

Parade IS for Families

by Wendy Shoffit

What do you mean, "Take my family to Parade for vacation?" As if they could possibly have a good time and not hate me for the rest of the year. If that sounds like you, keep reading. Our family has a great time at Parade every year! That includes our 11-year old daughter and whatever friend she chooses to bring along!

10, 20, 30 years ago I've been told Parade was different from what it is now. Kids were not really included in the week's activities. Sure, they could meet others their own age and if they were outgoing enough, actually develop friendships. Of course, that meant the parents would need to bring them year after year to build the friendly bonds with the kids from across the country. Communication now for teens, pre-teens, tweens, and any of the kids old enough for their parents to buy them a cell phone is much easier (and cheaper). Long distance calls and texting are extremely inexpensive and email is downright free (if your household already has internet service, which let's admit... most households with kids nowadays do). But I'm getting ahead of myself here.

Let's address how kids are included in Parade activities. First of all, there's usually now a chairperson on the committee to deal specifically with including kids! This person's sole responsibility is to make sure kids of all ages have a good time while their parents are, too. For the past few years (and for the foreseeable future), there's a Kids' Hospitality room. Kids can come there to play video games, watch movies, do craft activities, and so on. It's a place for them to meet and greet each other casually while doing something they enjoy doing. In Charlotte there was not just one room, but two of them! One was for kids probably 9 and younger and the other one for older kids. The younger room had things like the Candyland board game, crayons, and Thomas the Train videos. The older room had XBoxes with games like Rock Band and Guitar Hero. If your tween is anything like mine, she could probably spend most of the day playing video games (if we let her). When she was younger, though, she truly loved working on the arts and crafts and watching movies. Let me caution, though, the rooms aren't a drop off babysitting service, particularly for the younger ones. Parents need to stay with the kids, BUT it gives them something to do that's not in their sleeping room! Activities change often, so they don't get bored.

Speaking of getting bored... Have you ever taken your child to the Concours or Victory Banquet? Both dinners can be exciting for those winning trophies, but they're relatively long and kids can tire easily. Besides, spending THAT kind of money for kids to turn their noses up to Beef Tenderloin and Prawns seems wasteful. Parade of old would require parents to find a private babysitter for those nights, which can be iffy and pricey. Now, Parade offers reasonably priced babysitting for the kids during these times, often involving food they love - pizza, chicken fingers, and ice cream sundaes. Food that is much more suited for their tastes. These services utilize trained professionals, so you don't have to wonder if Brittany the teenage babysitter is inviting her boyfriend over and eating all your bonbons. One less thing to worry about!

Now, on to the really exciting events for the kids. Now, you might not think much about remote controlled (RC) cars, but what about your kids? There's an RC competition that can get a bit emotional

for the contestants. No self respecting adult wants to be shown up by a 7-year old little girl and no self-respecting 14-year old boy would be caught dead getting beaten by a 60-year old grandfather. It can get a little dicey. *wink* But, it's always in good fun. If your kid doesn't have his or her own RC car, not to worry... the loaners are GREAT! In fact, most people use them anyway!

Competition for the little ones continues at the Kids' Autocross. Kids of all ages hop on bikes, skateboards, roller blades, scooters, strollers and just plain ol' running shoes to compete with kids their own age. They get a taste of what the grownups experience on the autocross course. Again, if your 911 doesn't happen to have a bike rack installed on top, there are plenty of loaner "vehicles" available. One year, a girl's talent was cartwheeling, so she cartwheeled the entire course. While it may not have been the fastest way around, I'll bet she had the most fun AND was the most fun to watch! I've seen many a parent also put their wee little ones in the stroller and give that kid the ride of his or her short little life. Yes, the red mist comes even while pushing a baby stroller. Who knows what long term benefits learning an autocross course at an early age will have on these kids. When they reach age 16, they can get into a REAL Porsche and compete in the Junior Participation Program (JPP). Trust me when I say that daddy will feel much more comfortable if junior has some idea of what an autocross course looks like when he hands the keys to HIS baby over.

Not only can the older kids compete in the JPP Autocross activity, but they can also be great partners in the rally competitions. Dad and daughter, J and Jessica Toney, have proven to be quite a great TSD rally team, as have Tom and Lisa Gould. Teach them right while they're young and the sky is the limit!

Kids can be shy at times and might not be quick to get to know other, which is why there are so many opportunities during the week for them to meet each other. They start the week off at either a teen mixer for the older ones or a simple kids' mixer for the younger ones. This puts everyone in the same place so when they see a familiar face at the kids' food table at the welcome banquet (seriously, how many 6 year olds eat sauerkraut?), they can feel a tiny bit safer at saying hello. Trust me, by the end of the week they'll have made at least one best friend. Which brings me back to my first point about improved communication. If they meet a friend one year, spend a little effort communicating with them during the next year, when you bring the family back to the next Parade, the instant friend makes both families a lot happier! Just ask Aubrey Sutton and Jess Holzer who grew up thousands of miles apart, but were/are best friends because of Parade. Imagine how much easier that friendship would have been with kids' activities and text messaging?

So, please don't shy away from Parade as a summer family vacation. Kids of all ages will have a fun week of activities. Make driving there part of the fun and you'll have them hooked for life. What better way to raise the next group of Porsche enthusiasts and perhaps the future President of PCA! You just never know. See you AND your kids in Colorado!