

How to Organize a Car Show



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Preface

The purpose of this book is to give you my thoughts on organizing a car show. I've attended car shows for over 20 years and have been a project manager for over 15. Now, have I ever formally managed a project related to a car show? No. But after attending hundreds of shows you see the good and bad of shows. So if you are ready, let's turn the key and get to planning a car show!



Select your team

At the start of any project you need to select your team. I don't care if you think your show is going to have 25 or 1000 cars, you will need a team of people to help you organize your show. Once you have your team, you will need to determine who is going to do what on your team. Also, if a team member isn't able to do the things you need them to do, you need to kick them off the team. I know that sounds pretty ruff, but you don't want to get to your car show day without a place for the show. Set up a calendar with when you are going to meet each month or week to organize the show.

Pick a Date

Just like a wedding you need to pick a date that works for most of your team and you need to investigate what other shows will be happening on the same date. Ideally you want a day to yourself, but that is not always possible. And your best bet is to pick 2 or 3 dates and then find the best venue for your event.

Picking the perfect spot

I've attended shows at bars, parking lots of a business, car dealers, downtown area, fairs, race tracks, parks and indoors. With all of these spots there are different things to keep in-mind. For a 1st year show typically you are lucky to get 50-100 cars. A local business many times is the best place for a small show. Why? Typically the business owner will have food and bathrooms to use and you won't have to worry about permits and convincing city officials on the idea of a car show. The risk is not having enough space for all the cars and people whining about toilet paper in the bathroom. Keep it simple and you won't have to worry about spending so much money.

My favorite spot for a car show is in a small downtown setting, because I can swing into a local café for lunch, or maybe checkout some of the local businesses. Car shows that are in the middle of nowhere and are not within walking distance to restaurants and other non-car show related things, typically make for a super long day for the car owners, and it will typically greatly limit the amount of foot traffic. Car shows that grow each year typically have that one thing is common and that is a great location for foot traffic and things to keep the car owners engaged at the show or outside the show.



Parks and downtown areas are also great venues but there will be permits and meetings with the local city consuls to get approval for your show.

If there is a second event that is going on at the same time like a fair it is an excellent way of increasing foot traffic at your show.

Once you have a couple of places in-mind, drive out and check them out. Think about where registration would be at, where the cars might park at, where the DJ would setup (got power) and so on. Then you have to find out if it is available for the date you selected, and you may have to pitch the idea to a business owner (hopefully you have a car guy on your team that already owns a business).

Set the event's theme

Most car shows have a theme or a reason more than just, "it's just another car show". Having a reason for any extra money raised at the show, or at least the money from the 50/50 raffle going to a beneficiary, will at least give the car owners an idea where their entry fee is going to other than someones pocket.

Beneficiaries – who will get the money at the end of the event? If it is a recognized charity, make sure that you get their endorsement or acceptance in writing. Car people are very generous and will usually try and come to an event benefiting a worthy cause. The burden is on you as the event planner to make sure that the charity gets all of the money (or whatever amount you advertise for the event). You must be accurate in your description of the event. If you say "proceeds go to the American Red Cross". Then make sure the Red Cross is on-board and that you give them "all of the proceeds". It is also a good idea to keep them informed during the show planning. Also, give them a complete reconciliation (accounting) of the proceeds. Clearly show the costs of promoting and managing the event. The deal with all of this is "if you are not truthful about who gets what, the car folks will not come back". And sadly enough I have attended shows that have turned out to be a scam for the organizer to pocket the cash (sad, but true).

Money

If you think running a show is just picking up a 100 bucks of trophies online and then grabbing ten bucks from car owners as they drive in, you are completely wrong. You may be able to pull off a small show for \$2000 or less. The reality is a \$5000 budget is probably what it will take for a medium show with 150 or fewer cars (think of what it takes for a wedding). Money goes fast when you need to buy: food, rent prota-Jons, rent tents, hire a DJ, buy trophies and door prizes, advertise and so on. The two ways you can raise money is by finding sponsors or knowing someone with deep pockets who will write you a check. Many times car clubs will use their yearly fees towards a yearly car show they put on. If you are short on cash, you may need to scale back your show. Hit up potential sponsors early on so you know what your real budget will be early in the planning stages of your show.

Some shows have an admission fee for spectators. I think this is fine if you have a show with over a 1000 cars, but if you are going to have a typical local car show with a couple hundred cars I would suggest not charging for spectators.

What are you going to charge? Most shows in the Midwest charge 5-10 bucks per car. On the west coast it is 20-25 bucks. Make sure this information is on your flyer and on the day of the show and make sure you have plenty of change on hand.



Advertise your event

You need to do this early and often if you have a new show, and even more so if there is already a second show in your area at the same time. Get your car event “accepted” by the car people in your area. Immediately begin to talk it up and get the word out about your event. This will discourage others from planning an event on the same day.

Head on out to the interweb and find every car show list you can find for your specific state and get your show posted on it. Below is a national car show list:

www.rocknrod.com

Create your own website and post your flyer so it is easy to print off (others may help out by printing some off and handing them out at shows). web.com offers free websites and at godaddy you can buy a website domain for about ten dollars a year. Most 15 year old kids now can build you a generic website. Also, this is a great place to list your sponsors.

Have a blog on your website and post weekly how the planning is going (blogspot.com offers free blogs)

Post a Video of last year’s event, or a short video from the folks putting on the show who will talk about the show.

Hand out flyers at local car shows at the beginning of the season.

Search for Local Message forums and post details about your show early in the season.

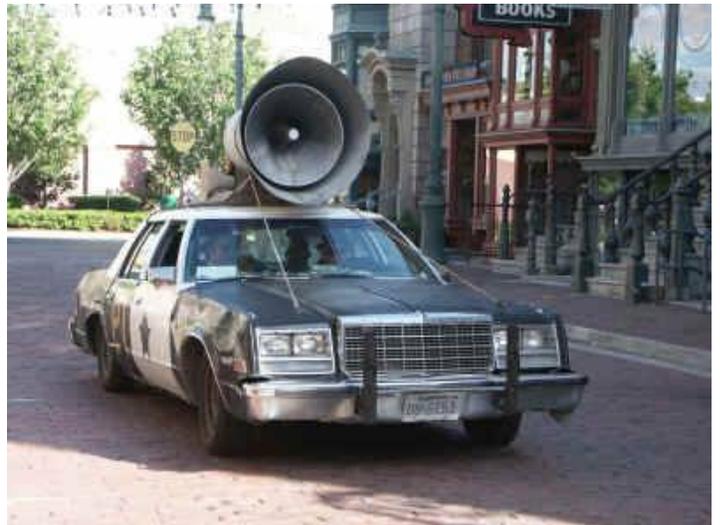
Post it on Craigslist.

Advertise in your local newspaper.

Create a Facebook Fans page.

Hit up a couple of automotive related car forums (like tuners, mustangs, low riders) and let them know you are having a show).

The key thing is to have a plan and stick to it. If your primary focus is to hand out flyers (which was the only way folks did it prior to the internet) don't be surprised if you only have 12 cars show up. Marketing a show is a lot more than just handing out a piece of paper (again, which was cool back in 1986). Get out and talk with owners, and have an online strategy.



What type of cars do you want to come?

I've gone to large shows that only have room for 1000 cars and they have a 20 year cut off. And I've gone to shows before where they have over 10,000 cars with a 1964 and older cut off. You should describe what types of cars you want to come. For instance, if you say "Open to all pre-1948 Hot Rods, Rat Rods and classics American Cars". That's fine. If you say "Open to all cars and trucks", you will get a little bit of everything. Don't forget to indicate Tuners too! They are the next generation of the car hobby! If you want a pure classic car show the typical date cut off is 1974. If you are a purist you may want to have a cut off, but by allowing everyone in, you should have a lot more cars show up. And if you are a purist, don't be snotty about all of these new cars at shows. The new car owners are putting their pride into their rides and you should respect that.

Must have items on show flyers:

Every show needs an informative flyer that you can hand out at shows. Here are some things to keep in mind when you are developing your flyer:

1. Map to the location or the address (I like the address so I can plug it into my GPS). An email address, website and phone number to find out more information.
2. Is it a judged show? Who is judging it? Participants?
3. List of all classes.
4. When does registration start and end?
5. Will there be a DJ?

6. Cost to enter your car? If you can send in your money (early bird discount) what is the cutoff date?
7. Will there be food on site?
8. If giving out awards indicate the time the awards will be presented
9. Is the parking on grass or asphalt? If parking on grass make sure the area was mowed 3-5 days prior to the show.
10. If you have a website think about allowing online registration and allowing folks to pay via paypal. Quick easy and it will draw them to your website.
11. Don't forget to include the hours of the show so the owners know when to roll in and when the awards will be.

Podcast on Show Flyers: www.wisconsinhotrodradio.com/whrr011908.wav

Examples of good car show flyers

<http://www.fountainvalley.org/community/communityservices/documents/CarShowFLYER08.pdf>

Make your show stand out from the crowd:

To keep folks coming back year after year you need to have a reason for them to come back. Here are some of my ideas to help make your show different:

50/50 raffle with the proceeds going to charity (have a table near registration to sell them and have folks walk around and sell them too)

Cruise after or during the show

Bring in your local Hooters restaurant girls, for some photos with the cars

Have a clinic on how to judge a car

Door Prizes

Engine "Blow ups"

Burn-out Competition (very popular on the west coast; would recommend some 3 foot high concrete walls and access to water to keep it safe; 5 bucks a burn-out with money going to a charity)

Poker runs (everyone meets at one spot and drives to several other locations)

Live bands



Tire toss or piston toss

Name that car part make and model

Floor creeper races

Reading off trivia questions; correct answer gets a prize

Allow vendors to come to your show to sell car related items (tupperware and cheap necklaces are not car related)

Chinese auction. 1 dollar gets you 1 ticket. Fill out one side of the ticket and place the other part in a can next to an auction item. At the end of the show draw out the tickets next to the items to determine the winners.

Information to capture at registration

1. Name, address, city (this can be used for the next year if you have a budget to mail out event flyers; and you can easily set it up to print of address onto labels for your mailing).
2. Email address. Why snail mail when you can email it! Make, model, color, and year of car.

Once you have this information it is nice to enter this into an Excel spreadsheet:

www.walkerdowney.com/ryanendres/carshowform.xls

This sheet can also capture your judges scores and quickly and easily find your winners.

How to use the Excel Spreadsheet:

www.walkerdowney.com/ryanendres/CarShowFormHowTo.doc

Dash Plaques:

The majority of shows hand out dash plaques and typically advertise the total number they will have available. The costs for the plaques range from 75 cents on up. If you are looking to save a couple bucks this maybe the area to do it. Car shows have been handing out dash plaques since the 1960's. There has been a new trend to have a magnet dash plaque, now the owners can stick to their tool box or refrigerator.

www.qualitylapelpins.com/dashPlaques.php



www.dashplaques.net/index.html

www.rallyproductions.com <http://daytonatrophy.com>

Trophies

You can purchase trophies locally or online (most of the places that sell dash plaques also sell trophies). Many show planners hit up local companies to sponsor one or more of the shows trophies in exchange for having their name on the award or their company logo on the Car Shows T-shirt. Also the DJ may be requested to read off the sponsors names several times throughout the show.

More and more shows are bringing in a couple of custom built trophies using old car parts for cars that are best of show, or if the show is small enough, all the awards are custom built out of cars parts. Very unique and different!



To judge or not to judge

Some car owners and clubs will only bring their cars to shows that offer awards. Some enjoy the competition and some have big plans for a plastic 15 dollar trophy. The fact is shows with at least some awards will bring in more cars, and many owners will stick around to see if they can add to their plastic collection (and to see if their friends won an award too). If you and your staff are going to judge make sure you set the ground rules and prior to the show and think about judging your own cars so the judges know how to appropriately judge a car. Also, for the stock classes define what stock means. Many shows allow 3-5 modifications in the stock classes; anymore and the car should really be in the custom class (or they will lose points). Common modifications in the stock classes are radios, rims, tires, carbs and intakes. If stock means stock you need to let the folks know, or you may have the owners with custom chrome rims in a stock class mad that they didn't win an award.

1. Some shows bring in Judges.

2. Some shows have their club members as Judges (if you are doing this please do not allow your club members cars to be judged because they may be bias)

3. Participant Judging (many times people will only vote for their friends or club member cars)



4. Show and Shine. No awards just bring your car and enjoy the show. Many times your entry fee for shows like these goes to a charity. For a first year show this may be the best way to go to keep the costs down.

5. Option as you drive in, Judged or Not Judged (typically the price for admission is cheaper if you enter as Not Judged)

6. If it is a Judged show make sure cars are put in to classes when they register. As sad as it is, some folks will drive in early, wait toward the end of the registration time to move their car into a class with the fewest cars to increase their chance of taking home some plastic.

7. If you will have computers onsite to help with the judging make sure you have power for them.

What does a Judging sheet look like?

www.jordanny.com/JudgesForm.pdf

www.motaa.com/Judgingsheet.htm

Books on Judging:

www.palmiericoncepts.com/Ebooks/E-book-judging-guide.htm

www.carshowtips.com

<http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/prepare-to-be-judged-how-to-get-your-car-ready-for-show/15157074>

Food at Shows

Typical car show food is burgers and brats which is pretty boring. Some different ideas are to contact local restaurants that offer to cater food. Or help out an organization like the boy scouts or 4H group and ask them to sell the food with food profits going to them. Also, make sure prices are fair. I've been shows where they charge 3 bucks for a bottle of water (tick off an owner once and they will never come back

Unique food items I've seen at shows include: corn on the cob, ice cream, pie, roasted chicken, pulled chicken/pork, cookies, bars, walking taco, donuts and coffee for the early arrives.



Goodie bags

Over the past 10 years goodie bags have turned more into garbage bags and more and more shows do not have them.

If you are thinking about having them places like Summit Racing and Hagerty may donate some bags to your show. Here are some ideas for your goody bags: contact automotive magazines to see if they have any old issues you can use for goodie bags and to promote their magazine. Pens, pencils, stickers, coupons from local companies that donated money for the show. Typically if you have 100 dash plaques you will have 100 goodie bags. Prior to the show get your team together and stuff the bags (just like a wedding).



Door Prizes:

If you want car owners to stick around you need to have door prizes. During the show have structured times to give them out like every 30 minutes. Keep your bigger dollar prizes until the end to keep owners at the show. Also, try to keep the gift cards to local businesses to a minimum, because the owner that wins may not live in the area. If you still want to have local gift cards, then let folks pick their door prizes. That way if a local really wants a free oil change from Bubba's garage he can then pick it up.

Here are some door prize ideas:

1. Anything related to automotive stuff (cleaners, rags ...)
2. Gift cards for gas, or places like Year One
3. Diecast cars
4. Separate drawing for the folks that pre-register
5. T-shirts or Hats that are automotive related
6. Steer clear of Dollar store items and items that have been collecting dust in your basement.
7. If you have that one big ticket item, do it right before your awards.

TIP: Have a dry erase board so you can post the numbers so owners can see if their number was called.



Hey Mr. DJ!?!

Should you have a DJ or not? If funds are tight and you cannot risk having a DJ as it will cut too deeply into your budget, think about heading to a place like A to Z Rental and rent an Amp, microphone and some speakers and plug in your ipod.

If your area for parking cars is large ask DJs if they have a 2nd or even third set of speakers (wireless). This will allow everyone at the show to enjoy the tunes.

If you hire a DJ set the ground rules with them. Let them know if want them to introduce cars as they roll in. Or ask them to read off door prize numbers. Or ask them to keep the talking to a minimum. Don't be afraid to give them a list of tunes you wish to hear or they may play "She's so fine my 409" 6 times during the show. And they don't need to play songs only from the 50's and 60's!



Must haves at the show

1. Three porta-johns for every 150 cars. The larger the location the more spread out they need to be. And you may want to check for toilet paper through the day too (keep your customers happy).



2. Post signs on the road the day of the show so folks know where to turn at (CAR SHOW THIS WAY). Think about getting some poster sized ones printed and laminated. I've been to so many shows that the signs are 8x10 and are written in pen. When I'm driving at 40 MPH I will never see it! This also works as advertising as a possible spectator may see this and then swing on in to check out the show a buy a burger.



3. Staff available to help park cars (use pool noodles to guide the cars to their spot).
4. If parking on grass make sure it is mowed at least 3 days before to give some time for the grass clipping to blow around
5. Make sure you have barrels for trash. Otherwise you may spend a lot of time after the show picking this up.

Day of the show

So you made it to the day of the show! Get your team there early and give them a pep talk and let them break off to where they need to be. A nice touch is to have t-shirts for all of your staff, so car owners know who to talk to.

Set it up

1. Get your "Car Show this way" signs out on the roads. Remember think big and if you have the funds get them laminated.

2. Set up your Registration area, make sure you have a ton of pens, and black sharpie pens and areas for the owners to fill out their information.



3. Set up a spot to take money from the participants as the drive in; hand them a card that they need to give to the registration desk to sign in; this STOPS people from driving in and then parking and then “forgetting” to pay

4. Mark off your areas with signs if you are going to park cars by classes or spray a white line on the grass so the cars park in a straight lines (bring a couple of stakes and string if you are worried about painting straight lines, and make sure this is done before owners starting rolling in, because no one wants white over-spray on their car’s paint)

5. Set up your awards and try to keep them out of the sun (the heat may warp the plastic)

6. Have your goodie bags ready

7. Have staff ready to park cars, I’ve been to shows where the folks parking cars have pool noodles to point owners in the right direction

8. Make sure you have plenty of change (money) so you can keep the flow of traffic moving

9. Get your power cords set up

10. Set up your registration signs so owners know where to register at

Event Registration Entry Processing

When car folks come to the event, you need to get them in and parked quickly and with little hassle. Think about traffic flow and parking so you don't have a long line of folks waiting to come in. Have your registration verification team well organized so that you can get them in quickly. Also if you are allowing day-of-show registration, have all of your entry forms and other information organized and ready for use. Make sure you have one registration area (tent, building...) so owners know where to go if they have any questions throughout the day.

Parking Management

You must plan ahead for parking of the cars. Make sure there are enough workers at the show to clearly manage the parking of cars. Consider these things also when planning the parking effort.

* Will there be classes?

If so, you should park the cars by class, or at least close to the other cars of their type. This makes judging much easier and fairer.

* Will you allow car clubs to park together?

If so, try and have the club members arrive together. If that does not happen, then try and leave enough space for others in the club to come later. (Most car show managers insist that they should arrive together. It is just too complicated to save spaces when you have a busy show.)

* Will you allow shade awnings and chairs near the cars?

This is a common situation among outdoor car shows. If this is done, you must allow enough room for them near their cars. There are several ways to park the cars and allow for awnings and chairs. You can leave space behind the cars, or you can leave every third space open.



Bikes and Dogs

It is your show, and it is a car show, not a bicycle and dog show. You need to be up front with folks that show up with dogs that they need to be on a short leash at their car and spectators should park their bikes or walk them. If you want to piss off car owners do it by riding your bike in-between their cars.



How to keep people at the show?

When you have the crowd at the show, keep them engaged by having regular drawings (say every half hour). Also if you have any large high-profile prizes (like a crate engine) do that drawing last and near the end of the show. Once the good prizes are gone – so are many of the people.

You may find it helpful to have a DJ or someone making regular announcements on a public address system. This keeps things moving during the day. Also plan to have some period music playing. Sometimes a live band is appropriate.

Have a couple of cars from folks organizing the show set up to show people how and what you are judging. This could be a 30 minute event with a stock and custom car to show owners areas where these cars would lose points. This is a teaching event to help folks at the show. Don't be surprised if you see owners running off to correct things prior to being judged!

Time to start Judging

Before the judges go out to do their thing have a meeting with them and hand over a clip board and pens. Take a couple of minutes to explain to the folks judging stock classes, what stock means. It may mean you will allow up to 3 modifications such as rims, tires, carb, radio, more than 3 the owner will lose points. And take some time to talk about being fair even if they are judging a buddies car. Tell them when they need to be completed by and where they need to return the sheets too. Also, let them know if they are having troubles finding a car to come back to registration to just for help.

If you have participant judging you can give the owner judging sheets when they register or select a time when the sheets will be available for pick-up. This will allow late arrivers to the show a chance to pick up some votes too. Also have a turn in time too.

Giving the awards

When announcing the awards make sure to say the person's name, where they are from, the make, model and year of their car. And if you personally know the person, do not start to tell a story about how you use to bounce little Jimmy on your knee. If you do it makes it seem like they were picked just because you knew the person.

Stick to the time you indicated on your flyer! It is better to start early then late. After a long day of sitting in the sun car owners can get grumpy about this!

After Event Activities

As the car event ends, make sure that you have people who agreed to stay afterwards and help clean up the facility. Sometimes the owner of the parking lot (or where ever the event was held) charges a fee to clean up after the event. Make sure you know what you need to do so that you can have the event there again, if you want to. Thank your car event attendees. Send them a letter or email thanking them for coming and inviting them to the next show. Tell them of the event success by telling them how much was donated to the charity or other information that gives them satisfaction from attending. If awards were given out, tell them who won your top awards. All of this increases the satisfaction from the experience of your show with car folks. The most important measure of your event's success – is the interest car folks have toward your next event.

Online survey

If you are looking to see what folks think about your show, think about having an online survey that you email out to the participants (remember you captured their email address at registration right?)

freeonlinesurveys.com

www.surveymonkey.com



Closing Thoughts

Over the past 10 years the car hobby has grown enormously. Baby boomers are retiring and they are looking back at their past for something old and familiar and many times that is a car. We are seeing a surge of folks buying their dream cars not only as a weekend cruiser but as a potential investment. Car shows bring people with common interests together to share the passion and history of their rides. So is the time right for you to join the club? Whether you are in it for the competition or just spreading the general knowledge on your ride it is a rewarding hobby.

