

## **The Road Sirs Car Club**

By Barbara Glakas

Car Clubs were popular in Virginia in the 1950s and 1960s. They gave young men a strong sense of identity and the opportunity to meet and associate with other car enthusiasts in their surrounding communities. With their car ownership - and through the use of plaques, jackets, patches, and license plate holders - the members would proudly display their car club affiliation.

Fairfax and Vienna were known to have car clubs. The town of Herndon was no exception. The club in Herndon was a club called the Road Sirs. That club's heyday was between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s.

A teenager named Gary Haines, who once lived on Quincy Street, was the main organizer of the club. Regarding his motivation to form the club he said, "I was a young boy and there was nothing for the boys to do."

Former club member, Mike Bailey, recalled that the club's first meeting was held in the basement of Herndon's Town Hall. The club later acquired a club house, an old house that they rented that was located in the vicinity of Elden and Grant Streets. Police Chief Joe Murray and Officer John Kirk attended meetings as members of its board and as sponsors of the club. Town public works superintendent, Corbin Thompson, was also known to be very active in the club. The club was later sponsored by the Herndon Optimist Club.

Members were bound by their love of cars. Members generally ranged in age from their mid-teens to about twenty years old, with some adults in supervisory roles. Some drove unremarkable personal cars, while others had cars that may have been fancier or "souped up" for that day, such as a 1962 red Ford Galaxy 4-speed big block engine, a 1957 Chevy, and a 1950 Ford stock car.

Club cars were identified by Road Sirs Club plaques on the back of their cars. Club members also wore black corduroy jackets that had a Road Sirs emblem on the back of the jacket. One female Herndon resident recalls being asked to be a "Princess" in the 1962 Herndon Homecoming parade. She rode in a convertible for the Road Sirs. At one time the club owned a 1939 Ford 4-door sedan with a Buick engine that they drove in the parade.

In the early days, club members would drive their cars around the streets of Herndon. Sometimes they would travel to Falls Church to race on Route 7. One member said, "We could make more money there." Before the buildings at Dulles Airport were built, they raced on the new airport runways. One night they raced on the unfinished Dulles Access Road, but they got in trouble when they were caught doing that, getting tickets for illegal drag racing.

Captain Murray was sometimes known to chew out club members if they left black marks on Herndon's roadways or made other minor violations. Sometimes, in lieu of tickets, Murray and Kirk would make the violators go before a grievance committee at a Road Sirs meeting. Violators would be required to hang a "Violator" plaque on the back of their cars. They were

also required to do some other civic duties such as helping elderly town residents mow their lawn or repair their fences.

In addition to owning and showing off their cars, the Road Sirs also raced go-karts. Early on they raced on a dirt track in an open field located off east Elden Street in the area that is now in the vicinity of the current Herndon Centre shopping center (commonly referred to as the former Kmart shopping center). In 1962 the club applied for a permit to operate a new Road Sirs go-kart race track on industrial property in the south east section of town owned by the Woodward Research Corporation. That track was located off of what is now Herndon Parkway, east of Van Buren/Monroe Street, where Herndon's Metrorail station is currently located.

There was some resistance to allowing the track to be re-located to the new site. Archived Herndon Town Council minutes indicate that some people were opposed to the track "chiefly on the noise associated with the go-kart track operations, saying it was a nuisance." Others indicated their support for the new track location for the club, pointing out the club's numerous accomplishments and benefits.

The Road Sirs were agreeable to using mufflers on their go-karts and offered to do a demonstration of their muffled go-karts. It was the opinion of the Mayor and Town Attorney that operation of a racetrack was not in violation of the Town Zoning ordinance, since "clubs, lodges, social and community center buildings" were permitted in the town's C-1 Commercial District. The Town Council put off a decision about the matter for many months. It was finally on January 8, 1963, that the Town Council voted 4-2 against an ordinance that would have prohibited racing.

Sometime around 1963 or 1964 the club started renting the old Herndon Theatre on Elden Street (now The Upholstery Shop) from Marshall Martin, who owned the building at that time. In addition to having meetings, the club would conduct fundraisers. They held dances on the second floor of the Herndon Volunteer Fire Department building on Spring Street and at Burger Hall on Center Street (now the Herndon Moose Lodge). Once they got the old theatre building, they removed all of its seating and placed them in the balcony area so that dances could be held there. In the old theatre they had a jukebox and a snack bar. They also raised funds by selling fruit cakes as well. The money that was earned went to support the club activities and to pay the rent at their club house. They also used some money to help the community as well, such as buying Christmas gifts for those in need, taking them fire wood or painting their houses. Additionally, some members of the club had a long-term goal of saving enough money to buy a car that they could drag race in other locations, a goal that was never realized. The closest dragstrip was in Manassas.

The racetrack near Monroe Street can be seen in a historic aerial photograph that is dated 1963. The second racetrack was initially dirt as well. The club obtained an old three-speed LaSalle fire truck from the Herndon Volunteer Fire Department. They painted it flat black and placed a Road Sirs emblem on it. The fire truck was used to spray water on the track to keep the dust down. The club charged spectators to come watch the go-karts. Metal commemorative dash plaques were given to people who paid to enter a race at the go-kart track. Trophies were given to

winner of the races. A concession stand was on site. In July of 1963 the Road Sirs requested of the town council that they be allowed to construct a pit privy at the go-kart track location but the request was denied. Eventually the track was expanded with some additional loops.

There was talk of paving the track. Not all club members were in agreement with this idea because some felt it would take up too much of the club's money. But ultimately, the track was paved. By around 1965-1966, several club members left the club and the club eventually dissolved.

Remnants of the club's track can be seen on historic aerial photographs up to 1980. At some point after the club came to an end, a pistol range was constructed next to the track for the Herndon Police Department.

The Herndon Community stood by the Road Sirs. The car club afforded an opportunity for teen boys to stay busy, learn responsibility, and form friendships around a common passion. One former member said, "It was a lot of fun and good comradery." Many young men who lived in the town of Herndon in the 1960s have many fond memories of their time in the Road Sirs car club. And, due to their love of cars, some former club members still attend the Herndon Rotary's annual car show today.

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*About this column: "Remembering Herndon's History" is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon's past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of "Remembering Herndon's History" columns is available on the Historical Society website at [www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org).*

*The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society's website at [www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org), and the Historical Society's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.*

*Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact [HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com](mailto:HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com).*

