

A "SHOW" OF THANKS

In 2024 the Santa Clara Valley Model T Ford Club started and finished its annual endurance run and low land tour at the VA Medical Center in Palo Alto, CA. Not only is this a beautiful campus with its multitude of American Flags proudly displayed on either side of the entry road, but it is also a gateway to some of the most scenic mountain and coastal roads in the Bay Area. Additionally, it gave the Club the opportunity to show support to the many veterans who are residing there on a short-term or long-term basis. The thinking was they would be entertained by watching the green flag drop while the speedster engines roared and the low land tour cars pulled out behind them. Later in the day they could watch again as the antique autos returned from their journey. The hope was that the Club and its cars might provide a little joy to the heroes. And it did. Nevertheless, upon reflection, it occurred to Endurance Run Chairman, Chris Bhirdo, that something had been missing. He felt they needed something to fill the void between the start of the day and the finish. Thus, the Veterans Appreciation Car Show was born.

On June 8, 2025, the green flag dropped as usual and the 54th Annual Endurance Run and Low Land Tour began. But, instead of having to wait until late in the day to see the old cars again, the Veterans Appreciation Car Show took place on the VA Medical Center campus. It was no ordinary car show. It felt more like a small county fair or town square picnic.

Live music played throughout the day, courtesy of Crossing Dana, a Bay Area rock cover band. "Proud Mary," "Lay Down Sally" and "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" filled the air from one side of the show. On the other side stood Club member Jim Lukash with a couple of antique automobile horns. He was encouraging passersby to try the horns for themselves. So every so often, above the band's melody, you would hear a loud "HONK-HONK" or "AH-OO-GAH." You could see the delight on the faces of those creating the sounds. Such a little thing, but such a big hit.

Since many of the Club's members and vehicles were participating in the endurance run and tour, the Club recruited members of the Bay Area Horseless Carriage Club, the Greater South Bay Chevy Club and the Santa Clara Valley Chapter of the Model A Club of America to participate in the car show. This made for a wonderful array of automobiles for the veterans to enjoy. Everything from a 1909 Maxwell horseless carriage to a 1941 Chevrolet Sedan Special Edition were on display. There was a 1913 Model T Touring Car, a 1924 Pierce Arrow and a 1934 Chevrolet Master Sedan, just to name a few. There was even a 1925 Model TT Fire Truck for their viewing pleasure.

Veterans and their families and caregivers enthusiastically studied each of them. I would have to say, though, the star of the show was Larry Wolfson's Circus Wagon. What started out as a 1914 Model TT Truck off the assembly line was meticulously and masterfully turned into a one-of-a-kind shiny red circus wagon that pulls a trailer fashioned to look like a box car. It was delightful. As Larry's son Lawrence sat in the wagon providing bags of free popcorn, Larry's other son Taylor sat in the trailer offering lollipops, gum balls and colorful pinwheels. The pinwheels were quite a hit — children carried them playfully while veterans used them to adorn their backpacks and wheelchairs.

Right next to the circus wagon stood the Model T Club's president, Lynn Alens, acting as grill master. While he tended to cooking up hotdogs, two other Club members, Mary Beaman and Lucy Greenberg, served them and assisted with condiments. The veterans were tickled with the free lunch and their expressive faces looked as though they had struck gold.

The car show was open to all veterans and their families. Some came by car, others walked in, but the majority of our visitors came from inside the hospital building. The Medical Center set it up so that six caregivers brought six patients out at a time. Some of them ventured on their own if they were able to negotiate their wheelchairs while others spent 20-30 minutes with us before the caregivers took them back and escorted six more out to the show. There was a steady stream of attendees while never being uncomfortably crowded.

Along with the circus wagon treats and hotdogs, the Veteran's Administration offered various bags of chips & cookies and bottled water & Gatorade, all free for the taking. The VA also took the opportunity to showcase some of the assistance it has available to veterans and their families. Some non-profit organizations such as Team RWB (Red, White & Blue) which concentrates on promoting a health and wellness community and The Cost of Courage Foundation that supports the needs of veterans and families as they transition back to civilian life manned information booths as well. Of course, the local chapter of the American Legion was set up to answer questions and pass out those all too familiar red poppies, reminding us that we should never forget the sacrifices American Service Members make to keep us safe and free.

As I walked the grounds capturing the day with my camera, I had several encounters with military veterans who shook my hand exuberantly and thanked me over and over again for the festivities. The weekends are boring, they told me, and time just drags on. This was a much appreciated respite from that. I have to admit that more than one of these brave heroes moved me to tears. The day was lovely and so much fun. Our Club's gift of one afternoon filled with olds cars, hotdogs and music had such a powerful impact on those who had given our country so much. It was our show of thanks.