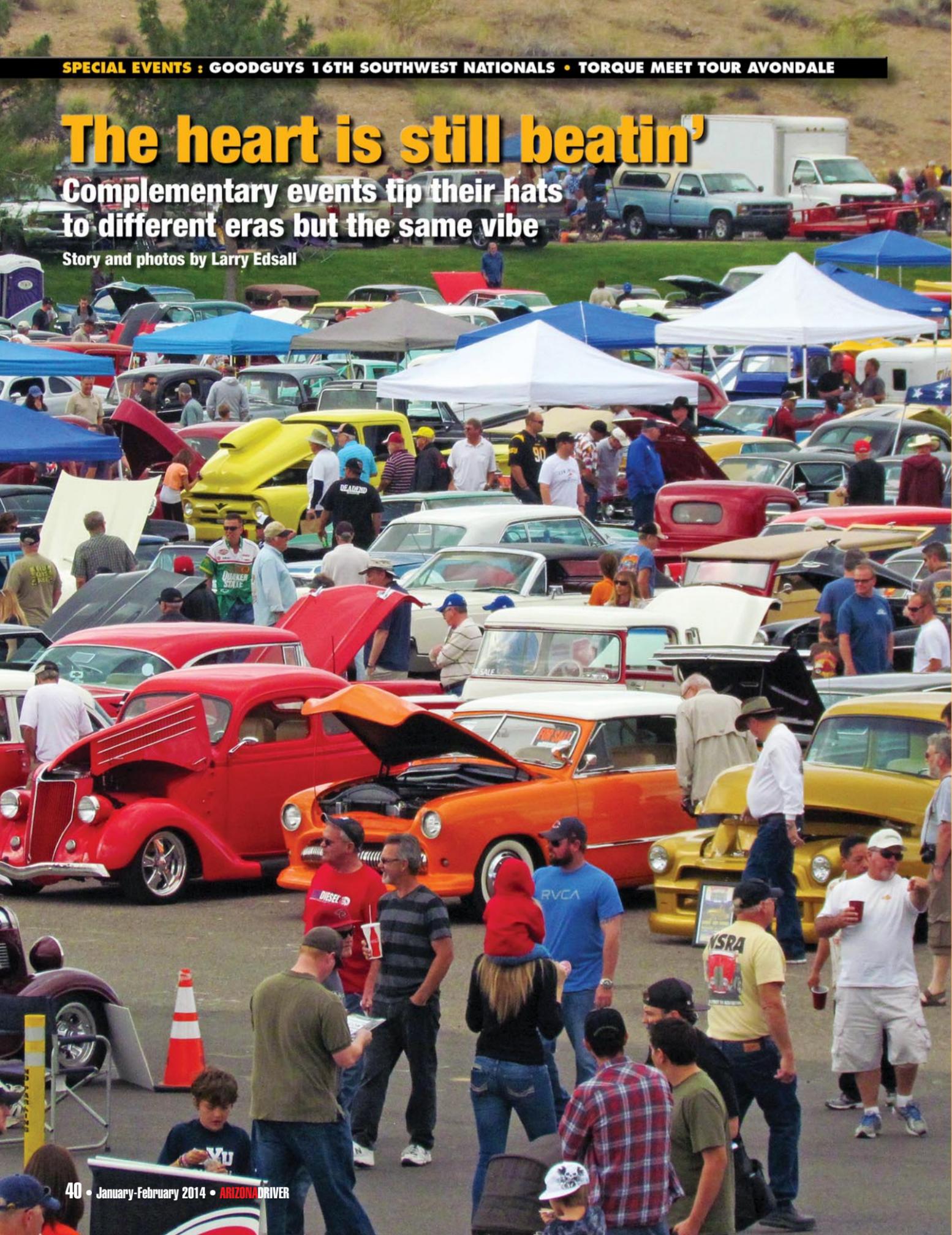


The heart is still beatin'

Complementary events tip their hats to different eras but the same vibe

Story and photos by Larry Edsall



Graying and bald-headed car guys often fret about whether young people are as interested in cars as the baby-boomer generation.

I try to assure them that the classic car hobby is not going away, though the younger car guys and gals are as likely to do their tuning with computers as they are with wrenches, and also are as likely to modify their own skins with tattoo ink as they are to modify their cars with aero rocker flares and big-can exhaust systems.

I held such beliefs even before the third weekend of November, when I attended two car shows on opposite ends of the Phoenix metropolitan area. What I saw only strengthened my beliefs.

First, I drove up to WestWorld, the huge equestrian and event complex in north Scottsdale, where the Goodguys Rod & Custom Association was staging its sixth Southwest Nationals, the next-to-last event of the group's 30th anniversary season.

The scene was mind-boggling. There were 3,100 cars on display. That's a record for the event, and by 200 vehicles!

Coming to see them just on Saturday were more than 35,000 people, and, yes, there were a lot of graying and bald-headed guys, but by far the most women we recall—and they were not all trophy wives—as well as a huge and steady stream of young car enthusiasts who appeared to be in their late teens, twenties and early thirties.

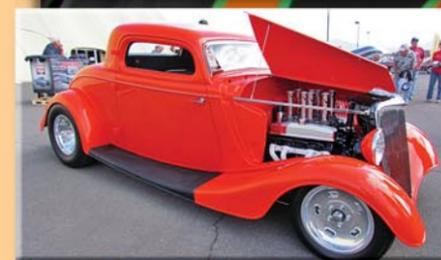
They not only were taking photos of the cars with their smartphones, but they were peering under hoods, even crawling on the grass beneath cars to check out suspension components and rear axle configurations.

The Southwest Nationals are a three-day affair, though Saturday is the big day, and Goodguys expected total attendance of around 50,000 during the weekend.

The Goodguys are a classic car group that allows only vehicles up through the 1972 model year to participate. But a large group of car enthusiasts wasn't even born by 1972, so to see what they were doing, from Goodguys I headed out to Avondale on the far southwest side of the Valley of the Sun, where, just a few miles north of Phoenix International Raceway, the local Universal Technical



Goodguys 16th Southwest Nationals



KEEP RIGHT >>

Institute (UTI) campus was host to the last Torque Meet Tour event of the year.

What's the Torque Meet Tour? Well, it's a series of five car shows—all held at UTI campuses—designed to provide “a safe, friendly and welcoming environment for the automotive community.”

The tour this year included the Tjin Edition Roadshow trailer. Neil Tjin is the young superstar of car customization and already has done projects for several original equipment automakers. At Avondale, his roadshow included the Gulf-liveried 2014 Ford Focus ST that just a week earlier had won honors on the Ford stand at the Speciality Equipment Market Association (automotive aftermarket products) Show in Las Vegas.

Oh, and the Torque Meet Tour is offered free to spectators, vendors and those with cars to show. As a bonus, UTI offers tours of its schools, which offer training to would-be auto mechanics and technicians.

The gathering for the Torque Meet Tour wasn't nearly as large as the crowd the Goodguys draw, but then the Goodguys have been at this for more years than most of the Torque Tour participants have been alive.

The passion for cars and customizing cars is the same, although the canvas of choice for the younger automotive artists tends to be Honda and Toyota coupes, Scions and Subarus, though we did see a gorgeous 1960 Chevrolet Impala that would have fit right in at WestWorld, and for that matter so would that mid-'70s Cadillac convertible (shown at right, riding on 26-inch rims and with “Imported from Detroit” tattooed on its rear end), except for the fact it missed the Goodguys 1972 cutoff by a couple of years.

One more thing I've observed through my years of covering the classic car hobby is that while the point of entry for most people is the car they wanted but couldn't have in high school, it doesn't take long for them to learn to appreciate—and to want—cars from a variety of eras, both those admired as historic time capsules and those that have been customized and personalized.

Bottom line: the classic car hobby is a long way from extinction. There's a whole new generation, albeit a computerized and tattooed one, that's getting ready to give the boomers a run. ■



Torque Meet Tour Avondale



Universal Technical Institute