

# Save for cell phones, the drive-in's the same

**W**hen you're feeling nostalgic (in the PT-Cruiser you most always are) nothing beats a drive-in.

There's just something about an authentic root beer stand that boasts car hops, tall floats, greasy french fries and juicy hamburgers.

But how much has the all-American drive-in changed over the years?

Though drive-ins are nearly extinct in some parts of the country, it's not hard to find them here.

Cruiser's first stop was Highland's popular Blue Top Drive In.

Car hop Alycia Martin, 17, was sitting cross-legged outside waiting for a customer.

It was a rare slow night.

Starting such a summer journey with images of a sunny day with customers in tank tops and shorts slurping on ice-cream cones, the rain was a customer-clearing surprise.

But nonetheless, it offered a perfect slice of Americana — even if it wasn't lined with dozens of cars.

You still get service with a flick of your lights.

Cruiser got to roll down the windows (electronically, of course) while the car hop slid a tray loaded with food on the window (The Blue Top even boasts a meal named the Cruiser).

Brandon Fritzsche, 21, of



Carhops Meredith Noll of Chesterton and Crystal Schulz of Portage relax with milk shakes after a long, slow day at the Port Drive-In in Chesterton.

Munster, and Beth Lee, 16, who works at the drive in, took the opportunity to have a night out together.

It's the classic date night from the 50s and 60s brought back again in 2001.

Except for one thing.

At one point, both Fritzsche and Lee were chatting — not to each other — but on their own cell phones.

"I don't know how they lived without them," Fritzsche said. Somehow they did.

Poodle skirts are long gone, capri pants are back again and cell phones are making a striking appearance at drive-ins.

Several car hops at The Port in Chesterton said many of

their customers shoo them away when they're having a conversation on the phone.

But many people still cruise to the drive-in to meet up with old friends.

Kenny Daumer has visited the Highland drive in for the last 30 years on a regular basis. He mostly sits inside at a counter where he meets up with a variety of people.

Both Gassoway, owner of the Port in Chesterton with her husband, Terry, knows what he's talking about.

"It's that feeling of belonging," she said. "You stop in and see who's there."

The Port's a prime place for beach bathers to cool off with

something frosty.

"Why it has that appeal, I don't know," Gassoway said. "It's just part of our growing up and it's uniquely American."

"It's an American thing like mom and apple pie and quilts and chili dogs."

Being a car hop is still a great job for teens, say several young women at the Port. On hot summer days, they're running back and forth grabbing orders for customers.

On slower days, they chat with one another about life and draw with colored chalk on the pavement.

Adam Hung, 17, of Chesterton High School often cruises to the Chesterton drive in after his cross country practice.

He knows most of the car hops and this night his friend was in the car next to them. Both were enjoying a good shake.

Car Hop Crystal Schulz has a blast.

"You get to sit around and talk with a bunch of girls and have guys come in and see you," she said.

After a frosty mug, you drive off again, glad to see not too much has changed, those pesky cell phones notwithstanding.

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