



CAR CLUB HISTORY

Organized in 1980 the Willmar Car Club continues to promote the preservation and enjoyment of collector vehicles. The Club now has approximately 140 family or individual memberships totaling over 300 members. The annual show on the third Sunday of May attracts over 300 show cars and several thousand spectators. Over 12,000 breakfasts have been served to car buffs at the monthly Car Buffs' Breakfasts since 1982. But how did this all begin?

In 1980 Steve Martens attended a Minnesota Street Machine Association (MSMA) car show in the Twin Cities and made inquiries with the MSMA officers concerning the formation of a Chapter of the MSMA in the Willmar, MN area. With the help of his friends Phil Bonham and Mike (Jake) Jacobson, a club was started and a car show was planned for the summer of 1981. Other charter members included Rod Believeau, Tim Erickson, Dave Freese, Darcy Koepf, Kylene Martwick, Dave Mickelson and Chuck Ostendorf.

The first meetings were held at Phil Bonham's parents' place on South Hwy 71, Willmar, and also Robbins Island Park. All the trophies for the first two car shows were cut, sanded and stained in Phil's parents' shop and the dash plaques were provided by the MSMA.

The first show was held on July 12, 1981 at the Kandiyohi County Fairgrounds. The second show was held at the Kandi Mall on May 23, 1982. The main reason the show changed from July to May was that Phil Bonham entered the Navy on May 24. After Phil's GTO custom convertible caught fire at the first show, he wanted to be there for the second show - with his GTO displayed in the Mall. The next 35 years Shows were held at Kennedy School

The MSMA provided guidance and advertising for the first show. With the rising cost to continue to be affiliated with the MSMA, and with a wider variety of interests in collector cars, the Willmar Street Machines name was dropped and replaced by the name, Willmar Car Club after the second show.

From 1983 - 2017, the annual car show was held on the third Sunday of May at the old Senior High School, now Kennedy Elementary School, in

Willmar. Part of the car show had been the weekend display of vehicles inside the Kandi Mall. Shoppers reminisce of by-gone days and are enticed to see over 20 times as many cars at the Sunday show. During the Car Show, a free Willmar Bus Service shuttle transported people from the car show to Schwanke's Car, Truck & Tractor Museum (over 350 units) and to the Kandi Mall to shop and of course, view more show vehicles.

Berdelle Enestvedt is the current editor of the club newsletter, The Polishing Rag. The monthly newsletter informs members of various events and meetings. Over the years, the Club's monthly meetings have been held at a variety of locations, including the Medical Center, KEC, Roosevelt School, members' homes or shops, the Unitarian Church basement, and currently are held at the Willmar Municipal Utilities Building at 700 Litchfield Ave SW. Meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the third Friday of the month. Summer meetings are usually social gatherings held outside or held in conjunction with another event such as the New London A&W Cruise Nights.

Past presidents include Steven Martens (1980 - 1988), Tom Hamann (1989-1991), Joe Shimota (1992), Jay Mork (1993- 2000), Bob Barr (2001-2003), Dennis Ulrich (2004-2006), Cliff Gesellchen (2007-2008), Cliff Willhite (2009-2011), Greg Gjerdingen (2012-2014), Jay Mork (2015-2017), Gary Hotovec (2018), Nate Lipinski (2019-2021), and currently Bob Barr.

Tom Hamann, long-time Willmar art and elementary teacher, was responsible for creating the Willmar Car Club logo in 1984.

Willmar Car Club is a registered Minnesota nonprofit organization.

Proceeds from the annual car show funded projects for the Kandiyohi County Historical Society, playground equipment at Kennedy Elementary School, and Willmar Senior High School high mileage projects. The club still provides scholarships to Ridgewater College auto body students and also contributes to Toys For Tots, and other community charities.

In May, 1982, two Willmar High School teachers, Ray Hillstrom and Francis Kalvoda, started the Car Buffs' Breakfasts at Timbers Restaurant, 1111 First Street South. In the early years, the breakfasts were all at Timbers on the first Saturday of each month, May through November. Later, the May and November breakfasts were in Willmar and other breakfasts were held at restaurants in area towns. Since 2001, winter breakfasts are held in February, March and April.

For more than forty years, the Willmar Car Club is still going and still preserving vehicles to be enjoyed by future enthusiasts.