

# Calendar

## Hydraulic Joy

### Custom Car Show

**T**he majority of cars that come to my car show are driven there," says Steve Henry of Encanto. "At a full-blown show, guys tow their cars. This is a car show for the regular working-type guy. I don't get the high-end cars that aren't ever on the road. To me, that takes away from what a car is supposed to be all about."

The 41-year-old Henry is founder and organizer of the custom-car show and competition at the annual street fair in his neighborhood, which drew 100,000 people last year, according to police and fire department estimates.

#### LOCAL EVENTS

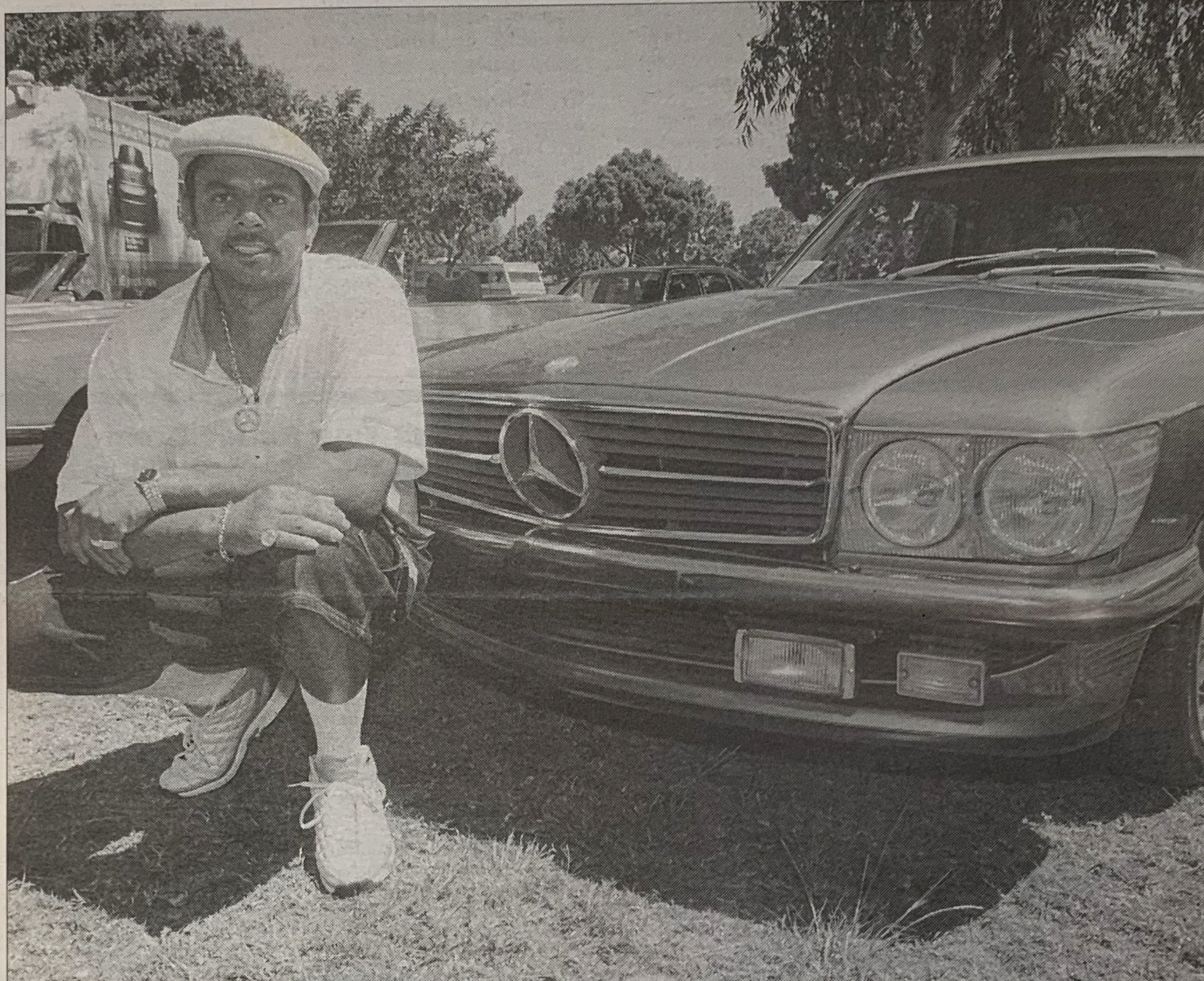
The main attraction is the music, five outdoor stages featuring jazz, blues, gospel,

urban, and R&B. The car show participants are few (due to space limitations, for one thing) but devoted. At the corner of 63rd and Imperial Avenue, look for about 30 customized vehicles, as well as some lowrider bicycles that belong to kids too young to have a driver's license.

Henry makes his living as the parts manager at Onager Corporation in Chula Vista, a used-Mercedes shop. In the past, he worked at a wrecking yard, where he saw some pretty weird attempts to customize, which at minimum means to repaint a car in a nonstandard shade.

At his house in Encanto, Henry has "quite a few" cars of his own, customized and otherwise. He has a '72 Chevy pickup, customized. He has at least two convertibles, a '72 Cutlass Supreme and a '70 Buick LeSabre, both customized. He also has, of course, several Mercedes models. "I have a '76 280E. It's a right-hand drive, English model, pearl white, customized." He has a '76 350SLC. "It's a European model, so it's got the V-8 with a manual 4-speed. It's customized, with wheels and things, but it looks 'Mercedes custom.'" He has a '64 220SE two-door coupe. "That car," says Henry, "was originally sold in Madrid, Spain. The color is 'champagne metallic.' It's got a black top, black hubcaps, and red leather interior." The 220SE has not been customized. "It's totally original, it's only got 32,000 miles on it, and I would put that car up next to any brand-new car."

Expect to see — and hear — a lot of customized exhaust systems at the show in Encanto. "Most guys will change the exhaust," says Henry. They like it louder; they also like the



Steve Henry with his 1976 350SLC Mercedes

improved performance.

Some may think lowriders are only for visual effect, but the lower ride height is what helps those cars slide around corners.

Guys have been lowering suspension systems since the 1950s. Henry dates the effect created by hydraulics from the 1960s. Hydraulics are what make low ones undulate as they cruise.

New trends, says Henry, include neon-colored lights for under the car, around the rearview window, and anywhere else a guy can wire them. "You can also now buy speakers to color-coordinate with your car's interior."

Henry is a tolerant fellow. "Those extremely loud systems that wake you up late at night?" While he admits that some "get to a point where it's kind of ridiculous," he believes that being able to customize to suit your own personal taste is "the American way."

But does he ever see a customized car that makes him mutter, "Oh, my

God, they've ruined it"? "Customizing is up to individual preference," he reiterates, "but some cars really do not make sense, like the ones whose rims stick out farther than the wheel wells of the car? That's a no-no. That's like wearing plaid. They're out of proportion. And it doesn't make sense, either, when the rims cost twice as much as the car. [Rims can range from \$2500 to \$6000 for a set of four, says Henry.] Now they have the rims that, even when the car stops, the rims keep spinning."

If a car was customized for an individual, who wants it afterwards? What about resale? "Exactly." So is it possible to de-customize a car? "I guess you could." What do people do normally? "At car shows, you can sell a customized car. They won't bring back the money you've invested, but for most guys who customize cars, it's a hobby, so they don't care. They are into it for the joy of it."

Henry has some advice for would-be customizers: "Just because

something looks good on one car doesn't mean that it's correct for your car. Go to car shows, where you can talk to the owners. Buy some magazines. For four or five dollars, you can see dozens and dozens of customized cars. It's just like if you want to be a romantic person, you get a couple of romantic books and read up on what works and what doesn't work. Let someone else make the mistakes. In customizing, once you do it wrong, it costs a whole bunch more than it did the first time to make it right."

— Jeanne Schinto

**Custom Car Show  
at the 11th Annual  
Encanto Street Fair &  
Cultural Arts Festival  
Saturday, August 16,  
10:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m.  
Imperial Avenue  
between 63rd and 68th Street  
Free  
Info: 619-266-0936 or  
www.encantostreetfair.com**

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