

Museum Cruise Night Wraps Up Season; '50s Chrome and '60s Fins Led the Way

by Gerald Scott

There was a galaxy of "car stars" at the Walter P. Chrysler Museum's most recent Cruise Night gathering, held the evening of Aug. 22, as lovely a summer evening as Michigan can offer, probably.

It was the 1955 Imperial Limousine owned by Wayne and Susan Simonson of Ray Twp. – Wayne is a Chrysler retiree who owns a dozen classic cars led by this one. He keeps them in two separate pole barns.

The 1955 Imperial, luxurious in look and style both inside and out, just turned heads and drew comments as among the best automotive design and engineering creativity that the Detroit auto industry could offer in that era.

Simonson is a diehard Chrysler devotee – his father worked in security at the old Chrysler Jefferson Avenue plant, the original one and otherwise he has many relatives who work for the automaker to this day.

"I started out working on the line at Jefferson Assembly myself," Simonson pointed out at the Museum cruise.

Simonson went on to enjoy a great career at Chrysler's operations in Center Line during the 1960s and 1970s. He was UAW for his first five years at Chrysler and then management from 1969 onward.

He tells the funny story that when Chrysler had close ties to TACOM at the Detroit Arsenal in nearby Warren, he recalled the big snowstorm of 1965 that effectively paralyzed the entire metro area with several feet of snow in a 24-hour period.

"They used the Army tanks (stored at Chrysler) to clear the

streets of snow in Center Line that time," he recalled. "The city's snow removal equipment wasn't enough."

Meanwhile, back to that gorgeous 1955 Imperial Limousine.

"We got it back in 1996," Simonson said. "There was a meeting of the Walter P. Chrysler Restorers Club here locally and a guy from Indianapolis had the car. He'd just gotten a divorce and needed the money, I guess, so he sold it to me for \$5,500."

As classic cars go, Simonson sure has gotten his money's worth, it would seem.

That's because the car is one of only 127 of this type made that year. It's curb weight was 5,205 lbs. and the factory engine was a 331 c.i.d. Hemi that gave 250 h.p. with a 4-barrel carburetor.

It had full-time power steering and brakes, a divider window and an original sticker selling price of \$8,434.

Simonson has "proof of inspection" paperwork that shows that the car passed certain vehicle testing requirements in Washington, D.C., but he can't prove whether it was used by the federal government or not.

"Eisenhower liked 1955 Imperials, it's what he had at the White House," Simonson pointed out. "The story goes that the air conditioning on the car was so strong that it blew snow on Mamie Eisenhower."

Funny story, part of the provenance of just a great, great car – in a parking lot of other great cars on display, too.

Elsewhere on Cruise Night in the parking lot of the WPC Museum, Anne Armstrong had her 1962 Chrysler 300 Sport named the "Beautiful Brute" on display. It's a car that she and her late

husband drag-raced in during the 1960s and 1970s.

Armstrong was with her daughter, Danielle, who recently returned from living in Hawaii for the past 10 years.

Although Danielle was a passenger in the 1962 Chrysler as a kid, a week ago was the first time she ever actually drove her parents' car.

"I had tears in my eyes because my family's history is tied up in that car," Danielle said.



While everyone was outside playing, the boys were hard at work.



Wayne and Susan Simonson with their 1955 Imperial Limousine.

Photo by Bill Springer

Now you know why cruiser cars have the emotional attachments for the owners that they do.

The Museum hosted three ma-

ajor cruises during the summer, in June, July and August, but this most recent cruise might've had the nicest weather if not the nicest lineup of cars.

What's cool about the WPC is that non-Chrysler brands are welcome to show, but largely, it's the historic Chrysler vehicles that hold down the fort.

Gilles: SRT Viper GTS 'Showcases Very Best We Have'

AUBURN HILLS – The Chrysler Group's Street and Racing Technology (SRT) brand marked its first official appearance at the renowned automotive events in Monterey, Calif., Aug. 17-19 with the unveiling of the new, limited-edition 2013 SRT Viper GTS Launch Edition model.

A sneak peek of the SRT flagship supercar took place Friday, Aug. 17, at the Quail Lodge as part of "The Quail: A Motorsports Gathering" event.

Then, on Saturday, Aug. 18, and Sunday, Aug. 19, the SRT Viper GTS Launch Edition was displayed on the Concept Lawn at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

The 2013 SRT Viper GTS Launch Edition evokes memories of past Viper Coupe reveals in 1996 and 2006 with symbolic GTS Blue paint and dual Bright White stripes – exclusive to Launch Edition models – running the length of its all-new exterior that incorporates iconic Viper styling cues with a contemporary execution.

The 2013 SRT Viper GTS Launch Edition carries on the tradition of special Viper model builds to the fifth generation of the American-built car with true performance enthusiasts and collectors in mind.

"Designed with Viper loyalists in mind, the 2013 SRT Viper GTS Launch Edition model brings back the classic paint schemes that have adorned all previous Viper coupe launches to help us celebrate the return of our brand's

flagship performance machine to the supercar market," said Ralph Gilles, president and CEO – Street and Racing Technology Brand and Motorsports and senior vice president – Product Design, Chrysler Group LLC.

"Our American-built supercar showcases the very best we have to offer by incorporating superior craftsmanship, the finest materials, a host of new technologies and ergonomic improvements while respecting its focus on outright performance."

In addition to its paint scheme, the wheels on SRT Viper Launch Edition models are a modern deep-section design, featuring a five-spoke polished forged-aluminum design.

"Stryker" badges can be found on the hood and steering wheel with a blue background replacing grey found on all other 2013 SRT Vipers models.

The new Stryker logo was named by owners who attended the 2010 Viper Owners Invitational event in Salt Lake City. Stryker marks the first new emblem for Viper since 2003 and the third incarnation of a Viper logo, following "Sneaky Pete" and "Fang."

Inside of the 2013 SRT Viper GTS Launch Edition, a serialized dash plaque aligns the build sequence number to the vehicle identification number.

Black Laguna leather with contrast stitching is found throughout, covering the seats, door trim, instrument panel, steering wheel, grab handle, shift knob



2013 Viper GTS Launch Edition

and center console. Alcantara covers the headliner and white bezels are finished in Satin Silver.

The 2013 SRT Viper and SRT Viper GTS models are set to return in fourth quarter of 2012 with more power and performance, superior craftsmanship, new technologies and creature comforts.

The all-aluminum, mid-front, 8.4-liter V10 powerplant delivers 640 horsepower and 600 lb.-ft. of torque – the most torque of any naturally aspirated sports car engine in the world. Standard safety features include electronic multi-stage stability control, traction control and new 4-channel antilock brake system (ABS).

An all-new carbon-fiber and aluminum skin is sculpted for high-speed stability and a slip-

pery .364 drag coefficient. Chassis enhancements bring 50 percent improvement in torsional stiffness, while triple-digit weight reduction results in a Viper-best power-to-weight ratio.

AH Golf Tourney Exceeds Its Goal

AUBURN HILLS – On Aug. 16, the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce, held its annual golf outing, the "Auburn Hills Open...Fore Business" event.

Held at the Fieldstone Golf Club's municipal course, the event included 120 golfers from the Auburn Hills business community and exceeded its fundraising goal by 20 percent, organizers said.

Sec'y of State's Mobile Van Will Visit OCC Site

The Michigan Secretary of State's mobile business van will visit the Oakland Community College's Royal Oak campus on Tuesday, Sept. 4 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. It will be parked in the Royal Oak campus alcove, across from Counseling.

This is a good opportunity to renew your driver's license, registration or a change of address.

There is no need to wait as the mobile business van comes to you.

Among the activities you can conduct through the mobile van are as follows:

- Apply and renew driver's licenses;
- Apply and renew ID cards;
- Change of home address;
- Register to vote in the state of Michigan only;
- Sign up as an organ donor;
- Purchase a copy of your driving record;
- Register vehicles;
- Apply for personalized or specialty plates;
- Transfer titles
- Register recreational vehicles including mopeds, snowmobiles, watercrafts and more.

The Secretary of State's office in Lansing has said that as its footprint of statewide offices shrinks, it will use the mobile business vans in select areas, such as the OCC college campuses including the busy Royal Oak campus site.