



Drive-In Theater History Page

The automobile age and Hollywood's fantasyland crossed paths more than 70 years ago in Camden, NJ when the first drive-in theater opened in 1933. It changed the way Americans dated and created a place for parents to go to the movies without hiring a babysitter.

"There are families with children too small to be taken along to an indoor movie, as their crying may disturb the other patrons. Here they may cry as loud as they wish as the other patrons will not be disturbed. It doesn't matter whether it is rainy or dry, as the patron remains seated in his own automobile during the performance with the windows of his car open or closed, as he pleases....patrons like the idea of dressing informally, lounging in their cars, smoking and taking refreshments while watching a picture."



By 1958 there were more than 5,000 drive-ins in the United States. In some drive-ins, the ushers had so far to patrol they used bicycles to get around.

More To Do At The Drive-In

As the size and number of drive-ins increased, many businesses started to include other forms of entertainment:

Free Pony Rides
Restaurant
Horseshoes
Talent Shows

Merry-go-round
Swimming Pool
Miniature Trains
Animal Shows

Playground
Miniature Golf
Boat Rides
Picnic Areas

"You can eat your dinner, get your car washed and see a movie all at once," said the Saturday Evening Post

Many theaters opened the gates as much as three hours before the movie would start. Many theaters began to serve a variety of diners such as fried chicken, barbequed sandwiches, hamburgers, pizza, etc. A few theater owners gave customers the ability to order from their cars and provided "car hop" delivery. To increase sales, the intermission trailers were invented with illustrations of food that even danced!

Drive-In Theaters Hit the High Numbers!



The drive-in boom was under way! Numbers of drive-ins increased from less than 1,000 in 1948 to close to 5,000 by 1958. The drive-in etched its place in history, not just in the United States, but in many countries around the world. During the same years of 1948 to 1958 over 5,000 indoor theaters closed reducing their number from 17,000 to 12,000.