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Monday, August 20, 2007

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David Guralnick / The Detroit News

Ford Mustangs grace Nine Mile in Ferndale. Dream Cruise officials are looking at extending the route to Detroit, among other promotional possibilities.

## Cruise expansion could hit potholes

Andy Henion / The Detroit News

Advertisement

It's either a great idea or an affront to Metro Detroit history, depending on whom you ask.

A proposal to extend the 13-year-old Woodward Dream Cruise into Detroit is rapidly becoming a polarizing issue. Supporters say the concept -- to be considered next month by a group of community leaders -- could bring more sponsorships and revenue to the world's largest free auto event.

"It should go all the way down to Detroit -- that's where the auto industry got its start," said James Foster, 64, of Detroit, who drives his 1954 cherry red Chevy pickup in the Cruise.

But critics say extending the 16-mile rolling car show south of Eight Mile is unfaithful to the roots of cruising Woodward -- a suburban phenomenon that originated in the 1950s.

"I thought the whole thing about the Woodward Dream Cruise was that this was

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where it originally started," Ted Lupu, 54, said late last week while showing his 1965 Mercury Comet in a parking lot at Woodward and 13 Mile in Royal Oak.

"If they move it downtown -- I don't think anyone ever cruised down there. They cruised up here."

Cruise officials say they're considering a variety of ideas to bolster the Cruise, such as having more events and promotions -- both on and off the Woodward route -- and retooling the one-day cruise as a multiday -- or even multiweek -- celebration. The Dream Cruise attracts about 40,000 muscle cars and some 1.7 million visitors, organizers say.

#### Local leaders to debate issue

Possibilities include a pre-Cruise gala at the Fox Theatre, events at the Henry Ford Museum and Cranbrook Educational Community, and a joint promotion with Michigan International Speedway near Jackson, said Greg Rassel, Dream Cruise president.

He said the ideas will be hashed out in September by a committee that's expected to include business and cultural leaders, mayors from the nine communities along the route and Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick or a representative.

Rassel said the proposal to extend the cruise into Detroit "might be considered, but it's not the focus" of the committee.

Still, the proposal has garnered plenty of attention since it was disclosed in The Detroit News on July 30.

"I've gotten feedback on both sides of the spectrum," Rassel said. "There are some people that say, 'No way.' There are other people that say we should have a discussion about it."

Kilpatrick spokesman James Canning said the mayor is "definitely open to exploring the possibility of the Dream Cruise expanding into the city of Detroit. We look forward to reviewing the proposal."

Birmingham Mayor Tom McDaniel said he has reservations.

"I'm still of an open mind about it, but I want to see specifics and make sure we don't dilute what has become a great event for Oakland County," he said. "It's held now in the area where the whole concept of cruising developed during the '50s and the '60s and the '70s."

Rassel, who's also Royal Oak's public service director, said the ideas are also meant to generate more money for the host communities, who spend more than \$325,000 combined on extra police patrols, setup and cleanup, insurance and other costs.

For some towns, the event is break-even. Others claim net losses year after year.

Berkley Mayor Marilyn Stephan, who plans to attend the September meeting, said of the proposal to include Detroit: "You think of the burden it will put upon Detroit in terms of police protection and cleanup. I mean, they're struggling as it is."



**David Guralnick / The Detroit News**

A car with artwork celebrating Detroit travels the Cruise path on Woodward. Extending the route downtown would take the event beyond its roots, say those opposed to the idea. [See full image](#)

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Stephan said she's all for regional cooperation, but not at the expense of ruining the Dream Cruise.

"I'm old enough to remember when cruising was the thing to do, but it was from Eight Mile out to" Pontiac, she said. "If it's tradition that's being celebrated here, then that's what it is."

#### Case made for expansion

Mike Bernacchi, a marketing professor at the University of Detroit Mercy who studies the effects of the Dream Cruise, said the event should have been expanded long ago.

Bernacchi said the Cruise should be marketed globally and extended into Motown.

"Excluding Detroit to me seems almost criminal," he said. "It's the birthplace of the auto industry."





Pete Pollock, a retired equipment operator and Dream Cruise regular, believes Cruise officials should extend the route a mile or so into Detroit to start with.

"If the people in Detroit want it, sure," said Pollock, who lives in Illinois. "But you don't want it to get too spread out."

Jim Kolodziej, a retired truck driver from Allen Park, who planned to drive his 1968 Camaro in Saturday's Dream Cruise, is against the idea. Not only does the Cruise have historical ties to the suburbs, it's already long enough, he said.

"Sixteen miles is plenty," said Kolodziej, 62. "I think adding more would be overkill."

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