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60,000 cars fill Hines Drive for third annual cruise

60,000 classics, hot rods enjoy annual Hines Drive cruise

*By Sue Mason
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All Rich Schlampp can say about Sunday's Hines Drive cruises is "wow" with two exclamation points.

Schlampp was among fans who lined Hines Drive to watch classic cars and hot rods cruise the parkway from Ann Arbor Trail in Westland to Outer Drive in Dearborn Heights.

"I was parked at the bottom of the Merriman Road entrance, so I got to watch everyone coming in all day long," Schlampp wrote in a posting of Cruisin' Hines Facebook page Monday. "All I can say is wow. ... The cruise in general, best in the world!"

Comments like Schlampp's are music to the ears of organizer Don Nicholson, who has watched the event grow by leaps and bounds since it started three years ago.

"It was phenomenal," Nicholson said. "The first year, we hoped for 4,000-5,000 cars and got 25,000. Last year, it was 40,000. And this year, we estimate it was close to 60,000. Who knows how many to expect, but what I do know is that I expect people to have a good time. Most of the people did."

Lining up to cruise

This is the third year Nicholson has joined Wayne County Parks on putting on the one-day cruise. Its popularity had cruisers lined up from the entrance at Ann Arbor Trail to Plymouth Road and along Merriman past Warren Road.

Nicholson estimates that some 100 cars a minute were admitted to the parkway, but there were a few vehicles that overheated while waiting to get into the park.

Cruisers like Debra McDonald posted that "getting in was not fun, but once we were in it was fabulous." Susan Smith Gronowicz said "getting in was a nightmare, but we did get in. It was great."

And Gerry Silka described Cruisin' Hines as the "best cruise in Michigan."

Setting up for the cruise started at 3 a.m., with vendors entering the area between 6-8 a.m. Once they were in place, the gates were opened to cruisers, who this year began lining up at 6 a.m. Cars came from seven states and two Canadian provinces, Nicholson said.

"There were a lot of cars down there this year. Our goal was to keep them moving," he said. "There were a lot of people sitting along the road, shoulder to shoulder. Merriman Hollow was full by 9:30 a.m., the lot at Perrinville School was full. Telegraph Road is our biggest area where we can hold 5,000 cars and that was 50 percent full. That's a lot of cars."

Watching the cars

Nicholson added that at the Warrendale area of the park, people were sitting on the hill with their umbrellas and tents to watch.

Nicholson recruited volunteers to help with the event and said they were phenomenal. Among them was a woman in her 80s whose husband worked at the Model T plant in Highland Park. Another volunteer, Ken Smith, was there at 3 a.m. and didn't leave until 7 p.m., Nicholson said.

The Hines Drive cruise is the only cruise in southeast Michigan in which the road is restricted to only classics and hot rods. With the response to the event almost doubling each year, Nicholson, Wayne County Parks and the Wayne County Sheriff's Department are sitting down this week to go over the event and begin planning for next year. One of the things they'll be looking at is entrances and the possibility of having two for next year's cruise.

Nicholson also is considering a \$5 charge next year, with half of the amount going to Wayne County Parks.

"We've had a lot of responses to the cruise. A lot of people are saying great things," he added.
