

Patina counts

A show that's more run-what-you-brung than trailer queen • Story and photos by Larry Edsall

Lalo Trujillo was working on a mid-1950s Chevrolet 210 that he planned to take to local car shows, until he noticed how popular they had become. "I wanted something different," he said.

He found it, in the form of a 1969 Cadillac Coupe DeVille that a friend of his father's had been keeping in the back of a barn for the previous 20 years. "Goats were living in it," Trujillo said, when asked about the car's condition at the time.

Long and low, and painted with a gray hood and trunk lid over its black fenders and doors, Trujillo's car was one of many personal automotive expressions that have been making the Rockabilly Bash one of the best car shows in Arizona.

It's a good thing Trujillo's car sits long and low, because that way you can see the amazing pattern he's painted on the car's roof. "It took two weeks on the top alone," he said, adding that after restoring and customizing the car and getting it all painted, he decided to strip it down and do the paint we saw at the show.

"I didn't like it the first time," he said, adding that he also realized some of the body panels weren't as straight and true as he wanted them,

so he took the car back down to bare metal and started all over.

Such is the labor of love car owners such as Trujillo put into the vehicles they bring to the Rockabilly Bash.

The show was launched by the Phoenix-area 5 & Diner restaurants three years ago. The first one attracted 200 cars.

Last year, 360 showed up. The first Saturday of 2014, there were 500 cars and trucks on display at the Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park, on the Gila River Indian Community just south of Phoenix.

Event organizers anticipate 1,000 cars in 2015. The Bash isn't nearly as well known as the weekly gatherings that have been going on for years at the Pavilions shopping center on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community just east of Scottsdale. It isn't nearly as prestigious as the new Arizona Concours d'Elegance, or the Field of Dreams display put on by the organizers of the Copperstate 1000 vintage sports car rally.

The collection of cars doesn't approach the historic significance of those on display at the Motor-ing Thru Time show in historic Heritage Square

in downtown Phoenix. Nor does this event draw thousands of cars and tens of thousands of people like the Goodguys Rod & Custom Association's twice-a-year visits to the Valley of the Sun. At least not yet.

Nonetheless, the Rockabilly Bash has quickly developed its own personality and its own following, for its display of automotive artwork, mechanical mayhem, and good ol' grassroots classic car fun.

The fun includes live music—this year, the bands were Whiskey Kiss and the Moonlight Howlers—and even a retro-style beauty pageant hosted by Brenda Lee Pinup and the Pin Up Angels. Think World War II-era makeup and hairdos, '50s poodle skirts over oh-so-high heels, and contemporary body art (tattoos).

And, well, there are the cars. Very few of them are trailer queens. Or queens or princesses by any stretch of the imagination. There are hot rods and rat rods and American classics in various stages of devastation and restoration.

This is a sort of run-what-you-brung show, with everything from cars that look as if they just rolled off a 1950s showroom to those that look like, well, like combinations of parts and panels you

The rooftop of Lalo Trujillo's 1969 Cadillac caps off the package (first photo, upper right). From custom taillights to untouched original pot metal badging, the Rockabilly Bash delivers the essence of a car show. Jim Bridgewater's golden '40 Ford convertible glitters, while John Redd's 1941 Ford International rat rod pickup with Buick cowl seems ready for absolutely anything. It's a casual gathering.

might not see anywhere else, or never expected to see in the first place.

Consider a 1946 Ford pickup truck with the nose from a 1951 Studebaker, or a 1955 Ford Thunderbird with green, matte-finished paint and white steel wheels, or a 1934 Pontiac with its sedan top and hood painted gray over a yellow shoulder stripe and maroon lower body and fenders, all riding on green wheels.

Patina counts with this crowd, but so does everything from matte primer to expertly applied custom-colored metal-flake. And flames. And pin-striping. Many of the cars and trucks appear to be the result more of someone's whimsy, far removed from some automaker's design studio or assembly plant. These cars are more than the sum of their parts. In simple terms, they are what they are, and we appreciate them—and their owners—for that very fact. ■

