

Bay Area, Home of the Sideshows

Sideshows have been around in the Bay Area since the 80's, now they're happening everywhere. Usually on weekend nights and Sunday afternoons, groups of car enthusiasts go out and shut down freeways or popular intersections doing donuts and burnouts for hundreds gathered around watching and recording. Hanging out all windows, opening doors, showing off your car club name. With the expansion of sideshows in every city, the scene is growing by the week. Some cities will even try to compete with one another to say who's best. Although not everyone in the city enjoys these outbreaks, many hate the tire smoke, traffic caused and say it's a dangerous environment, so why do sideshows spark such an argument? How can one activity be loved by some and hated by others?

For decades we've heard rappers incorporate lyrics about these shows into their songs, some of them being a big influence on the car community today. From artists such as, Mac Dre, E40, Too \$hort, Traxamillion, etc. In the songs they describe the environment of how the events used to be, no drama, just music, dancing, burning rubber, and good vibes. It was more so a time of showing off your car. On occasion, when artists' shoot the video for a new song, they will let some drivers come out to feature in the videos. Richie Rich raps, "every Saturday night brothers be riding, straight-laced zeniths, drop-tops, buckets, high performance."

"It's in the soil," says Sean Kennedy, a multimedia producer and local hip-hop historian. "For some reason the air here in East Oakland breeds that type of creativity." People love it, it makes them happy, takes away sadness, it's an adrenaline rush, and a hobby. Then in 2005 an ordinance allowed police to confiscate any car that is involved in sideshow activity. However,

many cars involved in this scene aren't just plain stock cars, they have work, sweat, money and love put into them. You're almost guaranteed to see it on the news at least once a week. As some people don't agree with the acts of sideshow behavior in the streets, thinking it's a dangerous crime.

Of course, bad stuff goes down at these events but nothing that wouldn't happen at a football game or casually on the street. Kennedy said "despite all that, the sideshow did not breed criminal behavior. He believes the sideshows were targeted."It's not about a car show," he says. "At that point, it's about arresting black youth in Oakland."He says the sideshow made it easy to paint East Oakland youth into an already-made stereotype: "Young black kids who don't have anything to do with their lives, out there playing around in these cars, carrying guns and selling drugs." (kqed). It makes young participants feel alive, free, gets their adrenaline rushing, carrying on traditions their parents would do years ago. For some Bay Area natives, they described sideshows as "Unlocking all my feelings while showing my people the real me, from inside, a young man doing what he loves. If we didn't love and enjoy the lifestyle this much we wouldn't spend the money to do it. Tires, gas, problems with your car, etc. Just being out on the streets is trouble and money waiting to fly out, yet they can't stop us from being who we are." If you're from the Bay Area you realize the scene isn't half as bad as they make it, the worst part about it is the traffic.

Nothing is going to break the soul of this generation and their car obsession, recently there were a few days this stay at home order was broken. Not caring about the COVID-19 pandemic going on in our world, it was still an average Sunday for these drivers. Meeting up at multiple Oakland intersections, ignoring the six-foot rule, a local man stated these kids were

standing “neck to neck” with no sense of remorse. A few ended up arrested and vehicles towed. So, what might stop these drivers from breaking the rules? Could the city of Oakland locate a vacant lot for them to go blow off some steam, or in their case tires. Or perhaps create a permanent location away from local traffic that drivers could spend time doing what they love without getting in tons of trouble. People even pay for the chance to drive on private property and not worry about law enforcement.

In other cities such as Detroit, a police chief has Ok'd for a vacant lot. Is Oakland aware of this? Law enforcement is tired of the scene, people are tired of getting caught and blamed for wrong things. Oakland puts a lot of work and effort into beefing up their task force to try ending these sideshows, they don't realize they're just triggering these kids to want to do it even more. With no doubt Oakland Police Department does not want these acts to go on any longer, they are tired of it. I've seen innocent people spend longer in prison losing their jobs and families, for doing some donuts than a rapist has. For the time of the “crimes” it's pretty much guaranteed the helicopter will come out and circle the air while these cars are swinging around and cops will try to block the roads, some are undercover dressed to fit in with the car guys, they'll throw tear gas, etc. Whatever they can do to try and end this, yet nothing will happen.

Instead of Oakland bringing out task forces and helicopters every weekend to tow cars away, propose an area or vacant lot in the middle of nowhere to allow these drivers to go help with the streets and crowds. Police want to keep the city safe but only aggravate these young drivers to continue driving dangerously. While we can't guarantee that a lot would completely stop with the sideshow scene it would make a complete difference. On top of taking away the violence that happens on the streets. They would most likely half in size, giving the Police

department more time to help with real crimes. Oakland may have the space and complete ability to be able to pull off something like this together to help their own community and make everyone happy, instead they'd rather fight fire with fire.



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