

Cars and camaraderie

Owners exhibit autos at Fourth of July show

By **JOHN BURNETT**
Hawaii Tribune-Herald

The American love affair with the automobile has always been about independence and the freedom of the open road, so the Hawaii

Classic Cruizers 4th of July Hilo Bayfront Car Show was a hit with the hundreds who turned out Monday to see everything from classics to sweet contemporary rides.

"We welcome all cars," said Martha Rodillas, the club's president, who estimated there were "150, maybe 175" cars on display.

"We have hot rods,

originals, we also have some lifted trucks and Volkswagen bugs," she said. "We bring the cars out every Fourth of July, but every three years we have an even bigger event we call Cruise Paradise. The next one will be in 2018. That event will have islandwide coverage. We'll go to different

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At the Hot Rides Expo, this 1940 Chevrolet was equipped with an original air conditioner that was filled with ice and hung from the passenger window.

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All types of cars were on display at Hilo Bayfront, including this U.S. Army special forces vehicle with a fake 50-caliber machine gun.



SHOW From the front page

towns and have car shows throughout the island — Waikoloa, Kona, Hilo. We'll make stops in Ka'u. We'll try to visit all the communities. It's a 10-day island cruise."

Rodillas said the Cruizers became a nonprofit organization last year.

"We come out and we help worthy causes. We participate in parades and we help medical causes, schools. We come out because it draws people. People like to check out the wheels," she said.

Rodillas and her husband, Francis, a retired police captain, had two gorgeously restored classics on display, a champagne 1955 Chevy Bel Air hardtop with a 327-cubic-inch power plant and a metallic dark blue 1966 Ford Mustang with a bored-out 289 small-block engine.

"My husband restored it. He took it down to bare metal and built it back up again," Martha Rodillas said about the 'Stang, and, as if on cue, the Michael Strand Band, playing on the event's stage, struck up "Mustang Sally," popularized in 1966 by Wilson Pickett and an essential number for any local band catering to Baby Boomers.

"I've always loved cars all my life; I've always been into cars," Francis Rodillas said. "Being a cop, I've probably had a couple dozen cars in my life. Now that I'm retired, I have more time to look at them and play with them, so it's cool."

The weather-beaten grayish green vehicle sported the words "U.S. Army Special Forces," a V8 engine, flat, riveted roof and a rusted, fake 50-caliber machine gun in the bed. Inside were a mortar round, a grenade and a bazooka, all dummies.

There were also vehicles made by manufacturers no longer in existence. For example, Herman Ludwig had a 1961 Willys pickup truck he got from his dad when he was in high school in 1978. It has the original flat-head 6-cylinder engine.

"This is about the third restoration I did. It was a work truck and I did this about four years ago now," Ludwig said.

Next to the Willys was a stunning 1955 silver-and-orange 1955 Chevy 210, also belonging to Ludwig. It's powered by a 502-cubic-inch engine, almost twice the size, displacement-wise, of the 265, which was the biggest Chevy engine available when the car was new.

"That was a four-and-a-half year build, I think seven, eight years ago," he said. "I built a shell."

One of the nicer, newer rides was Lloyd Cabral's Navy metallic blue 2000 Chevy Corvette C5.

"I bought it from some ham radio friends in Oregon who brought it over," said Cabral, who added it's his first time showing the beauty, which has a license plate sporting his call sign, KH6LC.

Another car generating a lot of buzz was a newly rebuilt 1969 Camaro belonging to Charles Umemoto and Audrey Terada, sporting a gleaming LS6 Corvette engine with Edelbrock heads, generating about 600 horsepower.

For those looking for something even older, there was a flat black 1932 Ford coupe — yes, the “Little Deuce Coupe” of Beach Boys’ fame.

“I built it from scratch. It’s an original body,” said Al Haraguchi, who’s owned it since 1969 and dropped in a fuel-injected 400-cubic-inch Corvette engine and 4-speed transmission, as well as putting the body on an all-new frame.

Not everything was gleaming and pristine, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder. One eye-catching truck was a rat rod — or perhaps, more accurately, a “Rat Patrol” rod, for those old enough to have seen the 1960s TV series about four Allied soldiers fighting in the North African desert during World War II.

“I was looking for a ’Vette for years and most of them are white, silver, black or red,” he said. “You get one used it usually has 100,000 miles on it and the interior is beat. This one’s only got 40,000 miles on it. I know the people I got it from. It’s a really nice car and it was a nice deal. I like the lines. It’s round and smooth.”

And although those round, smooth lines give the C5 a perhaps tamer look than the classic ’Vettes of the 1960s, don’t be fooled. The LS1 aluminum V8 engine and Borg-Warner T-56 6-speed manual transmission give it a top speed of about 175 mph.

Cabral said he showed up for “the cars and the camaraderie and all the people.”

“Everybody likes cars. Who doesn’t like cars?” he said. “You can have your money in the bank or you can have it in something you can enjoy every day. You only go around once.”

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