

2012 Autorama Wows Detroit's Hot Rod and Classic Car Fans

by Jennifer Knightstep
Special Writer

With more than a thousand custom hot rods and classic cars, a half-dozen special historical exhibits and a long list of pop culture icons signing autographs, this year's Detroit Autorama offered something for everyone.

It was, after all, a milestone in the long history of the iconic show, something Detroiters have looked forward to every winter for the past 60 years.

The main floor of the show was packed with an array of customized hot rods and restored classic cars, running the gamut from a bright orange 1954 Willys Wagon to a legendary 1960s bubble top Manta Ray to a set of tricked-out new Camaros and Mustangs to a 1920s Ford Roadster, and everything in between.

On one end of the floor, several local high schools and colleges displayed their special project cars, including a 1923 Ford T-bucket that runs on E85 ethanol by Macomb Community College and a much newer Ford Mustang customized by students at Roseville High School.

Roseville senior Jennifer Pitrago, who worked on the Mustang, was eager to point out the highlights of the custom body work on the car, including the hood, which she had worked on herself.

"My dad was always working on cars," she explained,

"and I always liked to watch him, and then I started helping him, and I just really got into it."

Pitrago plans to continue her education in auto design and customization. "Custom is my thing," she said.

Across from the Roseville High School Mustang display and over one aisle was a spectacular orange-and-yellow 1954 Willys Wagon, as bright as the sun, owned by Jerry Cole and customized by his son, Wes, who runs Wild Wes Paintworks in Dover, Ohio.

Aside from the brilliant custom paint, the Willys boasted several other beachworthy modifications and upgrades, inside and out and under the hood.

The rebuilding and modification took about seven years, and both generations of Coles were pleased with the results.

"This is the first year we've brought it to Autorama," said the elder Cole.

Meandering among the modified muscle cars and custom classics was Emily Page, a retro-styled pinup girl wearing a one-of-a-kind paper dress made of Autorama posters.

The dress, created by Royal Oak designer Matthew Richmond, was as gorgeous and elegant as the vehicle it was meant to promote, an awe-inspiring one-off called the Imperial Speedster. The Imperial Speedster began its life as a 1959 Imperial Crown Custom.



PHOTO: JENNIFER KNIGHTSTEP

Retro-inspired "pinup girl" Emily Page models a paper dress made of Autorama posters by local designer Matthew Richmond, highlighting the "what if" Imperial Speedster by Pfaff Designs.



PHOTO: JENNIFER KNIGHTSTEP

Customized by Wild Wes Paintworks of Dover, Ohio, this 1965 Willys Wagon features dozens of upgrades and modifications, including a Ford Racing engine and Sunrise, Sunset Pearl paint.



PHOTO: JENNIFER KNIGHTSTEP

The legendary, one-of-a-kind 1960s Manta Ray bubble top car on display at the 60th Autorama in Detroit. The car was representative of 1960s-era sleek exterior hot rod car design.



PHOTO: JENNIFER KNIGHTSTEP

Jennifer Pitrago, left, and Tiffany Androsuk, seniors at Roseville High School, with the Saleen Mustang they helped customize, on display at Autorama. "Custom is my thing," says Pitrago.

SAE Congress Expecting 10,000 to 'Get Connected' at this Year's Gathering

by Jim Stickford
Special Writer

The theme of this year's SAE Congress, to be held in Cobo Hall in Detroit between April 24 and 26, is "getting connected," said Patti Kreh, business unit leader for the engineering event.

Kreh said she's in charge of putting together this year's Congress, which will be the 78th held in Detroit. She said it will be a big affair.

"We're dealing with 10,000 volunteers, academics, industry engineers, as well as government folks," Kreh said.

"We're expecting that number - 10,000 - to visit the event as well. The auto industry is doing better right now and we're doing better. This is a business that has always innovated and we're bringing scientists and engineers together to talk."

When the recession started a couple of years ago, people within the automotive community said that the Congress should continue to be held and stay focused on automotive innovation, Kreh said, because when people get together, they talk about current ideas and generate new ones.

"And that's why this year's

theme is 'get connected,'" Kreh said. "It's about how people within and without this industry get connected."

"It's about peers connecting with each other, it's about making sure technology allows drivers to connect with each other, and even cars connecting with other cars. You can get electric cars connected to the smart grid. There are a lot of ways to get connected in the car business these days."

Among the topics to be discussed, Kreh said, is new options available to today's car buyer. Things like telematics, safety technology such as adaptive cruise control and how industries not usually associated with the auto industry can connect with and network peers within the auto industry.

"That's why this year General Electric is a Tier I strategic partner sponsoring the Congress," Kreh said. "The other main sponsor is Nissan."

The Congress's opening speaker will be Jeffrey Immelt, chairman and CEO of GE, Kreh said. She described his appearing at this year's Congress as a "big deal for us."

In addition to Immelt, there will be representatives from

the energy industry and the computer and electronic industries.

"The internal combustion engine (ICE) has changed so much in the last 10 years," Kreh said. "To think about it like it's basically the same technology that existed 100 years ago is totally wrong."

"Today's ICE-powered vehicles are so sophisticated and use the latest in high-tech systems. Now, drivers want improved performance with increased fuel mileage and they want it at an affordable cost. That's where electronics and computers come in."

"They make that possible and this Congress will allow representatives from these disparate fields to connect."

Technology has affected more than how an ICE runs, it has changed the entire design process, allowing engineers to radically speed up and improve the whole design process.

This year's Congress will allow attendees to connect with authors, Kreh said. There will be many engineers who have had papers published recently attending the event and speaking about their work.

"We will have 1,500 speakers at this year's Congress," Kreh said. "Of that number,

1,200 of them have written papers on various topics. We also expect to see close to 200 media representatives here as well."

While the theme this year is getting connected, the Congress does have a yearly routine, Kreh said. Every year, they hold technical programs where industry executives speak on panels. This year, day one will be dedicated to energy issues and day two will be about powertrains. Day three is safety. David

Strickland of the NHSTA will be speak to that issue, Kreh said.

On Wednesday, April 25, the head of Google's project for driverless cars will speak. "This is an example of new people playing a part of this event," Kreh said. "Google is new to this space."

"The Congress will allow those people with new or disruptive technology that can change the business show off their work. These are businesses not traditionally asso-

ciated with the auto industry. "This shows that we in the car business are embracing new technology wherever it comes from."

The third element of this year's Congress is the exhibit hall, Kreh said. There will be 150 of the top companies in powertrains, safety technology, infotainment and advanced materials showing off their wares and their tech.

"The vibe we're getting is that people will be coming to this year's event," Kreh said.

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