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'City of Hot Rods' film is a trove of stories about Detroit, cars and all of us

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Like a boxcar of parts arriving at the factory that builds sports cars, the documentary film “Detroit: City of Hot Rods and Muscle Cars” assembles a collection of seemingly disparate components into a vehicle of power and grace.

Following a sold-out June 19 debut fundraiser for six Michigan charitable organizations, filmmaker Keith Famie’s documentary — a tribute to Detroit’s car culture and relationships that stand the test of time, among other things — makes its broadcast debut on Detroit Public Television WTVS at 8 p.m. June 23 and will air on other PBS stations around the country.



Comedian Tim Allen recalls his days as a gofer in the GM Tech Center in “Detroit: The City of Hot Rods & Muscle Cars.” *Provided by Keith Famie*

“The story is about people and how cars impacted their lives from the early days of battling on Woodward to how cruising means so much to our Michigan community,” director and producer Famie said.

Woodward Avenue runs through the film like it runs from the Detroit River through the city and suburbs.



Ruth and Gary Bedard’s love story began with a custom car. *Provided by Keith Famie.*

“It was stoplight-to-stoplight racing,” comedian Tim Allen recalls in the film. Auto industry legend Bob Lutz describes the push and pull between starched-shirt execs who wanted to clamp down on street racing and firebrand engineers determined to defend the company’s honor, one block at a time.

The June 19 debut benefits six Michigan charitable organizations: The Rainbow Connection, Kids Without Cancer, Heroes Circle, Camp Casey, Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit, and Michigan Parkinson's Foundation.

Famie will attend two screenings of the film at the Bay Community Theatre, Suttons Bay, on June 25. A car show outside the theater will feature hot rods and muscle cars including some in the film from noon to 3 p.m. June 25.



Veteran auto executive Bob Lutz interviews for “Detroit: City of Hot Rods & Muscle Cars.” *Provided by Keith Famie.*

'An American art form'

The 95-minute film includes moments likely to surprise even car buffs and amateur historians:

- Tim Allen describes an incident in the men’s room when he was a gofer in the storied Design Center at the GM Tech Center in Warren.
- Detroit custom-car extravaganza Autorama’s 1950s origin as a fundraiser for a drag strip in the city.
- Steve Pasteiner Sr., host of what may be Michigan’s best and longest running cars & coffee meetup, recalls his childhood in Budapest, slipping off to the U.S. embassy in Budapest to sketch the inspiring American cars.

Custom cars are “a true American art form,” designer Chip Foose declares from his studio in California. “And it’s bigger and more alive than it’s ever been today.”

As evidence, the film presents Miranda Rumfelt, a 22-year-old GM design sculptor who inherited her father’s love of cars and passes it forward today teaching eager students at Roseville’s Drive One Tech Center. Teenagers from the nonprofit school are shown working on a vehicle that wins a spot on the hallowed Autorama show floor.

Auto designer Chip Foosse in the movie
“Detroit: City of Hot Rods & Muscle Cars.”
Provided by Keith Famie.



Singer Jill Jack performs “Fast Cars Ain’t Just for Boys Anymore” at
Women’s Motor Fest 2022. *Provided by Keith Famie.*

Other highlights include:

- The family history behind the legendary “Black Ghost” street racer.
- Throttle Gals Magazine car show celebrates women’s contributions to the auto industry.
- A trio of Vietnam vets reunite in the Oldsmobile 442 muscle car they cherished before going to war.
- A soundtrack of classics, punctuated by singer Jill Jack’s times-they-are-a-changing delivery of her brand new “Fast Cars Ain’t Just for Boys Anymore.”

The film presents cars from all eras, as well as personal stories and public history. As the film's story arc approaches the finish line, those strands intertwine in moving incidents, including a romance that lasts decades, and dreams coming true for car fans of all ages at the Woodward Dream Cruise, the largest classic car gathering in the world and the centerpiece of summer in Detroit, the city of hot rods and muscle cars.

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