

Cruising in Lincoln: fun, fun, fun for the young and reckless

Essay by Ken DiMaggio
Staff Reporter

Every place has its restless spirits. No matter how serene a landscape, there is always some hot spring or current just beneath the surface. The face of an old fashioned pocket watch may seem calm, but pry off the back and dozens of tiny gears and wheels whirl madly about.

By day downtown Lincoln is quaint.

A popcorn cart can be found outside of NBC bank. Across the street next to Miller and Paine street musicians make a dear effort to be heard by serious businessmen and women going to lunch. On the other side of what is the city's main intersection, is a Walgreen's drugstore that could've served as part of the set for the 1946 Christmas film, "It's a Wonderful Life," starring Jimmy Stewart.

If you're crossing 14th and O street on Saturday night, you stand a good chance of being jeered at by the children of the serious businessmen and women. I am told by quite a few people that cruising is a big pastime. I am told by a friend that in Minden, Nebraska, which only has a downtown consisting of two or three blocks, a fleet of cars keeps circling the area like cavalry riding around a besieged fort. That might also explain the war cries made from a colorful combination of expletives shrieked at pedestrians. But the best example I have seen of punching a hole

into a proper street like O is the driver who turns his car stereo to full volume, and calmly waits for the light to turn red. Time never seems to pass so slowly as when you're the car behind or along side of that person.

But driving around seems to be only part of the ritual. It is obligatory to stop at the Taco John's, Amigos, or other cheap fast food restaurants further up the street after failing to find a car filled with loose and lascivious members of the opposite sex. And instead of meeting them at the styrofoamed food factory, the '66 GTO or '69 RT full of would-be studs ends up watching similar GTOs and RTs cruising a little further up O street to get to the next Taco John's.

Dave Hurdy, a UNL Pre-Dental major, spoke of his brief experience cruising during high school. "Most of the kids on the Loop are greaseballs and on drugs," Hurdy said. He also spoke about a novel way the mother's club in Lemars, Iowa, used to raise money.

Because Lemars was a town with a lot of cruising, women of the Lemar's mother's club decided to make up and sell a bumper sticker that read, "Lemars Loopers." But life began to imitate art. And when kids tried to live up to their reputation on the bumper stickers, was when the Loop became a nightmare the mother's club never dreamed of. Finally, to solve what was becoming a real problem for the town of Lemars, Iowa, harsh measures were enacted.

"They had to stop the selling of

those bumper stickers," said Hurdy.

So far, "Looping" in Lincoln hasn't become that bad. By 2:30 a.m. the intersection at O and 14th streets is pretty quiet. There's still a car or two cruising around, its stereo blasting, trying to defy a night that died long ago. And the police who just seem to disappear between the hours of nine and two, are now heard wailing their sirens making more noise than a caravan of howling, screaming, horny teenagers.

If the nightlife dies pretty early here in Lincoln it's guaranteed to be revived the next night. O Street burns with restlessness seven nights a week. And unless there is a major storm, winter doesn't slow down the ritual. And at five-thirty in the morning, just as I'm getting off work, downtown Lincoln is dead.

Riding my bike, I might see a delivery truck a dozen or so blocks down O Street that I wouldn't be able to see during the day when it is plugged with traffic. Lincoln looks like such a different world at that time. The blue of a new day still has the fading dark textures of the night. The sky seems so rich and thick and creamy. And the emptiness of a city that will later buzz with propriety, and after that — restlessness — for now is gentle and charming. At twenty to six in the morning, Lincoln has a familiarity and intimacy about it that makes it less of a modern city, and more of a community that still hasn't outgrown its citizens.

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