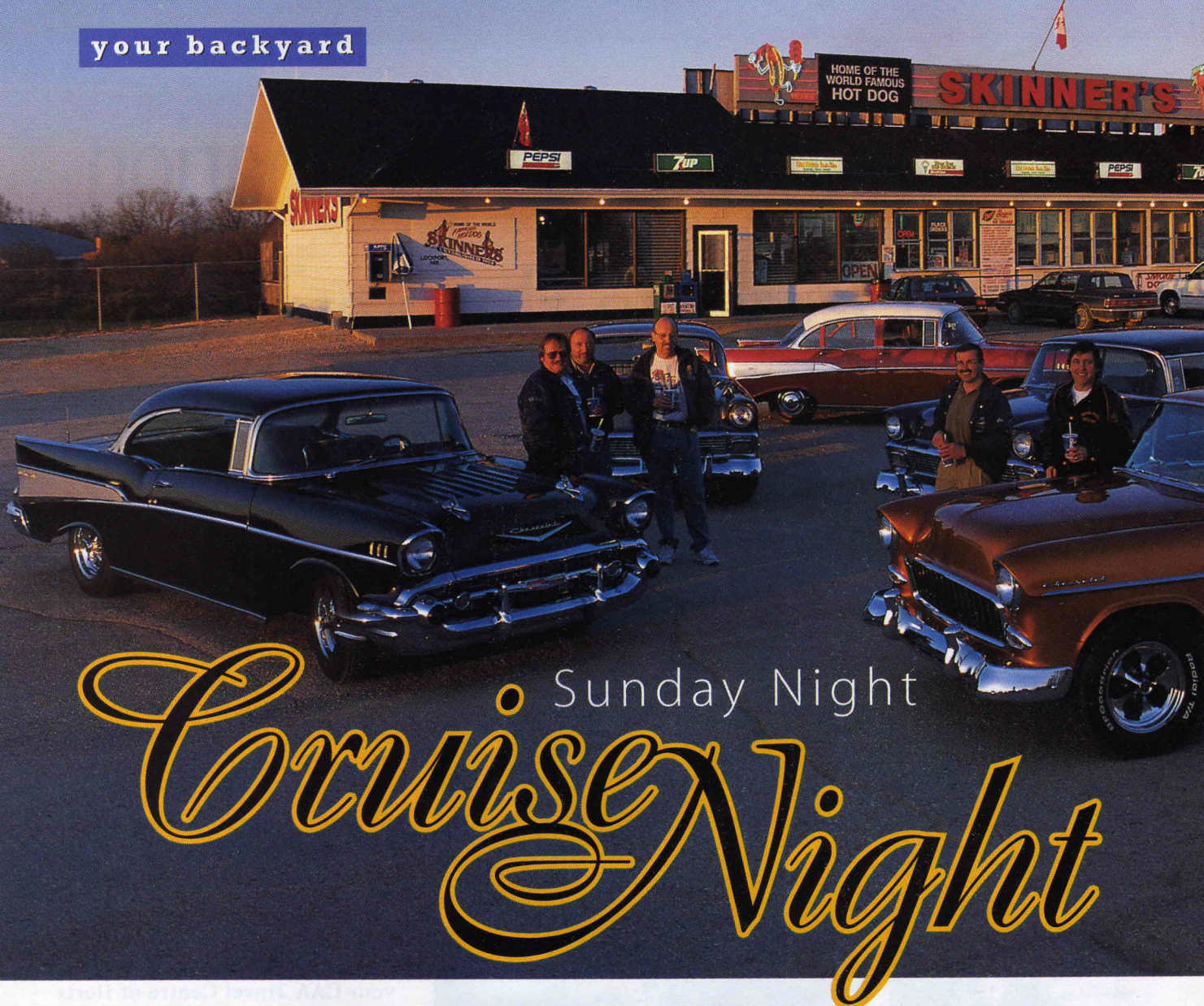


your backyard

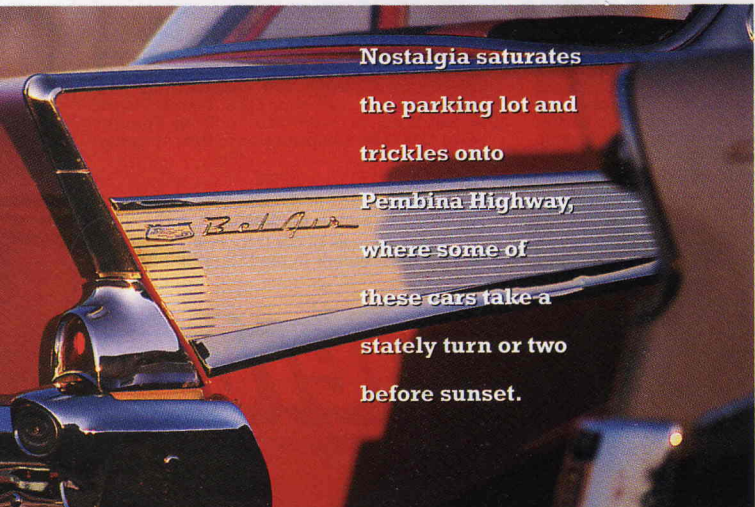


Sunday Night Cruise Night

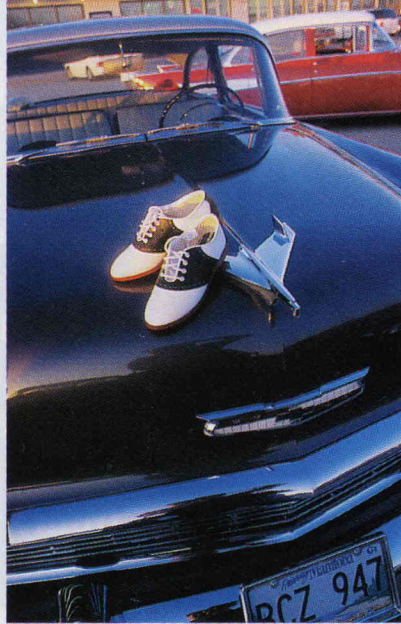
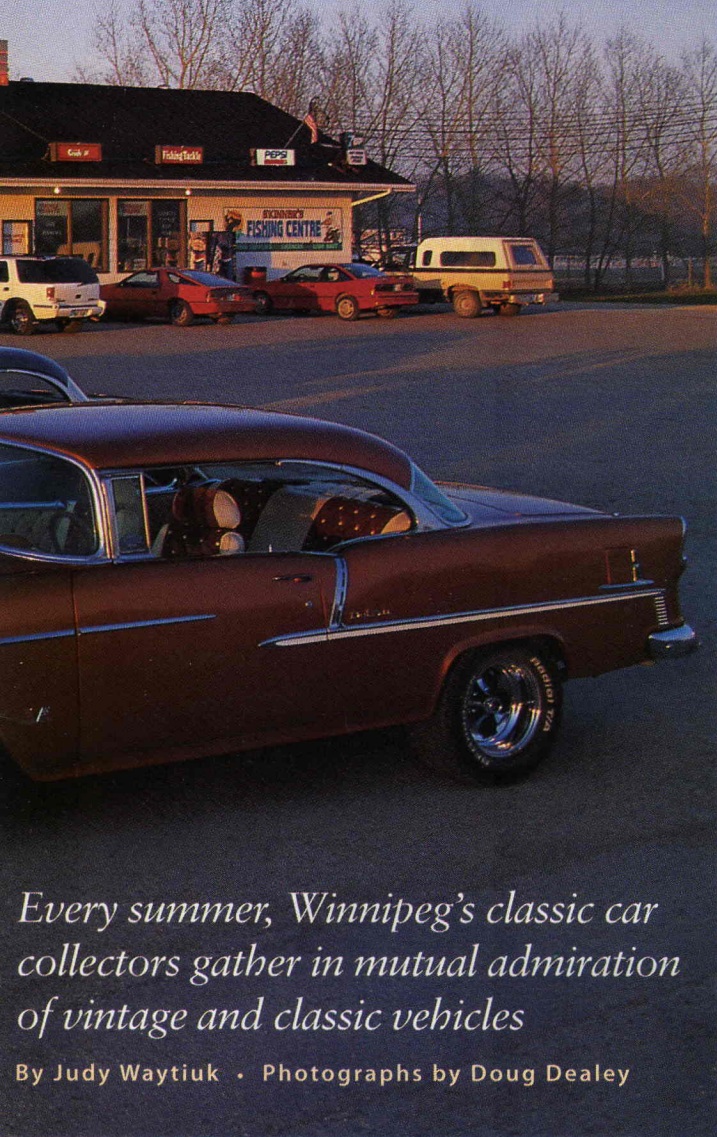
SHE IS PEARLIZED, GLOWING PALE MINT-CREAM. HER CHROME TRIM, LOVINGLY RESTORED AND polished to a hard, bright shine, glints in the Sunday-evening sunlight. The 1953 Chevrolet 210, as heavy and dignified as the *Queen Mary* sailing high seas, turns sedately into the shopping mall parking lot on south Pembina Highway in Winnipeg.

A lanky red-haired kid, no more than 20, is behind the wheel. He parks the Chevy, nosing her gently into a spot, and gets out. The car's door slams with a satisfyingly heavy, reverberating thunk. But the 210 does not stand out as old and incongruous in this parking lot, not on Cruise Night in Winnipeg for classic car buffs. Snuggled into her berth, the Chevy 210 is flanked by an immaculate, green mid-'50s Ford truck on one side and a gleaming, milk-chocolate-brown Plymouth from somewhere in the '60s on the other. There is no fear of door-dings here. These people are serious about very old cars. These are classic car buffs.

They used to migrate from parking lot to parking lot. But the grandstanding, rubber-laying, beer-quaffing punks who sometimes tagged along ruined the welcome for everyone, and the buffs, who just wanted a place for their vintage, grown-up show-and-tell, would move on. Then, a couple of years ago, the Pony Corral's Peter Ginakes made this parking lot a summer haven for the bevy of brightly polished old vehicles. They congregate here every summer Sunday evening, from the May long weekend until the last Sunday in September. Drag-racing punks are pointedly not welcome.



Nostalgia saturates
the parking lot and
trickles onto
Pembina Highway,
where some of
these cars take a
stately turn or two
before sunset.



Winnipeg's Pony Corral is a favorite Sunday night spot for classic car buffs, but you can also find golden oldies out for a cruise at other popular destinations, such as Skinner's in Lockport, where members of the 5567 Club show off a bevy of Chevies (opposite). A pair of classics – saddle shoes and a '57 Chevy BelAir, owned by Terry Klos (left). Even the engine gleams on the '55 Chevy proudly owned (and polished) by Wes Nordal (below).



Every summer, Winnipeg's classic car collectors gather in mutual admiration of vintage and classic vehicles

By Judy Waytiuk • Photographs by Doug Dealey

The red-haired kid disappears into the crowd of buffs. They stroll the pavement in singles or pairs, pausing to admire here, to chat there, to lean against a voluptuous car body and compare notes about upholstery, paint, trim and arcane, greasy engine mysteries. It's just past the dinner hour. By sunset, the crowd will have become a throng, and the disc jockey spinning tapes out of the van parked beside the Pony Corral Restaurant will move on to songs from the '70s. Right now, Bobby Darin is rough-crooning *Mack the Knife*.

Some nights, one of the car clubs will organize a special evening, turning out all the Corvette owners for one great display, perhaps, or staging a fund-raiser for a charitable cause. One or two Sundays, there may be fewer cars here, as auto meets in other cities call buffs enamored of a specific make or model to long-weekend journeys elsewhere. But there is always a solid core turnout, all summer long.

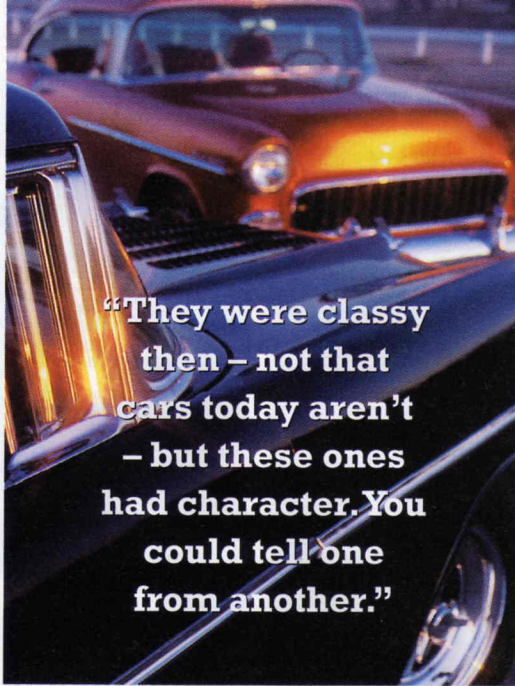
There are plenty of cars to fill the lot. Manitoba has the highest number of classic-car owners in Canada for its population, says Bob Chubala, chairman/director of the new umbrella group, the Manitoba Association of Auto Clubs. With 30 clubs in its fold and a few more about to join, the association represents roughly 12 to 15,000 classic-car owners in the province.

"It's pretty amazing," says Chubala.

Chubala, owner of a 1968 Caprice station wagon and a 1968 Impala SS 427, "one of only 182 ever built," says the home Peter Ginakes has provided is treasured by the buffs. "Peter's heavy into cars himself," Chubala says, "and he's done a lot for all the auto clubs over the years."

Ginakes says he just thought the buffs should have a place they could think of as their own. The other shopping mall merchants had no problem with the idea, as their stores all close by six on Sunday nights. Ginakes hires the deejay, sets up a roped-off area and provides a security guard and prize draws for the car owners; this year the final, season-topping prize will be a trip for two to Scottsdale, Arizona. "It's a lot of work," says Ginakes. "But it's worth it. It really is."

Near the deejay's van, a perfect, cream-puff Thunderbird convertible stops every envious heart that looks at her. Her proud owner, looking for all the world like a lover protecting his girl from poachers, has one possessive arm draped over her folded-back convertible top. She is Bill Shestopalka's 1956 Baby Bird, and she is Colonial White, with red-and-white upholstery. He bought her in 1989, a bedraggled mess, and slowly refurbished her. "I spent the first year underneath her,"



“They were classy then – not that cars today aren’t – but these ones had character. You could tell one from another.”

Shestopalka says, “scraping and cleaning.” Shestopalka, president of the 55-member Winnipeg Thunderbird Club, also has a 1967 T-bird, which he bought brand-new.

Across from the T-bird, a line of clownish little Nash Metropolitans shows their grinning grillwork. All four are maroon-red and white two-tone jobs. But one is a ’54, another a ’55, then a ’56, and another is a ’54. Only a Nash Metropolitan owner like Bob Lewer can tell the difference.

Lewer’s ’54 sweetheart, the one whose licence plate reads OURPET, is right there with him, her front fender nuzzling his hip, while he talks with the other Metropolitan owners. There are roughly 2,000 Metropolitan owners worldwide, Lewer says. Asked how you can tell one year from another, he launches into a detailed discourse revolving around annual variations in two-tone paint design. OURPET gleams quietly in the evening sun.

They knew how to build them 40, 30, even 20 years ago. They used real, virgin steel. They designed cars for strength, comfort and permanence, with an eye for smooth, clean, flowing lines. So the lovers of classic cars believe, and no upstart

from Detroit or Yokohama will ever tell them any different.

“They were classy then – not that cars today aren’t – but these ones had character. You could tell one from another,” says Bill Dickson, owner of a white 1957 Chevy Sedan Delivery and a black 1957 Chevy Nomad. “Now they all look the same.”

Yes, there were embarrassing flirtations with fins the size of aircraft tails, but on the whole, these beauties possess the elegance of pure lineage. And they had solid, strong names: Cranbrook, Galaxie, Cougar, Camaro, Falcon.

Nostalgia saturates the parking lot and trickles onto Pembina Highway, where some of these cars take a stately turn or two before sunset, sailing along wide Prairie traffic lanes, their drivers’ legs comfortably stretched out below big steering wheels and broad dashboards. Rubberneckers in newish, mid-size compacts do double-takes and look amazed at the dignified parade of elderly autos.

The owners of the vintage vehicles receive the gawking with dignified nods. They are entitled to this adulation. They are the ones who rescued these mechanical maidens from cold farm

fields, paid a few hundred or a few thousand for the sad old wrecks, nursed them back to beauty and ministered to crippled engines until they once again purred into life.

They are the classic car owners, and the red-haired kid is among them, ram-rod-straight behind his big steering wheel, a satisfied grin tickling the corner of his mouth. He is cool.

Way cool. ■



Join the Club

More than 30 classic car clubs are estimated to be active in Manitoba. Many are listed, along with a schedule of upcoming events and shows, in the *Old Car Trader*, sold in most convenience stores. Or for more information, write to: The Manitoba Classic and Antique Auto Club, P.O. Box 1031, Winnipeg, R3C 2W2; or the Manitoba Association of Auto Clubs, c/o 42 Mahonee Drive, Winnipeg, R2G 3S2.

And there's always the Pony Corral at 2870 Pembina Highway, Winnipeg, any summer Sunday night. □