

PRESENTATION TO DRAGGINS ROD AND CUSTOM CAR CLUB SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN October 26, 2019



As you heard earlier, the operation of the Canadian Street Rod Hall of fame is guided by a simple mission statement, which says as follows:

“To help guide the future of street rodding in Canada by recognizing individuals, groups, and corporations who have made a significant contribution in the past to the promotion and development of the hobby in Canada”

Now, what exactly does “a significant contribution” look like? Remember, in the 1950’s the general public didn’t think much of hot rodders, thanks to the negative stereotypes shown in many movies and in the news media at the time.

So, in 1957, along comes a car club called the *Draggins Rod and Custom Car Club* in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan that shattered that image, by using street rods as a means of promoting vehicle safety and by trying to make rodding a credible hobby in the eyes of the general public. Their mandate was to promote rodding as a safe and credible sport to the general public, and to support all types of motor sports in the process.

Now, this was an 1950’s club made up of eager young guys with fast cars so, of course, they needed some rules to make sure everyone behaved themselves and followed the mandate of the club. The rules were simple – if a club member got a traffic ticket, they also had to pay a \$25 fine to the club, and if a member’s car didn’t pass the club safety check, there was another fine. (And notice that white stuff in that photo – this club really puts the “street” into street rodding, rain or shine or even snow!)

And that’s not all – remember this was the days when hot rodding was strictly a guy thing, no girls allowed. Just ask Ron Lee – in 1962 he was fined \$2.00 for letting a girl wear his club jacket – how times have changed! Now, all the spouses have their own jackets and are valued members of the club, and the club is much better for it.

Speaking of Ron Lee, he is one of the longest running members of the club having joined in early 1958 and he has attended every charitable event the club has held since the start. Ron is quoted as saying:

“At the time there was a stigma attached to young guys building hot rods and we wanted to erase that image from people’s minds. We wanted to give them the right impression of what we were really about”.

The club started out with 8 members, then a few months later added a few more, and now the club boasts 41 members, all of them dedicated to following the true meaning of Ron's words.

How did they do this? One dramatic example of the way the club promoted safe vehicles was a campaign by the club to install seat belts in the public's cars for a small fee – ***in 1962!***

Remember, this was when the slogan "*safety doesn't sell*" was popular with some car manufacturers! Even the mayor of Saskatoon got in the act, and this is what a local newspaper had to say about the mayor trying on his new seatbelt:

February 17, 1962

"Mayor Sid Buckwold tests the new safety seat belt installed in his car by members of Saskatoon's Draggins car club. Motorists can buy their safety belts from the club at either \$18 or \$21 per pair, depending on the grade preferred. This local group of young men is helping to put 'hot rodding' in a favourable light, so, a toot of the horn for these civic-minded Draggins."

Starting in the early days, the Draggins club participated in local parades with floats, they delivered food hampers for the Salvation Army Red Shield appeal, even sold Christmas trees. On New Year's eve, they drove drunk revellers home for free, promoting this project with the help of no less than 99 local companies who supported the club.

In the beginning, the club used many different types of motor sports to raise money for their new club. In the winter of 1958, they held ice drags on a local river where they took up a collection to help with club projects. Remember, snow doesn't slow these folks down one bit. Anybody want to try that today?

They even sponsored a stock car in 1958 with money raised by installing guard rails at the race track. And when was the last time you saw double sided whitewalls on a race car – these guys have class!

In 1959 the Draggins got their first club house - a chicken coop that had to be completely rebuilt before it could even be used. In 1961, to help increase exposure for the club and to provide an opportunity for motor sport enthusiasts to display their creations to the public, the club held a one day car show in an arena. The show had only 25 cars on display and the club even had to borrow money to finance this first show. Thankfully, the show was a big success and helped finance even more work on the chicken coop, plus a bigger garage. That first show eventually evolved into a much bigger show in 1964, and it got even bigger over the years. This year was the 59th car show for the club – it's been so big for so many years that the show has become part of the Saskatoon landscape. The show now runs for 2 days, and next year will be the 60th anniversary of the longest running indoor car show operated by a car club in Canada. Quite an achievement.

They also use the show to promote the automotive trades for future technicians.

For several years, a highlight of the show has been an event called the Battle of the Automotive Technicians. Using a table full of loose engine parts and only hand tools, teams of 2 technicians or apprentices compete in a challenge to assemble Chev 350 engines in the fastest time, all this under the watchful eye of experienced Draggins judges.

These eager young people, both male and female, can assemble an engine – by hand no less – in under 10 minutes, as they compete for their share of thousands of dollars in trophies, cash & major merchandise prizes provided by sponsors.

And the engines have to run when they're done! How's that for encouraging young people to get into the automotive trades.

Now let's turn back the clock a bit. In 1968, realizing the success of their car shows and wanting to say "thanks" for the great support of their community, the club made the decision to use the many talents and skills of their members to raise money to support a local charity, and they wanted one that touched as many people as possible in Saskatchewan. For this, they chose the *Saskatchewan Council for Crippled Children and Adults* as the target for their efforts, and they started with an old International truck belonging to the Council. They rebuilt and repainted the truck, including the Draggins logo of course, and it served the Council for many years. This led to their first project car in 1975 – a 1935 Chev coach that the club members rebuilt into a beautiful street rod, and raffled it off to the tune of \$23,000. Not a bad start at all.

Since then, the club has raffled 8 more gorgeous cars, all of them beautifully restored by club members, and with a lot of help from many generous parts suppliers. All money raised goes to charity.

In 1987, the club raffled a 1955 Chev Bel Air that resulted in a \$30,000 donation, then a 1940 Ford that raised \$23,000, a 1969 Ford that raised \$14,000, a 1955 Ford that raised \$40,000, a '57 Pontiac raised \$60,000, a '57 Ford that raised over \$44,000, a 1965 Pontiac that raised \$65,000, and this year, a gorgeous 1964 Mercury Parklane convertible that raised a whopping \$82,000.

And this club doesn't fool around when they restore a car for these raffles. The Mercury got a complete frame up restoration by the club and it turned out great.

Long ago, the club decided pick a very specific project to direct the revenue generated by their car shows, and they picked a camp operated by the Council. The name of the Council had changed to the Saskatchewan Abilities Council, or SaskAbilities for short, and they operated a fully wheelchair – accessible recreation facility for disabled children and adults called Camp Easter Seal. For many years now, all the money raised by the Draggins has gone to help run Camp Easter Seal.

The beautiful stone chalet at Camp Easter Seal actually started out as a government "make work" project for men during the Great Depression. The chalet then became the

centre of a resort for upscale clientele during the 1930's but was eventually sold to the Saskatchewan Abilities Council who created the wonderful facility we see today.

Since they began supporting this charity, the Draggins Rod & Custom Car Club has helped to construct a new aquatic centre (that took two project cars and revenue from four car shows to complete), they fully funded a recreation centre, a wheelchair accessible medical facility, a storage facility, five cedar cabins, a 4X4, a truck, a tractor, all the laundry equipment and a pool heater. In total, the club has donated over \$2,000,000 to the camp, and the smiles of the people who attend this great camp says it all!

Just one more acknowledgment of the club's impact on their city was the naming of a city park in the club's honour. In 2007, the City of Saskatoon created the "Draggins Car Club Park" in a new and thriving west-end neighbourhood called Hampton Village.

This 11½ acre park has a ball diamond, walking paths, a toboggan hill, and lots of green space right in the middle of a modern urban centre.

When the park was created, the Draggins club was described by the city council as having *"turned hot rodding into a staple amongst the community by fostering an atmosphere of creativity, showmanship and generosity"*. It doesn't get much better than that.

Of course, a rod and custom car club wouldn't be a car club without – well – rods and customs, and lots of them. True to their mandate, the club cars of the Draggins club include everything – rods, customs, classics, drag cars, anything automotive. And that's only the ones that are on the road – there's lots more still in the works.

In 2003 the Draggins Rod and Custom Car Club was awarded the Easter Seals Canada Leadership Award for their tireless work with Camp Easter Seal.

Tonight, we want to present yet another award to the club for everything they have done over the last 60 years to promote street rodding in Canada by inducting them into the Canadian Street Rodding Hall of Fame.

There are club members with us tonight all the way from Saskatoon, so please join me in welcoming:

- Shane Arthurs
- Bob Gunn
- Robbie Gunn
- Ron Lee
- Bruno Konecsni
- Brett Pegg
- Wayne Pegg

- Neil Taylor
- Ethan Taylor

As well as Jo-ann Thorne (representing last year's inductee the Sarnia Street Machines) and Bob Kurtz to the podium to receive this award.