



The Rakers Car Club

Was started in 1957 by Port Townsend High School students Vic Olson, Gary Reid, Glen Benton and Jim Seastone. Raker members usually hung out at Joe's Corral or CUSAKS, both of which were eatery stops along the normal cruising circuit. Club meetings were usually held at the designated local quarter-mile strip out by West Hastings or, on occasion, in a building on Washington Street, the site of the Bishop Victorian Hotel.

The Rakers Car Club disbanded in the late 1960s, when many members had either gone into the military, moved away, married, or started a family. By April 2001, the original members had finished raising their families, retired, or rekindled their passion for cars — and the Rakers Car Club was reborn. Membership is currently approaching 100 with members located in Washington and Idaho.

The following are some original members of the Rakers and, to our best knowledge, the car by which each member is most recognized.

<i>MEMBERS CARS</i>			
<i>MEMBER</i>	<i>CAR</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>	<i>CAR</i>
Vic Olson	32 Ford Coupe	Dick Dull	33 Ford 3W Coupe
Gary Ried	40 Ford Coupe	Ray Brooling	34 Ford
Glen Benton	50 Studebaker	Robin Bergstrom	40 Chevy Tudor
Jim Seastone	None	Sam Swanson	32 Ford Coupe
Jesse (Duke) Miller	40 Ford Deluxe Coupe	Rick Buse	50 Mercury
Roy Brooks	39 Ford Deluxe Coupe	Bill Eldridge	39 Ford Coupe
Skip Lewis	48 Pontiac Fastback	Glenn (Buz) Neet	49 Chevy Tudor
Al Fossum	Model A Coupe	Stan Kaylan	50 Chevy
Don Mitton	41 Chevy Coupe	Karl Jacobson	59 Plymouth Fury
Dave Kilmer	30 Model A Coupe	Karl Sebastian	34 Ford P.U.
Mike Castellano	50 Mercury	Larry Marshlain	55 Mercury
Ron Mitton	49 Chevy Coupe	Herb Everson	50 Ford Convertible



Fred Robbins, in his Rakers' Jacket, with his 1941 Ford Coupe, (Photo, late 1960s)

Rakers Car Club reborn in Port Townsend

By Patrick J. Sullivan

Rakers member

American hot rods and the teenagers who drove them often had a less than sterling reputation in the mid to late 1950s. A lot of it was guilt by association due to notorious motorcycle gangs, and the simple misconception formed by the glut of Hollywood B movies that glamorized a renegade hot rod lifestyle.

But for teenagers in Port Townsend and Chimacum growing up in the '50s and early '60s, hot rods were simply an expression of love: true love for wrenches, gear ratios and flathead V-8s.

"We didn't want any trouble," said Vic Olson, who was an original Rakers Car Club member in 1957, and helped rejuvenate the club in 2001. "We just loved cars. Maybe we liked to drive too fast, but that was all."



Car club history

The Flywheels was the first Jefferson County car club, formed in 1955. Its logo was a bumblebee atop a flathead V-8 engine with prominent carburetor and pipes, with large wheels on the rear and small wheels on the front.

“That was a time when hot rods were happening,” said Robin Bergstrom, who helped design the Flywheels’ club plaque, and now owns Bergstrom Antique Autos in Port Townsend. “We were watching the cars as they were coming up from California. That’s where all the hot-rodding was being done. We’d see a ’32 Deuce that would be in town and our eyeballs would fall out of our head. That evening we’d be working to try and get something to look that way.”

The Rakers formed in late 1957, and eventually merged with Flywheels members. The Rakers logo is patterned after a 1939 Ford, “raked” with a low front end and higher rear end.

The Rakers specifically made efforts to combat any reputation of being a hot rod gang. “Courtesy cards” were printed, and when members would stop to assist motorists in trouble, a card would be passed.

“Hot rod clubs had a bad name at that time,” Bergstrom said. “But we were all about an insatiable desire to be around fast cars, not to get into any trouble.”

For the most part, the Rakers did stay away from trouble. In fact, some of them turned their early interest in turning wrenches into successful business careers as mechanics, equipment operators and ferry engineers. Some of those same people, and others like them, have now joined the club.



Hang outs

Jefferson County teenagers have always longed for a place to “hang out.” For the car club set in the '50s and '60s, it was pretty simple: go to a street corner garage or a hamburger joint.

Skip's Union 76 station at the corner of Tyler and Lawrence streets uptown Port Townsend was a popular garage. Skip Lewis let kids use tools and garage space to add “Mickey Mouse” whitewalls to their hot rod tires, or perhaps clean their spark plugs in hopes of gaining a few miles an hour or motor performance. In 1960 there were 12 garages in Port Townsend, and many of them were home to a hot rod or two. Other favorite garage hang-outs included Ed Lee's custom car shop on Hastings Avenue, and Dollar's Garage downtown. In the '60s, H.J. Carroll provided the use of the Bishop Building's street level rooms as a clubhouse. A few chairs, couch, refrigerator and TV provided a hangout. Wednesday evenings, the Port Townsend High School shop was opened for car club members to access tools and garage space.

Rakers participated in parades, and even hosted dances. In 1964 the club convinced two recording groups, The Viceroys and The Wailers, to play for dances at the American Legion Hall. The groups were skeptical that coming to Port Townsend would cover their costs, but each dance drew about 400 people. Other times, some people made trips to the Chicken Coop dance hall just across the Jefferson County line into Clallam County



Going fast

Obviously, young people who liked to build fast cars had to prove to themselves — and others — just how fast those automobiles might be. Some people used Airport Cutoff Road (now State Route 19), or the portion of Rhody Drive near present-day H.J. Carroll Park.

More popular was the straight stretch of Hastings Avenue outside the city limits. Ordained as the official “Quarter Mile” by 1961, it was in fairly routine — although clandestine — use through the early 1970s.

Members note that in those days there were few vehicles on local roads, and it was easy on some evening to have a half hour or more with no other vehicles in sight. The Rakers today do not advocate or promote drag racing on streets or highways. Olson is proud to say he has never been issued a traffic ticket of any type.

Rakers and others interested in hot rods those days might attend the drags in Shelton or Arlington, with the Bremerton drags starting in the early '60s..



A few pranks

The Rakers were never considered a “gang,” just a group of guys who loved cars. That’s not to say some members weren’t involved with a few juvenile pranks — most of it born from the boredom of living in a sleepy, dead-end town. These were not Rakers “sanctioned” activities.

About 1958, a young man hooked a chain from a light pole to the rear end of the police chief’s sedan parked uptown. When a hot rod sped by, the chief jumped in his patrol car and took off — and tore loose the car’s rear end.

In the early 60s, one club member drove his ’56 Chevy on the sidewalk (then void of benches or trash barrels) from the present day ferry terminal almost to the police station. Keep in mind, this was a time when, after the downtown taverns closed on a Saturday night, a person could lay in the middle of Water Street and not be a bother to anyone until sometime Monday morning.

“There was so little activity back then we had to create our own excitement,” said Bill Eldridge, an original Raker from the Chimacum Valley. “We never hurt anybody, but we had fun.”



Club membership

As the local men got married or moved away for a job or for military service, car club membership changed. “I got married in 1960 and that took care of the car club,” Olson noted. That’s one reason why today’s Rakers is a family club, with spousal participation encouraged.

The Rakers dissolved in the late 60s — none of the active members now remember exactly when or how. But many of those same members still carry their love for automobiles — and wish they still had their original hot rods.

Today in the United States, there is a growing number of organizations and businesses catering to those who buy, drive, collect and sell hot rods and classic automobiles.

That interest in cars and car clubs led to the Rakers being rejuvenated in April 2001. Owning a classic car is not required — simply a love and appreciation for chromium steel. The Rakers meet once a month in Port Townsend. Even more importantly, the club provides a network of safe advice for people working on their own car projects.

“Back in the ’50s I never would have imagined how popular those old cars would become, and that’s one reason car clubs are so big again,” Olson said. “Working on old cars is a disease, and no doctor has the cure.”