



# HOW TO START A CAR CLUB

*Turning a common interest into an active organization is the first job—but making it useful and permanent is the hardest part*

BY MICHAEL LAMM

**A**N ESTIMATED 750,000 active auto enthusiasts currently enjoy membership in car clubs around the country. Clubs now exist for every shade and ilk of motoring, from those interested in fast cars (hot rods, sports imports) to cars that stand still (show customs). There are clubs for owners of very new cars (Ponycars) and very old cars (antiques and classics). Then there are clubs for cars that run in sand (dune buggies), over snow (snow-

mobiles), over frozen lakes (ice racers), over mountains (four-wheel drive clubs), around parking lots (autocross and gymkhana clubs), and just anywhere under the sun (rally clubs).

Clubs exist for specific makes of cars—all the way from Isotta Fraschinis to Javelins. Clubs can thrive on local levels, where eight long-time friends get together in someone's garage. Or they can be of international scope, in which Swedish members

never even hope to meet their pen pals in this country. Many hold huge annual national meets—hundreds and even thousands of members jamming into little cities like Hershey, Pa., or Dearborn, Mich., some driving 1500 miles in 40-year-old buggies to get there.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was all the rage to organize or at least belong to a car club. Hundreds blossomed. Some flourished, ▶

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continued

most died. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was a period of relative calm, when no one seemed particularly interested in car clubs. But recently, especially under the auspices of Detroit car companies, local auto dealers, national insurance companies, accessory distributors, and even big chain stores like J. C. Penney, clubs are on the rampage again. Some carry commercial overtones; more, though, are on the grass-roots level.

In on the ground floor of this boom is the National Hot Rod Assn., one of the first clubs to make it really big in this country (present membership: 18,000). Wally Parks, founder of the NHRA and the one man most responsible for popularizing and innovating drag racing, started things rolling in 1951. Today, NHRA has a special charter club program, designed to help car clubs on all levels. This program is headed by Ron Root.

Root's an old hand at helping car clubs get started. Although he's best at clubs having to do with hot rods and dragsters, his methods and suggestions apply just as well to any type of automotive organization. Here are some of the tips he's formulated:

If you're interested in starting a club of your own, go about it by first contacting everyone who might have even the slightest interest along the same lines. On the local level, you can do this by word of mouth or by taking out a classified ad in your hometown newspaper. If you place this ad in the automotive classified section, you'll probably arouse a fair number of similarly interested people. If you're considering a club that involves people far away, like one banding together all drivers and owners of, say, 1939-1948 Mercurys in the U.S., place the ad in the classified sections of automotive magazines such as *CAR LIFE*'s "Automart."

If yours is to be a local club, it's a good idea to get a sponsor as soon as possible. For hot rod clubs, you might approach the owner of a parts or accessory store whose business can profit from the steady patronage of club members. If it's a sports car club, an import dealer might be the logical sponsor (or he can help you establish a local chapter of an existing national sports car club). Other possible sponsors include local law-enforcement agencies, safety councils, civic groups, radio and TV stations, newspapers,

garages and diagnostic centers, filling stations, etc.

Depending upon the size and type of the club sponsor, his support can mean anything from a discount on parts and a free meeting place to payment of printing costs, activity posters, refreshments, films, etc. Expect this to be a two-way street, though. In return for his patronage, any sponsor justifiably expects to have the club help advertise or promote his business, product, or service (via purchases, advertising on club jackets, decals on members' cars, etc.).

When you get enough members to make a club possible, first hold an open meeting to discuss plans, goals, purpose, and general logistics. You'll get lots of good, new ideas by simply throwing the initial meeting open to comment, letting everyone speak his mind.

Root says, "Consider not only what you want now, but your *future* plans and aims as well." To do this, one of your club's first moves should be to appoint a committee or study group to draw up a preliminary constitution and bylaws (see sample on page 51).

Another, similar group should start work picking a good name for the club. Here, Root stresses that the name should at least hint at what the club is about. Also, the name ought not be downbeat or in poor taste. If it implies lawlessness or something off-key, the public surely won't take kindly to it, and you'll *need* public support eventually, even if you don't

think it's really important at first.

Any group will have natural leaders. As soon as the members know each other well enough, hold elections. From the very beginning, even before you elect officers, it's best to hold meetings according to parliamentary procedure.

A club that exists just to exist doesn't last long. The members have to do things and get involved in things. If it's an old car club, it has to hold swapmeets, concours, maintain a parts locating service for members, keep owners in touch by publishing a newsletter, etc.

Sports car clubs keep active with slaloms, rallies, reliability runs, participation in road races, gymkhanas, and other contests of driving skill.

Hot rod clubs take part in drag races, of course, and also some of the activities that interest sports car owners. In addition, all car clubs usually hold regular, more sedate outings like beach trips, tours of various kinds, or picnics. And to make it all worthwhile, the more mature organizations participate in civic and charitable work—fund drives, seat belt installation, giving talks at schools and before other club meetings.

The Shifters of Huntington, W. Va., holds a Good Neighbor Weekend whenever possible, the purpose being to provide free, 24-hour emergency road service over specified Saturdays and Sundays. The Dusters of West Los Angeles developed a Community Safety Check, in which members per-



form free safety inspections in cooperation with other civic groups—this after an extensive publicity campaign announcing the service. The Untouchables of Turlock, Calif., recently held a benefit dance to raise funds for the family of victims of a traffic accident.

Any club also needs money to carry out its own activities. There are various ways to raise it. These range from car washes to club auctions, club shows (private as well as those held under the sponsorship of a shopping center, car dealer, parts outlet), dances, etc. For \$2, NHRA can provide an extremely helpful booklet called "Car Club Activities," which

tells in great detail how to organize all sorts of competitive events, money raising drives, civic campaigns, and other activities. Write Ron Root, NHRA 3418 W. First St., Los Angeles, Calif. 90004.

Sometimes, rather than starting a club of your own, it may be best to join the large number of organizations already in existence or to start a local or regional chapter of one. Your library probably has a club directory that gives names and addresses of most national car groups. Such directories are arranged by types of clubs, so if you look under "auto organizations," you may well find a parent group to attach yourself to.

If you start a club of your own, though, the NHRA Charter Club Program is well worth looking into—and not only for hot rod groups. Any type can benefit. NHRA can provide valuable guidance to help keep your fledgling club alive and thriving.

In this regard, keep in mind that it's relatively easy to start a car club these days. What's hard is to make it grow and keep the members enthusiastic, active, and interested. That's what takes work, planning, organization, good leadership, and a solid purpose. But there's no reason why you can't set up a going group, and if you do it properly, there's plenty of fun ahead for all those who join. ■

## SAMPLE CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS

### I. Name and Insignia

- a) The name of this club shall be: \_\_\_\_\_.
- b) The club shall have such official insignia as the members shall determine.

### II. Club Objectives

- a) To promote interest in (preservation of, activities centering around) \_\_\_\_\_.
- b) To create good fellowship and sportsmanship among the members.
- c) To uphold the principles of good government (optional).
- d) To conduct club operations and activities in such a way as to bring about a better (clearer) understanding on the part of the public, press, and other groups toward \_\_\_\_\_.
- e) To promote (safety in, pleasure of, maintenance of, restoration of) \_\_\_\_\_.

### III. Membership

- a) There shall be two types of members in this club, active and honorary.
- b) Any person interested in \_\_\_\_\_ activities is eligible for active membership in this club, with full privileges.
- c) Honorary membership may be conferred upon an individual by vote of the members for meritorious service to the club or its objectives. Honorary members need not pay dues, nor do they have a vote in club business.
- d) All applications for membership must be sponsored by an active member in good standing (optional) and must be accepted by a majority vote of the members or Board of Directors (also optional).
- e) (Optional) Any member who commits unsafe driving acts or whose conduct is otherwise detrimental to the purpose or standing of the club may be fined, suspended, or expelled by a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote of all members after being given proper hearing.

### IV. Dues and Initiation Fees

- a) The initiation fee for application for membership shall be \$\_\_\_\_\_ (optional).

b) Annual (or monthly) dues for active membership in this club shall be \$\_\_\_\_\_ and shall be payable to the treasurer each \_\_\_\_\_.

c) Any member whose dues are in arrears \_\_\_\_\_ months shall automatically be suspended from membership and can be reinstated to full membership status only upon payment of all delinquent dues.

d) Dues shall be waived for any member who enters military service until his return to active status in this club.

### V. Officers

a) Elective officers of this club shall be: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and sergeant-at-arms. In addition, there shall be \_\_\_\_\_ directors, and these directors, together with all club officers, shall constitute the board of directors.

b) A majority of the board of directors shall constitute a quorum at any meeting of the board.

### VI. Elections

a) All nominees for office shall be active members in good standing.

b) All elected and appointed officers and board members must remain active members in good standing during their terms of office.

c) All officers and directors shall be elected at the last meeting before the beginning of a new term, shall assume office at the first regular meeting of the new term, and shall hold office for one year (optional) or until their successors are duly elected and qualified.

d) Nominations shall be made from the floor (or by mail), and all voting shall be by secret ballot.

e) Nominations and election of the board of directors (other than officers) shall be after officers are elected.

f) Elections shall be decided by a majority vote of all active members in good standing.

### VII. Duties of Officers

a) President: Presides at all meetings, appoints committees, serves as chairman of board of directors, acts as ex-officio member of all

committees, issues the call for regular and special board meetings, sees that elections are held according to club's constitution, carries out directives of board of directors.

b) Vice president: Performs president's duties in latter's absence.

c) Secretary: Keeps minutes of regular meetings, keeps membership records, gives notice of all meetings, handles all club correspondence, keeps custody of all club records.

d) Treasurer: Collects dues and all other monies due to club, keeps club's financial records, makes payments from club funds when so ordered by board of directors, countersigns all club checks, keeps account of all club money matters, makes regular financial reports to club members and/or directors.

e) Sergeant-at-Arms: Maintains order at all meetings, sees that all president's orders are carried out.

f) Board of Directors: Responsible for the execution, through its officers, of the authorized policies of the club; authorizes all expenditures of club funds; determines club policy; fills vacancies in any office by a majority vote; formulates and submits policy recommendations affecting club or members.

### VIII. Meetings

a) A majority of the active members in good standing shall constitute a quorum.

b) Regular membership meetings shall be held every \_\_\_\_\_.

c) Meetings of the board of directors shall be held every \_\_\_\_\_ at a place set by the board.

d) The president may call special board meetings, and the board may call special membership meetings whenever necessary.

e) Roberts Rules of Order shall govern club parliamentary procedure unless otherwise provided in club bylaws.

### IX. Delegations

a) Delegations shall be appointed by the president, subject to approval by the board, to represent this club at any convention, meeting, or assembly as deemed necessary. ■