

Subculture of Enthusiasts:
National Street Rod Association

Brent Avant
MA in Park and Recreation Management
University of Mississippi

and

Jim Gilbert, Ed.D.
University of Mississippi

Profile: Subculture of Enthusiasts: National Street Rod Association

Abstract

A study was conducted with automobile enthusiasts of the National Street Rod Association (NSRA) representing over 50,000 members in 50 states . Survey packets were mailed to seven NSRA division directors representing geographical divisions of Northeast, (11 states), Southeast (8 states), North Central (7 states), South Central (5 states), West Central (7 states), Northwest (7 states) and Southwest (5 states). Each division director was instructed to randomly disperse surveys to representative members of their district. In addition, surveys were physically distributed to members on-site at three NSRA sanctioned regional locations (Oklahoma City, OK, Knoxville, TN, and Louisville, KY). A total of 1,080 surveys were distributed and 390 surveys were returned accounting for a thirty-six percent return rate. Respondents returned completed surveys via return, self-addressed stamped envelopes.

Introduction

The automobile has long been an important component of American society. By 1945 at the close of WWII until the mid 1950s a pent up demand for automobiles erupted in America. This demand was fueled by returning WWII and Korean War servicemen, young parents, teenagers and adults. An evolution of the automobile in the United States led to an evolving sub-culture identified in literature by Wolfe (1965), Dettelbach (1976), Hirsh (1985), Montgomery (1987), Batchelor (1989), Gahahl (1995), Bright (2000), DeWitt (2001) and Warde (2002) as hot rodders, street rodders, customizers, antique car restorers, and low-riders. The affluent post-war period

of the 1950s – 1960s was described by Hirsch (1985) and Ganahl (2000) as the ‘Golden Age of American Automobiles’ and several specialized enthusiast associations originated and diversified similar to the national Hot Rod Association (1948), such as the Kustoms of America (1950), National Street Rod Association (1970), Kustom Kamps of America (1970s) and in 1986 the Good-Guys Cars Association. In the 1980’s, a core group of nostalgia-driven enthusiasts expanded automobile -related activities that featured restored automobiles, street-rods, custom-builds, and antique machines. The ‘baby boomer’ generation with discretionary time, money and enthusiasm propelled the street rod movement. Fueling this automobile hobby/phenomenon was the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) which is composed of 7,094 member companies that represents \$36 billion in annual retail business, consistently serves over seven million automobile enthusiasts yearly.

Purpose of Study

The purpose was to examine leisure consumption factors which contribute to financial expenditures of men, women, teenagers, and ‘baby boomers’ who are 1) actively involved with the car culture phenomenon, and 2) are members of the National Street Rod Association.

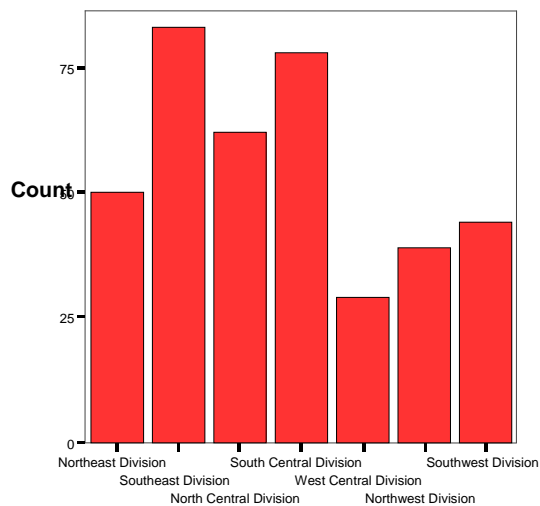
Methods

A National Street Rod Association resource, the *Fellow Pages 2005-2006*, was used to identify regional directors, who in turn, randomly issued a survey tool to NSRA members from their respective geographic districts. In addition, survey tools were issued at three on-site NSRA sanctioned car shows at the Southwest Street Rod Nationals (Oklahoma City, OK, Street Rod Nationals South (Knoxville, TN) and the Annual Street Rod Nationals (Louisville, KY). All surveys were returned in self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Research protocol as established by the University of Mississippi was adhered throughout the study.

Results

This survey revealed many things related to survey participants' interests and expenditures on topics such as related to automobile expenditures, hobby-related internet, magazine and television viewing habits, and, in addition, how respondents became involved in the car hobby.

The survey tool recognized NSRA members from every NSRA region of the United States. Street rod respondents who were part of organizations either in the southeast or south-central regions represented 40 % of all those surveyed. (see table 1)



National Street Rod Association geographic regionS representation

Table 1

Over 21% of the total number surveyed had been a member of the NSRA for over 25 years. Roughly 49% of respondents indicated their automobiles were licensed and street legal in their state and designated as an antique, a specialty plate (street rod or hot rod), or otherwise standard licensed car.

Profile of NSRA Enthusiasts

The majority of respondents, over 60%, are self employed with the next largest group technical science (mechanical engineers) (58%). Other fields noted were the mechanical field and food services respectively. The below graph depicts occupations of NSRA members. (see table 2)

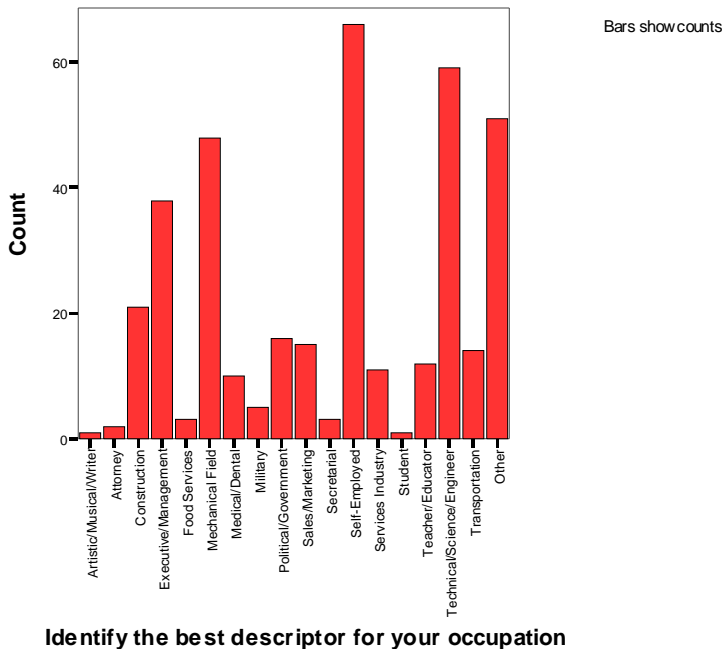
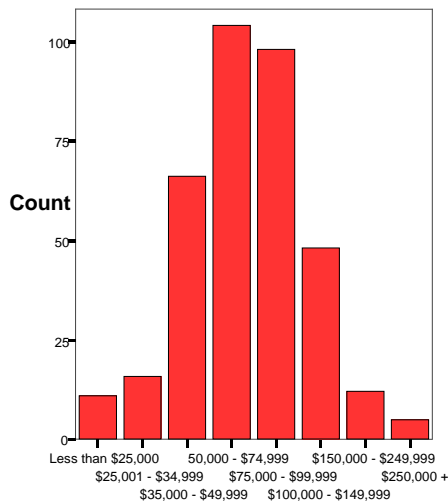


Table 2

Another aspect of the study was information related to the NSRA enthusiast's annual income. The largest group was those who earn between \$50,000 to \$74,999, while a smaller portion represented those who earn more than \$250,000 yearly. Less than 15% of those surveyed earn less than \$25,000. (see table 3)



Approximate household (joint) family income per year
Table 3

Of the 393 respondents 86% were married, a majority, 92% (361), were Caucasian, with 16 Native Americans, one African American, one Hispanic, one Asian and four Other. The largest age group, 60-65 (34%), second largest cohort 54-59 years (30%) and followed by age group 66-71 (11%) represent 75% of the respondents. Females represented (20) five percent of enthusiasts surveyed. Respondents are fairly equally divided between urban (to include suburban) and rural home places.

Specific Expenditures Related to Respondents Street Rods

Data indicated 54% of those surveyed own one to two additional street rods not including a primary street rod. Approximately 81% of respondents spent between \$10,000 to \$50,000 to purchase or construct a primary street rod. In one 12- month calendar year 98% of those surveyed reported \$1,001 to \$10,000 was spent on a primary street rod. Information about source- expenditures for after-market purchases (suspension, wheels, tires, engines, transmissions and other categories reveal after-market equipment suppliers were extensively

involved. For example, approximately 88% of accessories were secured at car show venues, 75% utilized specialty equipment mail-order catalogs (Summit, Edelbrock and others), and 38% frequented discount chain stores (Wal-Mart, Target, Autozone, Advance auto Parts, O'Reilly and others). Over one-half of all surveys noted a non-factory alternate engine in their automobile with 77% of these engines manufactured by General Motors (Chevrolet V-8). Although street machines ostensibly were designed and constructed to be driven, data indicates very limited mileage per year. (see table 4)

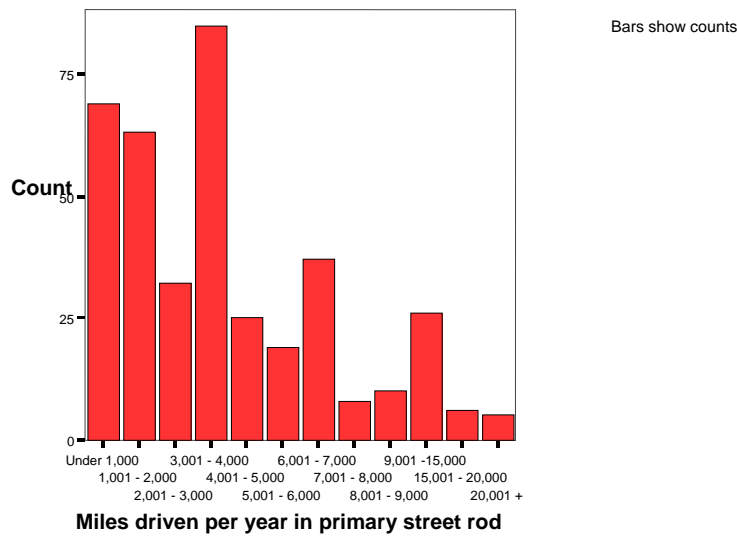


Table 4

Related NSRA Event Expenditures

Of the 393 surveys 40% of respondents had participated in at least one NSRA event in the past year with over half the participants being accompanied by the spouse. Approximately 14% were accompanied by their child and 25% were accompanied by a friend.

Expenses involve participant attendance of NSRA Events

Other expenses include items such as gasoline and over 38 % indicate they spend between \$101-\$250 on round trip fuel. The \$101-\$250 range is also consistent with meal expenses (45.7 %) at a NSRA

event. Memorabilia costs show 43% spent from \$1-\$50 per event to purchase items (t-shirts etc) and 20.9% spent between \$51-\$100. Registration fees usually vary depending on the type of event and of those surveyed, 66% paid \$50 or less, while 1.5% paid over \$251 to register their machine.

Enthusiasts Internet, television and print media interests

Data revealed enthusiasts' extensive internet involvement. For example, over 54% of respondents regularly utilize the internet in search of automobile- related information. A larger percentage (78%) read and/or subscribe to automobile- specific magazines on a daily to weekly basis. The publications most identified were **Street Rodder Magazine** (61%), **Rod and Custom** (38%), **Hot Rod Magazine** (34%) and **Street Rod** (10%) . One particular television show, *Horse Power TV* (Spike TV), was habitually viewed by fifty- three percent of all respondents.

Origins of Enthusiast Participation

This survey requested information related to respondent interest level in the automotive hobby and several different reasons were identified. Regarding enthusiasm, 88% answered a "die- hard" passion primarily due to personal enjoyment. For 75% of respondents, street rod activity was their main hobby where 54 percent indicated involvement as a peer-group rod activities as a peer group car club activity. Others indicated the hobby as a personal challenge to construct and complete a project car and 26% of participants state the hobby was a family project.

Conclusions

The street rod subculture identified with the National Street Rod Association consists of predominantly white males between the ages 54- 65 which represent 75% (294) of respondents. The largest represented group typically earn between \$50,00 and \$74,999 while a smaller group earn \$250,00 yearly. This information is indicative of the baby boomer

generation. A major reason for participation in this hobby appears to be that at this life stage they now have both discretionary time and financial ability to do so. Most who are involved in this hobby do so because of enjoyment they receive from it from peers and family.

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