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HAGERTY'S OPERATION IGNITE

These kid judges don't wear kid gloves

Okay, so classic car owners don't tremble when the blue shirts arrive, but these judges are all right

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B lame video games. Or gas prices. Or traffic congestion. Or graduated licensing. Or car technology. Or global warming.

Contemporary cultural observers cite these reasons as to why the younger generation has little interest in cars. Sure, there are still boys with Ferrari posters on the bedroom walls of their suburban homes, and teenage girls might still turn their heads and giggle when a convertible cruises past on a warm summer's eve.

But that seemingly unbreakable bond between teens and cars forged back in *American Graffiti* days and tempered for decades by car crazy baby boomers appears today to be broken. The wheels are off, as they say.

And from most accounts, those halcyon horsepowered

days are unlikely to return soon, as the youth of today, generally speaking, have been raised in an almost anti-car climate, with the automobile no longer a vehicle representing adolescent freedom, but rather as a carbon-spewing machine that must be tolerated more out of necessity than enjoyed as a transcendental thing. Guess there's always Willyoga.

Not surprisingly, many enterprises associated with the car business would like to reverse that trend, or at least slow it. To that end, specialty car insurance company Hagerty has been running a program designed to get kids into cars by letting them judge at car shows.

Two weeks ago Operation Ignite touched down in Canada for the first time as 20 youngsters took part at the All-British Field Meet at VanDusen Botanical Garden. Operation Ignite is a multi-levelled program to introduce kids to cars (and boats), with one of the more popular events being the youth judging events.

"We've been doing these judging events for three years now,

about twelve a year though this is our first one in Canada," Hagerty's Jonathan Klinger said before leading the judges through the field of five. "The whole purpose of Operation Ignite is to let kids see cars they might never have seen before, and to be able to ask questions of the owner and find out the history of the car."

For All-British Field Meet co-chair Patrick Stewart, the program is a perfect fit with the show. "Part of our mandate is to educate and inform the public about the classic car hobby in addition to encouraging the preservation of classic cars for the enjoyment of all," Stewart explained of the partnership with Hagerty. "The response was wonderful to see, and we plan to get the registration out earlier next year."

The young judges took a crack at judging five classics during the All-British Field Meet. And just as the kids, clad in their blue judging shirts and clutching clipboards, came in all shapes and sizes, so too did the handful of vehicles up for judging: a 1967 Jaguar E-Type, a 1911 Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, a 1959 Jensen 541R GT, a 1976 Austin Mini and a 1960 MGA Twin Cam racecar.

Hagerty's Tabetha Salsbury assured the young judges that "these car owners love to talk about their cars, and don't be bashful to ask questions."

She also said they could get close but don't touch, "unless the owner says it's okay."

And so the group headed to the first car of the day, and one that would get any kid-at-heart's pulse racing, a 1967 Jaguar E-Type, a car Enzo Ferrari considered the most beautiful ever made.

The judges, not so much. Owner Norm Harris, his good-natured, friendly attitude setting the tone for the afternoon, gave a nice history of the car as the group swelled to 40 or so, and included kids, parents and curious show goers.

"Let's hear the horn," an eager judge called out.

The fact the Jag wouldn't start nor power up to sound the horn was a disappointment to



Steve Woodyard (at left, with glasses) points out one of the unique features of his 1960 MGA race car — the hood scoop is used to direct cool air not to the engine bay but to the driver's feet.



the young judges, though there were nodding heads and wry glances exchanged between many of the adults. Bloody British electrical system.

The judges then weaved through the large ABFM crowd to the Rolls-Royce section and the oldest car in the show.

"It looks like a living-room on wheels," a judge remarked to no one in particular. "It's pretty cool, though."

And to his and his colleagues' relief, the horn worked. In fact, both horns did, and owner John Pierson seemed to take as much delight in honking them as the kids did hearing them.

Hagerty's Klinger did an excellent job of providing historical information, such as the origin of the term Silver Ghost.

From the oldest car in the show came one of the rarest, the Jensen. Owner Derrick Neale clearly enjoyed telling the story of the fibreglass-bodied GT car, deadpanning to a judge who asked when the restoration job was finished, "This past Thursday."

But what really left an impression on the judges was the fact that just 43 of these cars were ever built, and that roughly two dozen still exist. Oh, and the horn worked.

The fourth car, a lovely little Austin Mini, got the judges excited before owner Malcolm Scanlan had a chance to talk.



Norm Harris (top) tells the story of his beautiful 1967 Jaguar E-Type during the All-British Field Meet. (Above left), as dad contemplates the twin-cam power of Steve Woodyard's immaculate 1960 MGA, a daughter wonders how anyone could fit into the small race car. Clipboards in hand, young judges cast a critical eye on Derrick Neale's rare 1959 Jensen 541R GT.

"Hey, it's Austin Power's car," one exclaimed. One of the older young judges said something about the Italian Job.

The final car was also extremely rare, and extremely loud. When Steve Woodyard fired up his 1960 MGA Twin Cam racecar, it seemed as if every leaf in the botanical garden trembled. Maybe it was the racecar authenticity of a 238 or the whimsical fact that the hood air scoop channels cool

air to the driver's feet, but the judges seemed smitten.

But just as they always do, the kids surprised. At the awards ceremony presided over by Klinger, the judges handed out the hardware to the Jensen (first), the Silver Ghost (second) and the MGA (third).

A straw poll of adults seemed to indicate the kids got it right, though one had to feel for the Jag owner. To think, foiled over an electrical problem.

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