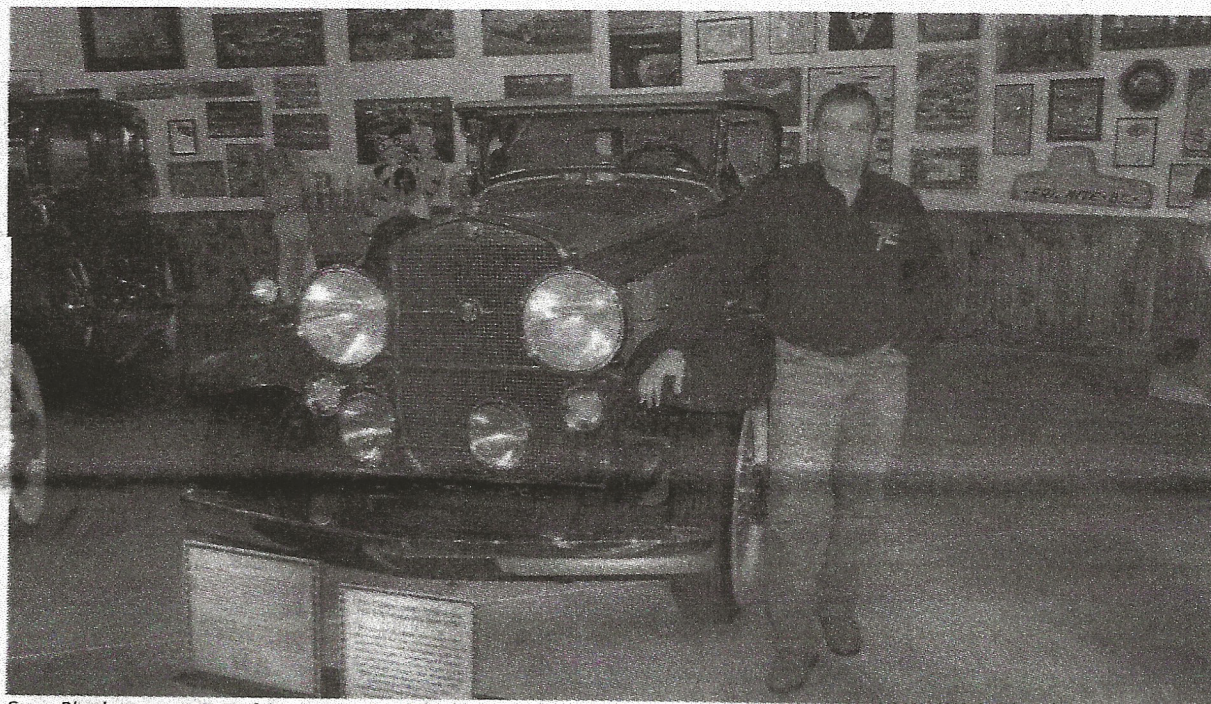


Cruise In "Perfect Mix" of Music, Aircraft, Charity and, Of Course, Cars

By John M. Milner



Steve Plunkett, organizer of the Fleetwood Country Cruise In, to be held from June 8-10th at the Plunkett Estate, stands next to his 1930 Cadillac, just one of the many cars that will be on display.

CARENTHUSIASTS from across North America and indeed, across the globe will be marking the weekend of June 9th-10th on their calendars, as that is the weekend that local car enthusiast Steve Plunkett will be hosting the fourth annual Fleetwood Country Cruise In at his estate outside of London, Ontario.

The Fleetwood Country Cruise In has grown from 400 cars during the first event to 2200 cars last year. Last year, there were an estimated 15,000 people who attended the event, and this year, Plunkett expects 15-20,000 people. Plunkett works all year in preparing for the event and estimates that he spends about a half-million dollars per weekend to put on the event.

"There's so much happening,"

Plunkett says of the Fleetwood Country Cruise In. "Old Autos TV can't cover it in one show. Old Autos newspaper covers it in multiple pages...It's just a lot going on so it's a very interesting day and, in this case, weekend."

Among the over 2,000 cars expected to be on hand, the Fleetwood Country Cruise In will boast seven of George Barris' custom cars. There will also be a complete operating steam exhibit as well as several other of what Plunkett calls "Special Exhibit", such as Guy Lombardo's

Speed Boat and other vintage boats on the ponds on Plunkett's estate, fire truck exhibits, the Tin Can Tour Group (vintage house trailers, mostly from the United States) and a much larger trade show area.

Not only will there be lots to see on the ground, but in the air as well. Once again, the Canadian Harvard

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Aerobic Team, featuring Team Lead Pete Spence, #2 Right Wing Dave Hewitt and #3 Left Wing Kent Beckham, will be performing. Once they are finished, Rick Volker from Niagara Falls, New York will be putting on "an extreme air show" in his nimble, Russian-built Sukhoi SU-26M, considered the best aerobatic aircraft in the world.

"He can fly it downwards, backwards...it's just wild stuff," Plunkett says.

On Sunday, June 10th, the Cruise In will host a Classic Car Auction. "There's a lot of excitement about this," Plunkett says, "This is a whole new thing being incorporated with a world-class car show and charity show and evening entertainment as well." Excell Auctions will be handling the auction, which will include such classics as a 1935 Packard 1507 V12 Club Sedan, a 1971 Chevrolet Corvette Roadster, a 1949 Mercury and a 1957 Chevy 3100 Stepside Pickup among others.

As in past years, the Cruise In will also be hosting live musical events in the evenings. Last year, Canadian entertainer Bobby Curtola was the featured performer. "The Bobby Curtola show last year was absolutely sensational," Plunkett says. For the 2007 event, there will be two different musical shows. On Friday, June 8th Herman's Hermits featuring Peter Noone will perform under the big tent (measuring 100 feet by 300 feet) and the next night will feature triple bill of Fabian, Frankie Avalon and Bobby Rydell.

"It'll be the only time that you'll ever be in a giant tent with a jumbotron," Plunkett says, explaining that prior to the live acts, music videos of the 50s and 60s will be shown on various TV screens. While the Fabian/Avalon/Rydell

show is sold out, tickets still remain, through Centennial Hall, for the Herman's Hermits featuring Peter Noone performance.

"I just love the music of that era as well as the old cars...so bringing together the old car fans, the music, the vintage aircraft (and) the charity aspect is just a perfect mix, really," Plunkett says.

The Cruise In is coming off a great event in 2006. "It was quite an event last year. It was a lot of fun," Plunkett says, with spectators from seven Canadian provinces and seven U.S. states in attendance and drawing coverage from the BBC. The event set six different records including the largest single day car show in Canada, the largest pole type tent in Canada, the largest Corvette meet in Canada, the largest George Barris (who served as the Guest of Honour) movie car showing in Canada, the largest sit down dinner served in southwestern Ontario and the largest banquet served in the 20 year history of Custom Cuisine Catering.

The charity aspect of the show "was really an accident", Plunkett says, that began when charities approached him before last year's show and has "snowballed" from nine charities last year to 20 this year, including Jesse's Journey, London Regional Cancer Centre, Crime Stoppers, the Make-a-Wish Foundation, SARI, and many, many others. "I'm very happy about that," Plunkett says, adding that he is open to involving additional charities as well.

A number of charities are running spectator parking lots to help with the number of people who will be coming to the Cruise In. "The only thing we can't repeat this year is the big traffic jam," Plunkett says, adding that the issue was the

first thing he addressed. The problem has been solved with many more parking lots to keep cars off the street.

Having charities involved with the Cruise In coincides well with the Plunkett Foundation, which Plunkett founded in November 1997 as a legacy to his parents, Dr. Earl Plunkett and Corinne Plunkett. "It's like continuing my Dad's legacy but in all areas of medicine," Plunkett says. "The Plunkett Foundation's focus is health care and medical research for facilities here in London and Strathroy hospitals."

Dr. Plunkett (1922-1997) served as the Chief of Gynecology at London's University Hospital and was the founder of the first major research unit in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at The University of Western Ontario. He also served as Chief of Gynecology and Research at Toronto General Hospital, Chairman and Director of the Canadian Committee on Fertility Research and President of the Canadian Fertility Society and the Canadian Association of Professors as well as the member of several other prominent medical boards across Canada. Dr. Plunkett lent his knowledge and expertise to developing the first birth control pill.

"It's partly the curiosity factor of coming (to the Plunkett's estate)," Plunkett replies when asked what draws people to the Cruise In, "It's unusual for a private individual to open up an Estate to such a huge public crowd....It's a perfect place to have an event."

For more information on the Fleetwood Country Cruise In, visit: <http://www.fleetwood-countrycruisein.com/>

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