Road Angels Tailpipes

Monthly Newsletter of Who, What, Where & When

From the Prez

As always, welcome to this month's issue of the Tailpipes.

Greetings Road Angels, supporters and friends. My name is Rich Kelly and am the newly elected President of the Road Angels. I look forward to serving as the Road Angel's President and appreciate your support. I hope to continue the good work and positive environment that Al Tursi established in his twelve years as President. During Al's tenure we found a new home at the Dublin Volunteer Fire Company, grew membership, developed an effective committee structure, and established a reputation as a club of car enthusiasts who care about their community. I hope to continue to provide the kind of steady and effective leadership that Al provided, and I want you to let me know how that's going as move forward together. I believe in Al's position that the club belongs to the members, not to any single person or group within the club, and I'll do my best to lead with that in mind. I can't promise that everyone will agree about everything, but I can assure you that all members will be heard and respected. Thanks again for your support now and in the future. Let's have fun!

The Club agreed to bring a canned food good to our meetings each month to be donated to the Food Larder at the New Britain Food Larder. This month, we collected **68 pounds of food with a goal of 1,500 lbs. collected for the year.** Way to go Road Angels and THANK YOU!

Thank you for your continued interest in the Road Angels of Doylestown and, of course, your support as we strive to support local non-profit organizations. Due to yours and our sponsors support, last year the Club was able to donate approximately $10,000 to several local charities and organizations

SHIFTING GEARS

The therapeutic benefits of the far-from-perfect, anything-goes rat rod

HEMMINGS

By
Jim Van Orden
Updated
July 15, 2024

Your first car may have been like mine. Rust everywhere, peeling paint, torn upholstery, smelly interior, worn out clutch, engine that burned oil…you name it, my 1951 Mercury had it.

That was about 60 years ago. You know what I miss today? Besides wishing I still had it, I miss not caring that the car was a mess. Even after treating the Merc to a $19.95 Earl Scheib paint job, which did little to hide bondo-covered rust holes, dents and other imperfections, I didn't worry about making it look nice.

Everything I added — from fender skirts to chrome tailpipes — and everything I took off — from hood/trunk emblems and side chrome strips — was done for a purpose: to make the car mine. I was telling the world, "Look at me, you'll never see another car like it."

Since then, I've owned lots of new cars, kept them polished and obsessed over the usual things: dents, scratches, fender benders, bird poop, mud on carpets and seats, etc. It was all about keeping up appearances.

Then, about 25 years ago, I started seeing rat rods at car shows. They stood out like sore thumbs among the restored classics and hot rods. At first, I didn't know whether I liked them. But in time, I realized these ugly-duckling creations had a therapeutic effect.

My blood pressure dropped each time I examined one. They reminded me that life wasn't about perfection. Rather, it was about self-expression and fun. It was all right to have a less-than-perfect car. Slowly, my teen psyche was returning.

I enjoy the freedom from conformity that rat rods represent. They are an art form and express the owner's creativity and individuality. Their owners told me many interesting stories.

Rat rod owners were the nicest bunch, too. A few years ago, an old guy at the Nocona, Texas, classic car auction told me about his rusted coupe that had a tractor's grill and enormous engine with tall, chrome exhaust stack.

What powers that beast?" I asked.

"That's a Cummins truck diesel," he said. "It has enough torque to pull stumps and it's as fast as hell."

I believed him. The ground shook and the stack roared when he started it. Now I understood why he was hard of hearing.

Rat rod owners are the nicest people you'll meet, such as the man who built this Cummins diesel-powered beauty with an old tractor's grill. We met at a classic car auction in Nocona, Texas.

For this man and many other rat rod owners, it was all about being rebellious and intentionally distressing their vehicles…everything society had taught me not to do. I had to unlearn so much.

Many rat rod owners previously built six-figure, pristine hot rods and classics that were show winners. They told me they were tired of maintaining and hauling them in trailers to shows. I asked a man at a McKinney, Texas, rat rod show what motivated him to build his creation.

"I built show-quality hot rods for years," he said, "but seldom drove them. The fun factor was missing. So I went back to basics…to when I was just getting started in hot-rodding…and built my first rat rod. I went to junkyards looking for parts or traded with folks who had what I needed. Sometimes I built my own parts. The fun factor returned."

Finding the "fun factor" is what drives some rat rodders to build their creations. Finding the right part often involves trading or building your own.

The rat rods of my youth

Come to think of it, most of my high school friends owned rat rods. We didn't call them that, of course. They were just beat-up stockers — jalopies, as my Dad used to say — "customized" with Moon hubcaps and fender skirts. A few were "souped up" with multiple carbs, headers, and more powerful engines bought at junkyards and installed in backyards.

A classmate removed the flathead straight-eight from his four-door '54 Pontiac Chieftain and replaced it with a '56 Olds V-8 sporting a four-barrel and dual exhaust. The engine hooked up to the Pontiac's dual-range, four-speed Hydra-Matic. The big engine transformed the timid ride into a sleeper-rocket.

Its rear end almost scraping pavement, the '49 Mercury's engine bay no longer housed a flathead V-8. A car shop buddy transplanted a '52 Olds V-8 and Hydra-Matic into the tight space. Dual glass packs rumbled and exhaust tips scraped macadam when he launched, producing sparks and excitement.

Barry's '34 Ford five-window coupe, chopped 4 inches with Cadillac V8, was the quintessential rat rod. It was stripped down to bare essentials. Its light weight and three deuces made it fast. Photo by Barry.

Harvey's '40 Ford convertible, dubbed "Blue Moon" due to its bright blue paint job, had what every boy wanted: a Vette mill under the hood. It was "only" a '55 Vette motor with four barrel, but it delivered 195 horsepower – enough to keep the lightweight Ford ahead of most cars. Chrome wheels and a chopped windshield and top made it a visual treat.

Brothers Barry and Justin held top spots in the rat rod pecking order. Their cars were the fastest and most radical…such as Barry's '34 Ford and '53 Studebaker. Both cars eventually shared the same Cadillac V-8 with three two-barrel carbs. Justin's rides included a '53 Chevy convertible with bored-out "Jimmy Six" and three two-barrels, as well as a black '48 Chevy with 283-inch V-8.

No wonder you see so many kids like my grandson Jake enjoying the rat rod aesthetic these days. They're not all that different from the cheap and fast cars all generations seem to gravitate toward in their youth.

'In rust we trust'

You need a sharp eye and sense of humor to enjoy rat rods. Like appreciating modern art, it's an acquired taste.

What made me laugh at the McKinney, Texas, rat rod show was the sign on a vehicle proclaiming "In rust we trust." A common credo among rat rod disciples, there sure was a lot of rust on the 100 or so vehicles I examined that day. Some had clear-coat applications to protect rust, which came in a variety of shades and patinas.

You've got to have a sense of humor and an eye for detail to enjoy rat rods.

It looked like many rat rods started with a single part, such as a radiator cover or frame, around which everything was built.

"It's all about the hunt for parts," a rat rod owner from my hometown explained. He was proud of the International Harvester tractor grill rigged on the front of his pickup. The roof was chopped 4 inches and a Chevy V-8 with chrome valve covers and four-barrel carb sat up front.

The owner of this rat rod at a Richardson, Texas, classic car show was proud of his International Harvester tractor grill. It looked handsome…and bullet-proof.

When it comes to engines, enormous V-8s — in particular, Chrysler Hemis — are preferred among rat rod owners. Mounted on sturdy frames with extra steel supports to handle their weight, the engines feature custom-made exhaust manifolds with 4-foot-long — or longer — pipes pointing to the sky. Usually muffler-less, their exhaust blats and pulses are deafening.

It's nice to see carbs in proliferation, their chromed air cleaners — sometimes six of them — reflecting sunlight like mirrors. Unusual engines are the norm. I had never seen an "Industrial" Chrysler Hemi before. Its owner told me it

The owner of this rat rod told me his "Industrial" Chrysler hemi engine once powered a boat. Ever see one like this? I hadn't…and I've been going to car shows for nearly 60 years.

Rat rods aren't about going fast, although most look quite capable. After all, they usually weigh less than 2,500 pounds and have 400-plus horsepower engines. It's really about being seen.

Shifting Gears Cont.

Spotting a rat rod with the largest blower I had ever seen, its compressor sticking up about four feet, I asked the owner how he could see the road, especially as the windshield was only 4 inches tall.

"Easy, I look around the sides," he said, chuckling.

"Is that legal?" I asked, wondering how he got through state inspection.

"They're too busy checking everything else to worry about visibility," he replied.

I wondered about noise, too, and exhaust fumes…and hearing loss from 130-decibel pipes…and whether roll bars were needed for crashes…and how to evacuate tight interiors should doors not open in a crash…and….

Stop worrying, Jim. Remember, it's all about having fun. You never worried about that stuff as a teen.

Ear-splitting engines with tall blowers blocking the driver's vision through 4-inch-tall windshields were commonplace. Stop worrying about safety, Jim. It's about having fun.

Custom designed and built

No matter with whom I talked, each rat rod owner told me how many hours were devoted to designing and building their custom creations. Most were fabricated in barns or backyard garages. The finished products might have passed as "barn finds." You might say that was their goal: to produce a vehicle that looked unique and, most of all, original.

Frames had to be cut and lengthened or shortened. So did doors, hoods, and windows. New steel floors were welded into place, as were custom dashboards, seat mounts, glove boxes and hangers for clutch, brake, and gas pedals. Like classic car restorations, rat rods required lots of sweat equity.
It may look simple, but building a rat rod takes a lot of design time and "sweat equity."

Rat rods aren't just cars. They come in all types of vehicles from children's bicycles and wagons to work trucks and motorcycles. Although not always accepted at classic car and hot rod shows, rat rods have grown in popularity across the nation. They have their own shows and draw big audiences. For this reason, most car shows have special rat rod sections…and sometimes they steal the show.

Rat rods come in many types, from pickup trucks and motorcycles to children's bicycles and wagons. Classic car and hot rod enthusiasts may not like them, but they're quite popular nationwide.

Rat rods have grown on me over the years. I'm almost ready to take one for a spin. Stop worrying, Jim, you survived your teen driving years…as well as old cars that were no safer than rat rods.

2026 Car Show Participants













Upcoming Car Events

October 3
Philadelphia Modifiers Car Show & Swap Meet
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Automotive Training Center
900 Johnsville Blvd., Warminster, PA

November 1
Riegelsville Fall Roll Out
8:00 AM – 2:00 PM

November 7
New Britain Borough Car Show
10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Lenape Valley Church
321 West Butler Ave., New Britain, PA



SAVE THE DATE!

JULY 11, 2027

"Road Angels Car Show" Location...

Dublin Vol. Fire Company, Dublin PA

194 N. Main St., Dublin, PA

Become a Road Angel

Benefits of Joining THE Road Angels Club

- ***Our** Club is a great way to connect with like-minded enthusiasts*
- ***Our Club helps charities on a group level; sponsorships***
- ***Your social life will improve immeasurably through group events and socials***
- ***You'll have an incentive to look after your car***
- ***Community involvements***
- ***Going to other car shows as a Club, with friends / families***
- ***You will be part of our Annual "Run with The Angels" Car Show***

So much more: camaraderie; family socials; road trips!!

For more info please contact our President, Al Tursi, at altursi@gmail.com or 267-893-9796

"We will be looking forward to meeting you!"



Road Angels Member
Bob Duke's
1948 Plymouth Coup

Road Angels Member
Bill Ford's
1957 Chevrolet Belair



Celebrations



Lynne Towle –October 1
Vivian Bell - October 23
Steve Goscinsky – October 28
John Perry – October 29
Terry Kimmey – October 30

Mitch Meyerson – November 18
Paul Curtis – November 24
Carolyn Palermo – November 30



Brad & Christine Sanders – October 1
Terry & Trish Kimmey – October 8
Greg & Carolyn Palermo – October 14
Butch & Annette Bickley – October 16
Tom & Judy Wholf – October 20

John & Jean Perry – November 13
Bob & Dawn Frank – November 26

Mark Your Calendars

~ 2026 Cruise Nights ~

The Road Angels had a very successful Cruise Night season for 2025 hosted by the Dublin Volunteer Fire Company. Thank you Dublin Volunteer Fire Company. The following are dates for the Cruise Nights in 2026 all located at the Dublin Volunteer Fire Company, 194 N. Main St., Dublin, PA:

April 10 – 4:00 – 7:00 PM - 85+ Cars
May 8 – 5:00 – 8:00 PM – 50 + Cars Threatening weather
June 12 – 5:00 – 8:00 PM – Cancelled due to threatening inclement weather
August 14 – 5:00 – 8:00 PM – 78 Cars
September 11 – 4:00 – 7:00 PM – 76 Cars
October 9 – 4:00 – 7:00 PM

Food, as always, will be provided by the Dublin Volunteer Fire Company. We look forward to seeing you there. As always, thanks for your continued support.

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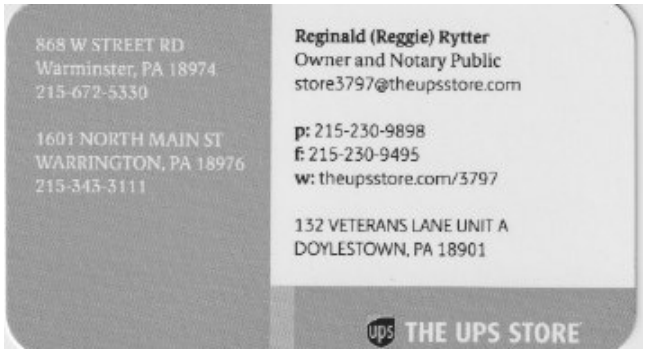
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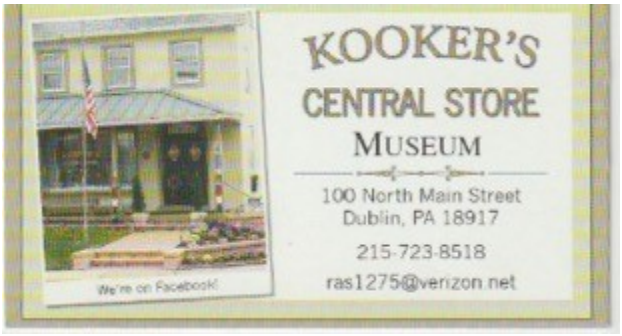
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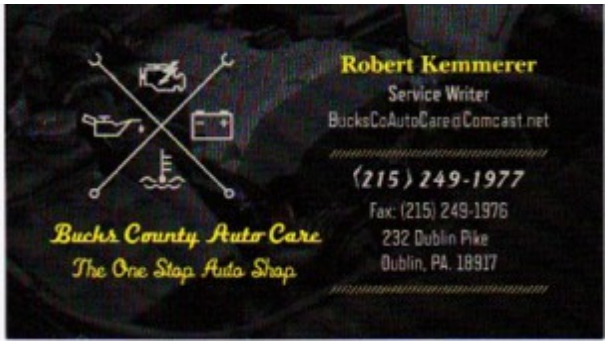
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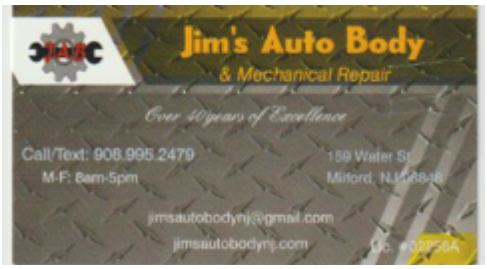






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