

A Brief History of the First La Palma Meet – 1975

As told by Ed Reynolds

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Sunday April 20, 1975, was a significant day for Studebaker drivers in So. Cal. That was the date of the very first La Palma Car Show sponsored by the Orange Empire Chapter (now the Beach Cities-Orange-Inland Empire Chapter). No, it wasn't referred to as the "La Palma Meet" that first year, but rather was called the "Invitational Meet." Because of the success of the first meet and because of the popularity of La Palma Park as a sight for the event, the meet has subsequently been referred to as the La Palma Meet or the La Palma Car Show and Swap Meet.

The idea for the annual car show was actually generated many months earlier when the newly elected Orange Empire Officers had their first Board meeting. I was a fairly new member of the chapter and had just been elected President (at the time being a member for a year was not a requirement of holding office), John Metzker was Vice-President, Beverly Radel was Membership Secretary, and Jim Holsonbake was Newsletter Editor. At that first meeting we discussed our goals for the year, which included increased membership and the establishment of an annual car show.

Orange Empire had previously hosted the Zone Meet for what was then called the Pacific Zone. For many of our members this was their first Studebaker Meet and it provided a foundation that was used to create the La Palma Meet.

It's worth noting that at this time Orange Empire Chapter was the only Studebaker Drivers Club Chapter in the Los Angeles area and had been in existence less than five years. In addition, Studebaker hadn't been out of the automobile business for that long and some of our cars were less than 10 years old.

The board discussed a few of the basics that we wanted. We wanted to encourage as large a turn out as possible. At that time the majority of members used their Studebakers as daily drivers and most of them were in less than show condition. We wanted everyone to bring their cars and to participate regardless of condition and even offered bonus points during judging for high mileage vehicles.

We also wanted to encourage people to fix up their cars. To do this we included a trophy for the most improved Studebaker which was announced to the first meet and presented at the second meet for the car showing the most improvement over the previous year.

We wanted to keep the meet simple. A one day only car show with no swap meet and no banquet was planned. The awards would be passed out in the afternoon in the large multipurpose building within the park.

The swap meet was added the following year. At that time Frost & French was still in business and there were very few available vendors. Pat Holsonbake took calls of inquiry from interested participants who responded to our ads in magazines and newsletters. Bob and Chris Anders took care of pre-registration which started prior to the meet and then registration during the meet.

Judging presented the largest obstacle so with the help of Tom Mueller who was a member of CHVA, some of their members came over and judged the Studebakers with a few of our members acting as advisers for questions regarding authenticity. This worked out very well this first year and the following year we did the judging ourselves.

We wanted the meet to be as low budget for participants as possible. The chapter treasury was in good shape at the time, and we wanted to establish that the meet wasn't about making money, but rather about participation and camaraderie. The registration fee was only \$4.00, and for those bringing more than one car the additional charge was only \$1.50 per car.

What turned out to be the simplest part of our planning was the selection of a site for the meet. We visited a couple of other parks first but knew right away that La Palma Park was the place that we wanted our Studebakers to gather on April 20th. The selection was aided because chapter member Dick Kamphefner was Director of Parks & Recreation in Anaheim and was willing to take care of all the arrangements with the city to procure the park for the day.

To encourage participation, we started early sending out notices to other clubs. We attended activities of the Antique Studebaker Club, Studebaker Owners Club and the Avanti Owners Association to promote our coming meet. Letters were sent out on a regular basis to chapters outside the area. Carl Anderson sent out notices of the coming meet to all of the major old car publications.

1975 was a rainy year. When the date of April 20th was selected for the car show none of us on the Board gave the slightest thought to the possibility that rain might be a problem. As the date grew nearer, it seemed we had one weekend after another that was rainy. The weekend prior to April 20th, was bright and sunny and was a beautiful day. What a relief!

From the first year we had no idea what the turnout would be. We utilized both sides of the park and arranged the cars among the designated twelve classes. Many of the cars were parked under the trees on the south side of the park. I remember how good it felt to see the lineup of cars entering the park after so many long months of planning.

On the southwest corner of the park we had an original Studebaker billboard of a Bordeaux Red 1964 Cruiser that could easily be seen as cars drove north on Harbor Boulevard. John Metzker assembled the plywood and bracing. Many saw the billboard and then the collection of cars and stopped to have a look.

The Champion Café was part of La Palma from the beginning. The first few years we sold coffee for 5 cents a cup and I can still remember our announcements on the loudspeaker advertising the "Champion Café – where coffee is still only a nickel!!" The Champion Café was operated by Millie Mueller, Em Heymer, Sonja Reynolds and Rosiland Metzker.

Mark Melino, who also displayed his 1963 Cruiser, made first and second place trophies. Goodie bags were part of La Palma from the start. Bob Nash did the work the first year of writing letters, making calls, and securing donations.

A total of 130 Studebaker were shown at the meet and 80 of these cars were judged. Our Membership Secretary, Beverly Radel, signed up 10 new Orange Empire member that day of the car show, and probably a few more later as a result. The Champion Café reported sales of 360 hot dogs, and they lost count of the 5 cent-a-cup of coffee that they sold.

The success of the first La Palma Meet was the result of a lot of hard work by many who participated in the planning and at the Meet. Some are still members of this chapter today and have continued to be active members as office holders and contributors to La Palma.

It was obvious from the success of this year that La Palma would be an annual event. In the 40 years that have followed there have been different locations experimented with, but we are now back to where it all began 40 years ago at La Palma Park. The date has been made later in the year (to avoid rain) and a swap meet has been added. It's still a great meet, and like so may other things, La Palma only gets better with age!

