

## Heart of the City Cruise-In A Success!

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Mansfield, Ohio - I started getting interested in cars at a young age beginning around 11 or 12 years by old building model cars. It wasn't long before I was 'customizing' these models with hand painted flames and swapping parts across different kits.



*Heart of the city Cruise In | © Bill B*

At one point I thought it was a good idea to install a model rocket engine in one and set it off. My friends gathered around and the car took off like a rocket (of course!) spiraling around and eventually slamming into the ground. I gathered the pieces, added some and put the model back together, never realizing this was the beginning of a fabulous hobby and eventually my life calling as a customizer, restorer, collision repair specialist and graphic artist for hundreds of different projects over a 40 year span.

That's why I love car shows and the 'Heart of the City' Cruise-In in Mansfield Ohio each August is no exception. Held in and around the center of town, where decades ago hot rodders would circle the square as the easternmost point of the Park Avenue cruising zone. The late night hot rodders eventually gravitated to the Miracle Mile a few miles west after the square was cut through, dividing it in half. It's great to have the area blocked off to traffic and be able to walk around the downtown area enjoying the millions of dollars of heavy metal machinery as rock n roll blares from the gazebo.



19th Annual Heart of the city Cruise In | © Bill B

I go for many reasons, to see some familiar classics, some newly completed projects and the variety of foods to eat, but most especially, the people. Talk about diversity! People of all ages, races and abilities. People that can't drive, don't drive or will never own a car come to appreciate the beauty and originality of the dozens and dozens of automobiles. It seems to me that the diversity of the show entrants are of a magical quality. Here I see: blue cars, purple cars, little cars and big trucks. There are spotless vehicles and uncompleted projects, some for sale. The cars are from different parts of the country and even the world. Some have done military service or starred in movies. Others have raced on the street and on the track. Some are metal and some are fiberglass. Some are just grandpa's car that he took good care of because, well, we love our cars and they are so much more than just transportation, they are an extension of who we are, our style and our status.

So, back to the people. I see kids coloring on a car, probably the only time they will ever be allowed to! I see folks of differing physical abilities cruising the show in their wheelchairs and motorized carts right alongside folks walking. I saw one lady posing beside several cars on her three wheeled battery powered mobile unit, beaming as happily as the kids coloring on the Scion Chalk Box. I took note of a gentlemen with one leg in a wheelchair with the same glow on his face as he repeatedly rolled up and down the middle of the road enjoying the view. I saw African Americans, Asians, Hispanics and White folks of different sexes, all admiring the same car. It seems to me that if we can embrace the diversity of all the cars in world, as indeed we do, putting aside our fears and insecurities to just admire the qualities and uniqueness of each mechanical marvel, that we could somehow learn to do that with each other.

That's what I love about the Mansfield show, aptly named the 'Heart' of the City, because for a brief moment in time, the world seems to be at peace because we have found common ground to express our love of something and focus on our similarities rather than our differences. Maybe we should all get each other a model car kit for Christmas this year and see what happens.

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