

HOT RODS ROAR

End-of-summer car party mostly safe, successful

By NATALIE ST. JOHN
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — The noise rattled windows and terrified dogs, as participants in the traditional Saturday night cruise roared through downtown on Sept. 10.

The event resulted in one police chase and one roll-over wreck, and some police officers said the atmosphere seemed a bit rowdier this year.

But aside from those incidents, the Rod Run was safe and successful, authorities said.

More than 800 vehicles registered at the official Beach Barons’ Wilson Field east of Ocean Park, a club member said. Rain on Saturday afternoon somewhat dampened the celebratory atmosphere, but on Saturday morning the field looked as full and lively as it ever has.

Younger, wilder

People who pour their life savings into vintage cars are pretty sensible drivers — they don’t want to destroy an irreplaceable part or a perfect paint job. But the long line of raised jeeps and old Toyota pickups from an off-roading club had no such concerns. As they pulled through the intersection of Pacific and Bolstad at sunset, one Jeep driver peeled out and jerked backwards, slamming on his brakes just as he was about to hit his buddy’s Jeep. On each pass through downtown, they revved their engines, surging forward and screeching to a stop again and again. Some observers cheered, others looked seriously annoyed.

Officially, the Beach Barons’ Rod Run to the End of the World is a celebration of lovingly-restored “hot rods” and classics. The 34th annual Ocean Park car show was open to cars made no later than 1987. But this year, the informal cruise seemed to draw a lot of cars — and people — who were made well after 1987.

As always, there were pristine Mustangs, Bel Airs and Barracudas whose owners hovered over them with chamois cloths in hand. There were custom-paint jobs worth more than the actual cars, mirror-like chrome bumpers and hand-upholstered leather interiors too beautiful to sit on.

This year, there were also



Robert Hilson

This ’56 T-bird brought back memories for Donata Kalisch of Nehalem. Her father borrowed this exact same car to take her family on a trip to Montana more than 40 years ago.



Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

For some, the cruise is a family event, and a chance to bond with other car enthusiasts. The cars ranged from prize-winners that have been featured in magazines to works-in-progress like this one.



Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

A spectator leaped into the street to cheer for a muscle car during the annual Saturday night cruise in Long Beach.



Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

‘Rat rods’ and other eccentric vehicles — and people — are an increasingly common feature of the Saturday night cruise.

more souped-up model Ts, ancient Chevy pickups and other jalopies that wore their flat paint, rusty bumpers and dents like badges of honor. These were the “rat rods,” the redheaded stepchildren of the

hot rod world.

Mixed in with the vintage cars were dune buggies, homemade mopeds, coupes with giant spoilers and neon lights, and giant muddy trucks.



Robert Hilson

Roni Zonnefeld, 27, of Kirkland, worked hard rebuilding this 1963 Ford F-100 truck with her dad.

Drinking on the downlow

Early in the evening, a visiting officer from Castle Rock noticed a man in a black truck talking on his cellphone as he drove through downtown.

When he signaled the man to pull over, “The guy dropped the cellphone, turned and took off. He went to Ocean Beach Boulevard,” Washington State Patrol Sgt. Brad Moon said. “The driver was headed north,

accelerating to the point where he lost control of the vehicle.” Near Bolstad Avenue, the man crashed into a white SUV and jumped the curb, nearly hitting a woman in a wheelchair.

Officers from several agencies arrested him at gunpoint. Tests later revealed he had a blood-alcohol level of 0.26, well over the legal limit of 0.08, Moon said.

Though a bouncer meticulously checked IDs at one popular watering hole, a lot of drinkers didn’t bother with bars. Many of the people who lined the route of the cruise surreptitiously pulled out flasks, or sipped from red plastic cups filled with mystery punch. When a spectator threw something into the bed of a passing truck, a hidden cache of empty cans clattered loudly.

There’s always a certain amount of partying associated with Rod Run weekend, Moon said. But crime dropped significantly after local authorities moved it to after Labor Day and beefed up the downtown police presence several years ago.

Fifteen years ago, Moon said, State Patrol would send as many as 40 troopers to help out, and they’d arrest 40 to 60 drunks over the weekend. For the last few years, they’ve arrested four to six drunk drivers each year.

This year, there were three DUIs, Moon said.

Rod wrecks

There was one fender-bender involving a 1948 car that lost steering and crashed into a bush near Chinook, Moon said. The only other Rod-Run-related wreck occurred on State Route 103, near the Dunes Bible Camp in Ocean Park.

Two men in an open-top Jeep were headed south on 103 on Saturday night, when the driver missed his turn.

“We suspect he was going too fast for the conditions,” Moon said. “He did a U-turn. It rolled over.”

Both passenger and driver were ejected from the vehicle. At first, the passenger, who was “highly intoxicated,” appeared to be unresponsive, but he woke up. The driver was not drunk. Both men were up and walking around by the time responders arrived. They refused aid. The vehicle had to be towed.

“That ended up being a minor injury collision,” Moon said.

Program: Participating businesses must pay at least minimum wage

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County leaders learned about McMinnville Works, a similar internship program in Yamhill County, and applied to be part of one of their four statewide workshops funded by a grant from the Oregon Talent Council. The initial workshops were all taken, but the leaders banded together to pay \$125 per business for up to 20 to attend a fifth workshop Sept. 27 at Clatsop Community College.

Kevin Leahy, executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources and a coordinator with the internship program, said he has been reaching out to a number of major businesses in the county, from hospitals and mills to the hospitality industry.

The intern program will be open to students at all five county school districts, along with the college. Originally, the program was meant to be for students 18 and older, Leahy said, but some businesses, such as hotels, want to start training employees as young as 16.

“The beauty of this is that it’s employer-driven,” Leahy said. “It’s almost turnkey, the way that I see this. The business can dictate what the internship is about.”

Participating businesses must be able to host interns for up to six weeks, pay at least minimum wage and provide



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them an employee mentor and management.

Leading the workshop will be Jody Christensen, the executive director for the McMinnville Economic Development Partnership. Christensen has overseen the McMinnville Works internship program for the past five years.

“When I was going out and meeting with companies, I kept hearing over and over again about the critical issues in finding and keeping talent,” she said. “Positions were being kept open months on end, they weren’t filling jobs.”

The city reached out to Climax Portable Machine Tools, a Newberg company with an internal internship program, and secured seed funding from the Yamhill County Board of Commissioners for a summer pilot at four local companies.

The program took off, she said, and now includes 15 to 20 businesses a year hosting a similar number of students. The businesses focus on project-based work that can be completed during a nine-week summer internship. Participants also go through weekly workshops to learn skills like teamwork and managing finances.

“What we’re trying to do is round out some of the things they might not be learning in school about what it means to be employed,” she said.

Most of the students in McMinnville’s program are juniors and seniors in college from throughout the Pacific Northwest, Christensen said, but each community designs a program fit to local needs.

“We’re not going to get every detail worked out in six hours,” she said. “There will be areas up in the air, but we’ll create the basic framework.”

Grades: Roughly 60 percent of students fell short in mathematics

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are more demanding than the previous generation of year-end exams. That was a tad more than ducked testing in 2016.

The new tests, titled Smarter Balanced, were developed by a consortium of 13 states to measure reading, writing, listening, math and reasoning skills that panels of teachers, professors, employers and other experts agreed were needed at each grade level.

Overall, in the three years the exams have been given, students in Oregon and most other states have struggled to reach the standards they set.

This year, roughly 60 percent of Oregon public school students fell short in mathematics as did 45 percent in reading and writing. It was the worst showing yet by Oregon schools, particularly in language arts.

Statewide, all four major race and ethnic groups — whites, Latinos, Asians and blacks — registered lower proficiency rates than in 2016. Scores for Asian-American students, already the top-performing group, dipped least; scores among white students fell the most.

How well students performed on the Smarter Balanced tests this year will be the primary factor driving the school performance ratings

that the Oregon Department of Education plans to issue in October.

But those ratings will require a more sophisticated determination than whether a school posted low, average or high scores. Instead, the ratings will be based primarily on how much the school helped individual students progress in English and in math from where that particular student scored a year or two before. Performance ratings also give extra weight to how well schools succeed with students who historically have struggled in Oregon schools: minorities, low-income students, those with disabilities and students still learning English as a second language.

Very few Oregon students still learning to master English do well on the exams, which require reading complex passages and following multi-step math instructions. But a higher share of them registered as proficient on both English and math exams this year, making them the only demographic group to show strong gains.

Smarter Balanced tests are designed to measure how well students have been taught to master the Common Core State Standards, a set of rigorous expectations for reading, writing, math and reasoning skills adopted by nearly all U.S. states.

Still, the tests have

remained controversial. At some Oregon schools, parents or students decide that it’s best for the student to sit them out. That’s particularly true at some schools where students generally do well on standardized tests.

This year, only 16 percent of juniors at Portland’s Cleveland High, known for its academically rigorous International Baccalaureate program, took the math portion of the test. More than half the juniors at Lake Oswego High and Portland’s Wilson High skipped one or both exams, and nearly half skipped both subjects at Portland’s Grant High.

Students at Lake Oswego and some other schools organized to urge fellow students to boycott the tests. They say they do a poor job of measuring readiness for college. They also complain they place an undue burden on juniors, given that many take the ACT, the SAT, Advanced Placement exams and other standardized tests that year.

Test-taking rates among elementary pupils were generally very high. But dozens of Portland-area elementary schools — mostly ones in comfortably middle-class Portland neighborhoods — fell short of testing 95 percent of students.

Edward Stratton of The Daily Astorian contributed to this story.