



Movie-Going in the Casual Manner

by Peer J. Oppenheimer



Newest drive-in theater model (above) utilizes four screens, center projection booth, refreshment stand. Familiar twilight scene is crowded drive-in (below).



**Because it offers many conveniences for the family,
the drive-in theater has won millions of fans.**

THIRTY YEARS ago, a prominent clergyman complained that movies were helping to tear families apart. Today, at least one sort of movie-going can take credit for exactly the opposite effect.

In recent years, the drive-in theater has become a solid family institution, and for several good reasons: for family groups, admissions usually are less than in conventional theaters; the extra nuisance and expense of finding parking space has been eliminated; baby sitters have become unnecessary since even the tiniest tot can be put to sleep in the back seat, and mother doesn't have to spend a lot of time getting dressed—no stranger will notice if she watches the show in loafers.

Besides, most drive-ins offer refreshments that make the standard popcorn-candy-soda pop diets of conventional theaters as obsolete as silent movies. And one of the biggest attractions for the younger set, the kiddie playground, has become standard equipment in nearly 70 percent of all outdoor theaters in the country.

Since the first drive-in opened at Culver City, Calif., in 1932, their number has grown to 4,400 of a total of 18,200 theaters—almost 25 percent.

This figure tells only part of the story, however. The capacity of the average drive-in far outnumbers that of the average four-wall theater. New York's Radio City Music Hall, the biggest hard-top theater in the world, accommodates 6,900. The Los Altos Drive-in Theater in Long Beach, Calif., holds 3,000 cars, with an average of three viewers per car—total audience, 9,000.

The success of drive-ins is just as apparent in the new format of their shows, primarily first-run films now because they are able to compete with and sometimes even outbid the old-fashioned theaters for newer films. It can also be found in Hollywood's increased emphasis on wholesome films which please all members of the family.

When the first drive-in opened, one huge loud-speaker was used to service all cars. Although the one lonely farmer who lived in the vicinity didn't

complain, it soon became evident that this would never do. Within two years, the individual speaker became standard equipment.

Another problem was the long daylight hours, which cut down the number of performances during the most profitable Summer months. This situation was eased by the use of color films, which can be shown earlier in the evening than black-and-white pictures and still be seen clearly.

To maintain business despite bad weather proved more difficult. Experiments to overcome this handicap started in the late 1930s when a drive-in in the State of Washington reimbursed customers for the gasoline used to keep car heaters running. When the first plug-in heaters were tried out in Minnesota, a great percentage were never returned to the theater. More foolproof systems are being initiated, and a few theaters in the Midwest now are open year-round.

There also are plans to install inexpensive lightweight aluminum covers over the whole parking area so shows can start earlier and the nuisance of keeping windshield wipers operating when it rains can be eliminated.

As solutions to the various problems are worked out, drive-ins are sure to play a more important part in the movie-going habits of the American people.