

Two Women and Their Model Ts -- *Signs of the Past* by Ed Allen

Bebe Lovitt owned a 1913 and a 1926 Ford Model T and belonged to two Phoenix antique car clubs when she came to Sun City in 1977. She soon met Ruth Martin who owned a 1926 Model T coupe, and the women decided Sun City should have a car club. It was a long drive into Phoenix to participate in parades, rallies and shows – why not have those activities locally? Every time the women saw an old model car, they got the owner's name and encouraged him/her to join the group.

April 22, 1977 marked the first vintage car meeting in Sun City. Twelve Model Ts left LaRonde Center on a mystery route, which ended with lunch at the Martin residence.

The first few years of the club were very casual. But as it grew, the need for organization became apparent. The group met at the Bell Rec Center in 1981 to select officers and decide on a name. That was the official beginning of the C.A.R.S. of Sun City...Classics, Antiques, Replicas, and Sentimentals were the four categories of cars in the club.

It soon became apparent that car collecting seems to have almost as much appeal for women as it does for men. Like Bebe and Ruth, many members' wives were actively involved in the mechanical work of restoring and maintaining older cars. Several members bought homes in Sun City's Rancho Estates area west of 111th and between Peoria and Olive Aves. The larger lots provided space for out-buildings for car restoration and maintenance work on the cars.

Soon, the club began working with local shopping centers for dates to show off their cars. The centers advertised the car shows to draw visitors, and paid a fee to the club based on the number of cars displayed. Members were expected to display their cars in shows at least twice a year. They earned points for doing so, which can be used to pay for meals and club memorabilia.

The club held various social events for members. The first Sunday of the month, members paraded to a different restaurant for breakfast. The Wigwam Resort was a favorite on special days. A call ahead would result in the circular drive at the entrance being reserved for the club to park their cars. Another regular spot was the White Tank Mountain Park where many club picnics have been held.

Wickenburg's "Gold Rush Days" each February offered a parade that attracted classic cars. Two of the club members, Steve and Phyllis Freegard owned property just south of Wickenburg called "Calamity Canyon." In 1996, they began hosting a pit barbecue for car owners who came to participate in the parade – or who just wanted to meet with others with like interest. The invitation made it clear the event was for owners of cars more than 30 years old, and contained the warning: "New Iron will not be allowed through the gate." The Freegards sent invitations to car clubs throughout the West Valley and at its peak some 300 attended.

Club members occasionally planned multi-day trips. One 4-day trip saw the cars traveling to Winslow the first day, staying overnight at LaPosada. The second day they toured the Painted Desert and the Petrified Forest. Day 3, they drove down the Coronado Trail to the Morenci Copper Mine and Globe. They returned home on the fourth day.

Long distance traveling is slow as the cars travel at 40-45 miles-per-hour. If one car breaks down, all the cars pull over to see what can be done to get the crippled car going again. Another challenge is that most of the cars require a higher-octane leaded gas than can be found at the average gas station. As a result, drivers carry a supply of lead additive

Over the years, the C.A.R.S. Club added members from not just Sun City, but Sun City West, Youngtown, and Peoria. As a result, it could not be a chartered club in Sun City. Interest in using rec center space, or even having a facility of their own, caused some of the Sun City members to form the



Vintage Vehicle Club of Sun City – and in 2015 it became a chartered club. In 2021, it opened a facility in the new Grand Center for members to use restoring and maintaining their cars.

The C.A.R.S. Club still exists and is very active as an independent car club serving the Northwest area of the valley. There are several Sun City residents who belong to both clubs – C.A.R.S. and VVSC. As a result, they have the best of both worlds.