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Club revs up car buffs

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It's good that Rachael Phillips, a Mississippi State University student and Madison-Ridge-land Academy alumna, has a dad who knows a thing or two about cars.

"She just called and said I have a flat tire. Dad, what do I do now?" said Tom Phillips, who is pretty knowledgeable about automobile maintenance. He still has the 1963 Chevrolet Impala sport coupe he bought in high school 40 years ago and she's in mint condition.

"I drove it through high school and through four years of college," he said. "After college, I got a new car and hung onto my high school car and restored it. It looks like you just drove it off the showroom floor."

As one of the charter members of the Mississippi Classic Cruisers car club, Phillips along with Bert Craft, Glenn Hepner and John Slay, founded the Mississippi Classic Cruisers, a group of car enthusiasts who meet to discuss and show off their high school sweethearts.

"High school, to me, was a simpler time," he said. "It was all fun and games, just tons of fun. As you get older, get married and have kids, you have to worry about the house note and bills.

"But when you get in your high school car, it's kind of like traveling back in time. It was a simpler time, a fun time, and it just takes you back 40 years. You turn the radio on the oldies music and you would almost swear you were back in high school again."

The formation of the Mississippi Classic Cruisers is the result of a car show held three years ago at First Baptist Church of Madison that attracted 80 classic cars. The second year, 170 rolled into town.

"There is such an interest in clubs like this in this part of the state," he said. "We started off with three members and now we have 65.

"Car clubs are big all over, primarily because of the baby boomers. We are at the point now where we are either close to retirement or we have retired, so we have spare time and we have more money than we had when we were kids. Back then, we couldn't afford muscle cars, but now that we are older gentleman, we can."

Phillips also owns a 1976 Chevrolet Corvette

that he bought new 28 years ago.

"We bring them out for cruise-ins," he said. The club's next cruise-in will be Sept. 18 at Bumper's at the corner of Grants Ferry Road and Lakeland Drive from 6-9 p.m. Car owners from throughout the state are invited to participate.

"They don't make cars today like they used to make them," Phillips said. "Back in the '60s, they had big engines and lots of horsepower. ...To get that kind of car, you have got to go back and restore the older ones."

Madison resident Mike Martin, 55, has been interested in the 1964-1972 muscle cars since childhood.

"When I was growing up, I was interested in these cars, but couldn't necessarily afford one," he said. "And so later in life, a lot of my generation is now able to afford these cars."

Martin has owned his high-powered, black 1971 Chevrolet Chevelle for about a year and he enjoys showing it to others who can appreciate its history and preservation.

"We have no restrictions on the cars," he said. "You've got 1920-something cars and you've got 2004 cars in it. Some of the cars are driven daily and, in my situation, the car is not driven much at all. It's waxed and shined to a pretty high state and I'm not interested in driving it in the rain because the bottom side of it is as clean as the top."

On Oct. 23, the Mississippi Classic Cruisers will display their cars in Madison's Scarecrow Cruisin' Car Show at the Madison County Cultural Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

"We are hoping that we can get between 200 and 300 cars to show up," said Martin. "We eventually want it to become a multi-day car