

Murdo Has A TRUCKLOAD of Trucks

Story and photos by John Gunnell

If you think that old-truck collectors are going to run out of vehicles someday, one trip to the Pioneer Auto Show in Murdo, S.D., should clear up the misconception. It's not fair to describe this attraction as a "museum" when it's really a community built around collecting stuff. The complex consists of 38 buildings erected a few at a time around a motel, gas station and the GTO Diner. Many of those buildings are filled with vehicles, including more than 50 old trucks.

The beginning of Pioneer Auto Show dates to 1954, when Dick Geisler opened it under the name Pioneer Auto Museum. Today, it's his son, Dave, who will most likely greet you at the door. If you buy a ticket — which Dave will tell you is cheaper than those for many other highway attractions — you'll gain entrance to a treasure trove of trucking history (plus cars, tractors, motorcycles and all kinds of Americana).

After you pass through the turnstile (probably an antique itself), you'll wind your way through several buildings, some of which are truly pioneer, as they date to the trucking industry's early days; other buildings hold 1920s-'80s models. There are buildings filled only with trucks and

others filled only with Ford and Chevy vehicles of all types, including trucks. More trucks can be found decorating a 1906 Murdo Fire Department building.

One of several long, open-front buildings towards the back of the complex (building No. 24) is crammed with about 10 pickup trucks, plus covered wagons, buckboards and, for some reason, an Amphicar. There is a matching building labeled for cars that actually includes a number of very interesting imported trucks, such as a German-built 1960 Lloyd van, 1961 Subaru van and a 1967 Toyota Stout 1600 pickup. The latter is something you don't see everyday, even when it was new.

Other trucks in the Pioneer Auto Show fleet range from a 1921 White motorhome to a 1988 Nissan three-wheel truckster. The earliest light-duty commercial vehicle appears to be a 1912 Model T Ford panel delivery. There is also a 1918 Nash truck, 1918 Samson cab-over-engine express, 1920 Model T fire engine, three 1926 Fords (including a flatbed and a fire truck), 1929 Ford Model A camper and a Ford pickup from the same year, '32 Ford Model B pickup, '36 Ford Australian Ute, '37 Indiana truck and '37 Diamond T fire truck.

Here you can see some of the trucks stored in Building No. 24. The row includes a couple of early postwar Fords, a Bronco and an International.



Early postwar models kick off with a '46 Ford pickup, '46 International fire truck and '47 Reo Speedwagon. Rarities include a one-to-a-dealer '48 Nash wrecker with a rather loud paint scheme and a gorgeous 1949 Diamond T pickup. There's also a '48 I-H "corn binder" pickup and a Willys Jeep of the same vintage.

The 1950s are well covered with Ford, Chevy, Studebaker, Crosley, Jeep and Dodge pickups, including a 1951 Ford with a Marmon-Herrington four-wheel-drive conversion. A '51 Jeep wagon and '53 Packard ambulance qualify loosely as "commercial vehicles," and a stylish '57 Dodge Sweptside pickup hints at the "designer trucks" of the late '50s. Strangely, no Rancheros and El Caminos of this era appear.

Desirable later-model trucks found in Murdo include a '77 Dodge Warlock and a '78 Dodge Lil' Red Express. There's also a '73 Dodge wrecker, '66 Ford Bronco and two classes of '68 Ford pickups: F150 and F250. There is a '63 Falcon Ranchero and a Pinto Cruising Wagon. Not listed in the latest edition of the Pioneer Auto Show directory, but appearing in the photos, is a late-'70s El Camino. This is not unusual, since Geisler "rotates" a number of vehicles each year in order to keep the

attractions fresh for tourists.

As Geisler pointed out — and several visitors verified — there are serious car enthusiasts who come to the museum again and again. Although most of the trucks have the "older restoration" or "un-restored original" look, the sheer number of different makes and models, as well as the chance to see some untouched factory features, makes Pioneer Auto Show a unique place to stop. In addition, over the 52 years of the collection's existence, the Giesler family has had the opportunity to add toys, signs and other memorabilia, some of which it would be extremely hard to find anywhere else. It's also doubtful that light-duty truck lovers will find an assortment of this type anywhere else.

If you're starting to plan your hobby travel for 2008, you might want to consider visiting Murdo in May. In addition to being a place and time, "Murdo in May" is the name of an annual event held at Pioneer Auto Show the weekend before Memorial Day. It includes a swap meet, a car corral and a classic car and truck auction. Last year, people came from more than 25 states to enjoy this springtime event. Of course, you can always visit Pioneer Auto Show by computer at www.pioneerautoshow.com.



Old trucks decorate this replica of the 1906 Murdo Fire Department at Pioneer Auto Show. This South Dakota attraction should not be confused with Pioneer Village, in Minden, Neb., which also has hundreds of old vehicles.



A very colorful and rare '48 Nash pickup. Each Nash dealer got only one of these service trucks to use to keep things "all-Nash."



The unmistakably handsome lines of the '49 Diamond T pickup look great even in a rather dark, unlit quonset hut.