

## Get Them to Join Your Club

Every year, I spend a small fortune on club memberships. It's not just to support the good works of as many clubs as possible, it's also because so many clubs offer high-quality publications that are worth reading, sometimes over and over. Those clubs and many more are highlighted in the Golden Quill Award listings within these pages.

The magazines and newsletters published by clubs can be — and should be — hugely effective tools to bind owners of similar cars together by providing ownership and maintenance tips, leads on cars and parts and technical help with advisers and Q&A columns. The best club publications do all of this, plus organize members to gather, whether at a club event, or at other car shows unaffiliated with the club. They include accurate historical information on the cars and trucks owned by members. Some national clubs have evolved to the point that they have developed judging standards to help car owners interested in authenticity, not ego, and have even published separate authenticity manuals. These clubs acknowledge all of the vehicles that fall under their banner, not just the vehicles some club officials prefer. (I know of one club that purports to represent all vehicles of the marque it represents, yet rarely acknowledges in its club publication the most popular era of that vehicle — not a recipe for success.)

In short, the best club publications are about communicating the camaraderie that brings together the people who joined that club by offering the aforementioned tools, and others. Those types of club publications are on the list of Golden Quill Awards for their efforts throughout 2024.

There's no question that some clubs are struggling, and a big part of that struggle comes from online media. Internet-based forums, websites and social media platforms now provide some of the camaraderie and tools that clubs and their publications once fulfilled. Many wise club officials have embraced and incorporated these internet-based tools as a way to expand the club's reach, but they've struggled to convert visitors to their forums and websites into full-fledged members. Admittedly, this can be tricky. There must be a balance in welcoming new people into the club through these mediums without shunning them as freeloaders for not paying dues, thus turning them off from the club forever.

The best practices I have seen clubs use for converting online visitors into club members is to be engaging online, and to show visitors what they're missing by not being a member of the club, and receiving their publication. Clubs that are able to convert online visitors into members load up their online presence with relevant content, such as images of members' cars, past articles from the club's publication, mentions of upcoming events, answers to questions and historical images. Essentially, these clubs are giving visitors a taste of what club life includes: activities and information that can be provided and organized only by people highly experienced with the vehicles featured by the club. Once the public is engaged with the club's online platforms, invitations to club membership can be effectively extended on those online platforms.

Club editors searching for content for the club's publication may find the online engagement to be a reciprocal source of new content. Questions to Facebook pages can be the source of Q&A departments in club publications, and photos posted to the club's social media pages can be added to the publication's pages. Leads for story ideas may be found online. And that's just the start.

Many clubs have been around for decades, and in that time, the world has changed. Like many established organizations and businesses, there's a need to adapt to the changing world in order to survive and even thrive. Established clubs and their publications have more to offer than the "Johnny Come Latelies" — it's just a matter of how to show and tell that to the rest of the world.

— Angelo Van Bogart

Editor, *Old Cars*

avanbogart@aimmedia.com

### VP/GENERAL MANAGER, COLLECTIBLES

Corinne Zielke

EDITOR Angelo Van Bogart

(avanbogart@aimmedia.com)

ONLINE EDITOR Mike Eppinger

(meppinger@aimmedia.com)

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Brian Earnest

(bearnest@aimmedia.com)

GRAPHIC DESIGNER Julie Green

(jgreen@aimmedia.com)

### ADVERTISING

#### NATIONAL ACCOUNTS SALES MANAGER

Michelle Kraemer - 715-318-0946

(mkraemer@aimmedia.com)

#### ADVERTISING SALES PRODUCTION

##### COORDINATOR

Kathy Shanklin - 715-350-7090

(kshanklin@aimmedia.com)



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### EDITORIAL OFFICE

PO Box 658 • Neenah, WI 54957

715-445-2214 Fax: 715-997-8883

[www.oldcarsweekly.com](http://www.oldcarsweekly.com)

[www.oldcarsreport.com](http://www.oldcarsreport.com)

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