

Americans Rally Behind Their Favorite Auto Brands

(NAPSA)—If you love automobiles, you have lots of company. More and more Americans are willing to drive hundreds, even thousands, of miles to rally around certain makes and models of automobiles. It started with a bike rally. Then came the Saturn Homecoming and the Jeep Jamboree.

The proof is in the numbers: last year, 450,000 people attended the Harley-Davidson Black Hills Rally in Sturgis, S.D., and an impressive 38,000 Saturn owners flocked to the first “homecoming” in 1994.

What’s behind the growing trend of national rallies?

Robb Wing, co-founder of FOK-ISD, a Ford Super Duty truck club in Cincinnati that draws members from three states, explains, “For a lot of guys, their vehicle is an extension of who they are. Going to a rally gives them a chance to meet other people who are just like them.”

A new rally centers around the biggest trucks around: diesel-powered Ford Super Duty pickups. The three best-selling vehicles in 2003 were pickup trucks, according to auto analyst J.D. Power and Associates, making up more than half of all vehicles sold last year, with Ford F-Series pickups continuing their run as the best-selling trucks for the past 25 years.



KEEP ON TRUCKING—The latest trend in auto rallies includes trucks.

“Why is one vehicle more popular than another? It has to do with a lot of things,” said Wing. “Styling is big. But so is power. When you have a vehicle that combines both and a manufacturer that shows it cares about its drivers, you’re bound to build a cult following.”

This year, Wing’s enthusiastic club has teamed with International Truck and Engine Corporation to host a national rally for owners of Ford pickups powered by the Power Stroke diesel, which International designs and manufactures exclusively for Ford. The “Power Fest” rally will be held in Indianapolis this August to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the engine sold in two out of every three Super Duty trucks.

According to Wing, “It’s going to be huge. We’re planning plant tours, a poker run and the whole

event will take place during the year’s big Indianapolis NASCAR racing weekend. We’ve had diesel rallies on our own but working with the manufacturer gives us even more planning power.”

For automakers, rallies offer benefits as well, providing opportunities to interact directly with customers. Manufacturers use events to learn what vehicle owners think about the current product, how they use their vehicles for work and play and how it fits in with their lifestyle. All of this information is used to design better vehicles in the future.

To feed enthusiasts’ hunger for information and passion for modifying their vehicles, rallies often feature manufacturer representatives who talk about vehicle diagnostics and vendors to sell accessories from bug shields to stainless exhausts. Fans who attend rallies can also expect sneak previews of new models and exclusive test-drives.

“I love going to rallies,” said Ford truck owner Rick Weissmann, who traveled 500 miles to attend a diesel truck rally in upstate New York. “I feel like the company really cares about me. And it’s great to meet other people and talk about what they’re doing to their trucks.”

For information about the Ford Super Duty truck rally, visit www.PowerFestRally.com.