

Hey, there are people in those shiny cars!

By **Catrina Coghill**
Wheelbase
Communications

Maureen Pendagras doesn't have kids. And that's just the way she likes it.

"This is my baby," says the 48-year-old administrative assistant, polishing the headlights on a 1978 Ford

Mustang, which she coddles the same way a mother would a newborn.

The fact that she was born in 1954 - the Year of the Horse, if you're one of 'those' types who buys into the whole Chinese Zodiac thing - is a detail she doesn't overlook. In fact, she IS one of 'those' people (the green-tea drinking, yoga-

practicing, horoscope-reading type) who believes she was born to drive a Mustang. No kidding.

"It was meant to be." Yeah, OK, I'll go along with that considering it's my first experience with what my editor calls, 'your garden variety show and shine.'

So far, there's not much

that's garden variety about Pendagras.

She tosses me a towel and 'allows' me to wipe down the windows inside. (C'mon, do I look like I do windows?)

Mo, as her friends in her Mustang club call her, and I spend the better part of an hour waxing and buffing her baby in preparation

for the group's bi-monthly mixer, a show and shine followed by a cruise through our rather large metropolitan downtown area . . .

where lots and lots of people can and WILL see you.

Just when I think I have time to back out, she lets me in on the plan: we're going to meet up at a diner that sponsors the club's regular shin-dig (yes, there are more people out there just like Mo). We stay long enough for the locals to ogle and pet the ponies before Pendagras organizes the troops - a fairly equal mix of men and women (it's hard to tell if the guys are drooling over the cars or their shapely owners) - and gets them saddled up for the embarrassingly slow ride (this is the cruise part, in case you were wondering) down the main drag.

"When we're all in sync, it's a beautiful sight," she says, reapplying her lipstick that matches the glossy red paint on 'Delilah'.

"Everyone stares. You'll love it."

I doubt it, but she has been kind enough to let me, one of the uninitiated whose fascination with this odd ritual borders on mockery, ride shotgun for this beauty pageant of sorts.

I don't know if I should practise my Miss America wave or lock myself in her trunk.

"I remember my first time. I went with my husband in his Mustang - a 1966. I loved it more than I did him."

The 'Stang, she brags, was part of the divorce settlement. Both cars - hers and hers, she jokes - are polished at least once a week, although she only rolls out the '66 on 'special occasions.' More special than this, I'm thinking?

Then Pendagras sheds a little light on what drives her club: it was her "built-in support group" during the rather messy split.

"It helps when we all have something in common like this. It gives us a chance to socialize and get to know each other because we have something in common - we all love our cars."



CATRINA COGHILL

Some maybe a little too much.

Following behind us is one of Mo's gal pals, Terri Wright, who collects Mustangs the way some women collect expensive pairs of shoes.

"I have seven of them," she boasts.

"Yeah, one for every day of the week," adds Pendagras.

"I can drive a different one to every event and never show up in the same (car) twice in a year."

Wait just one second. A dimly-lit light bulb flickers on inside my head. It took a few hours, but I just realized it's not just the showing off, the smell of exhaust fumes and the love of the cars that keeps these otherwise sane people grooming, grooming, grooming their babies for these beauty contests. There's something there a little deeper, just under the surface if you scratch a bit for it.

The next time you're off ogling some lovingly restored classic at the local show and shine, look past the cars and take the time to meet the people with the rags and polish. Shake some hands and ask some questions. You'll find a therapeutic bond between them that not only helps restore their vehicles, but their faith in themselves and the world around them. Really.

"She's a riot!" Pendagras says as we climb into her '78 and Wright slips into a sassy violet number parked next to us. "She kept me laughing through my divorce. They all did, they still do." I think that's why I didn't go insane.

Insane? Now we're talking. I'm going Mustang shopping, right now.

Catrina Coghill is a journalist with Wheelbase Communications, a worldwide supplier of automotive news, features and reviews. You can email her at cat@wheelbasecom.com.

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