Cruising for tourists



JOHN C. STEVENSON /Staff

Car buffs normally don't have to go far to find a cruise-in during the warmer months in Pickens County. Thousands attend the annual show at the Blue Ridge Fest each year, and Pickens officials are hoping for similar crowds when it hosts its own cruise-in later this month.

Pickens hopes events will drive crowds to area

Three weekends devoted to music, vehicles

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PICKENS – Cruising – a teenage pastime since the first teen borrowed the keys to the family car – will make a comeback in Pickens for three weekends this month.

But the cruising in Pickens is for kids of all ages.

The city this month is launching three consecutive weekends of Cruise 'N and Music on Main, an event devoted to cool music and hot cars and other vehicles.

Other events in the city, such as the Azalea Festival and the Blue Ridge Fest, have demonstrated that plenty of folks will cruise in in their classic autos, while plenty more folks will come to see the rolling iron, according to city administrator Katherine Brackett.

"Pickens had a long history of cruising," Brackett said. "They say the traffic used to be bumper-to-bumper up and down the streets. This is going to be just a traditional, parked 'cruise-in,' but it kind of connects us back to our tradition of doing this."

The American love affair with the automobile is particularly strong in the Carolinas, according to Paul Ianuario, an Upstate resident, collector and curator of the BMW museum.

"The South has always been a region of automotive-minded people," Ianuario said. "The automobile is part of the culture of the Carolinas."

Cruising, Ianuario said, has its roots in the drive-in restaurants popular in the 1950s, when teens would cruise through the restaurant parking lots looking for friends, or looking to show off their rides.

That kind of friendly competi-

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tiveness continues to fuel the popularity of cruise-ins today, Ianuario said.

"It's an opportunity that any of us baby boomers can appreciate – it's reliving our youth," he said. "And the young people are just learning about the cars, and they like to meet the old-timers and talk to them and learn about the cars."

Pickens will host three Cruise 'N and Music on Main events, on June 12, 19 and 26.

Each of the nights will be themed, but Brackett said anyone who wants to cruise in in any type of classic ride is welcome.

The first weekend will highlight classic cars, the second weekend features classic and custom Jeeps, and the finale will be for motorcycles.

Brackett said the idea originated with the city's Steering Committee as a way to lure folks to Pickens.

"A lot of people are excited to be seeing anything happening," she said. "We're getting a lot of community support – people glad we're trying to do more than one festival a year, and doing something built off of community ideas."

Shelia Barton counts herself as among those who are excited to see the new events. Barton, owner of Town and Country Florist on Main Street, said she might even extend her hours on the three Saturday evenings so people can visit her shop.

"I think it's super fantastic," Barton said. "I think it's going to bring a lot of attention that Pickens really needs. I think it's going to draw people into Pickens that don't necessarily live in Pickens."

To round out the three events, the city is also bringing bands to provide the musical entertainment.

The lineup includes the Marvin King Blues Revival on June 12, the Last Minute Band on June 19, and The Saboteurs on June 26.

Brackett said there is no entry fee for folks who participate in the cruise-in, nor is there an admission fee for those who just want to come out and enjoy the sights and sounds of the evening.



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Pickens County hopes car buffs will be drawn to events that are planned during the summer.