

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

Cruising back in time: Scoop the Loop lives on

By Pat Grahn

"Scooping the Loop" was a popular pastime for many people on warm evenings in Ripon. Residents, as well as visitors, drove their cars through downtown Ripon, "looping" around Rotary Square in the 100 block of Watson Street to head south to the 300 block of the street where cars would do a U turn and head back north.

Banned in 1992 for various reasons, the nostalgic activity was revived in 2019 for one evening each summer. This year's Scoop the Loop event took place last week Saturday from 5 to 8 p.m.

Although popular for decades in Ripon, it is hard to find the history of this tradition.

The first use of the term "Scooping the Loop" in the *Ripon Commonwealth Press* was found in the Jan. 29, 1975 edition. Marcia Bentley Buhrow (1943-1991) was interviewed about her memories of growing up in Ripon during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Buhrow attended Ripon High School from 1957 until 1961 and hung out in a clik of 15 girls called the "Vultures." The article noted that "Like most of other teens in the 50s, the Vultures did a lot of cruising. Scooping the loop was highly popular."

An earlier reference to Scooping the Loop came from Martin "Marty" Hammen. In August 2019, Hammen told the *Commonwealth* that during World War II, "One night a school bus filled with German prisoners scooped the loop. It was Saturday night when everyone was in town — there was no TV. They were singing German songs. It was beautiful."

In 1945, more than 600 World War II German prisoners of war were housed in Ripon to help with the harvest.

There were no references to Scooping the Loop in the 1940s to early 1970s editions of the *Commonwealth*. However, in the Aug. 8, 1985 *Commonwealth*, a new reporter wrote a column on "Loop Cruisin'" which talked about a Wednesday night that he stood on Watson Street to watch car.

"What I soon detected was that it wasn't just the two girls in the Ford Escort who were going up and down the street and making the customary U-turn in front of City Hall," the reporter penned in the piece. "Two guys in a red something-or-other were doing it too. Then a couple in a maroon Laguna. Then a guy on a Honda motorcycle. And finally, three girls in a white Trans Am."

He added that he also saw a Maroon Delta '88, a brown Chevette and some mopeds "get into the act as well." When he asked some high school students what



SCOOPING THE LOOP was a popular pastime in Ripon. Vehicles would drive from the 300 block of Watson Street north to the present-day City Hall and then "loop" about Rotary Square. Due to various reasons this activity was banned in 1992, but was revived for one night each summer in 2019. *submitted photo*

was going on they stated that it was a Ripon rite of passage called 'Scoop the Loop.' The students noted that Scooping the Loop was not condoned in Ripon and related that Friday night scooping was much busier.

Video Age Productions produced a video in 2012 called "Stories of the Square," which included interviews about Scooping the Loop. Joyce Rudolph (1935-2025) noted that in high school, anyone who had a boyfriend with a car was lucky because you could Scoop the Loop after school. She recalled that having a loud muffler was popular.

"You were either a Scooper or a Scoopie" stated former *Commonwealth* publisher Tim Lyke in the video, who explained that if you were a "Scooper" you had a car to drive or ride in and a "Scoopie" stood and watched.

Both were fun and acceptable although having a car was much cooler.

He noted that many of the high school jocks stood wearing their letter jackets in front of a business called "Big Al's" in the 200 block of Watson Street, watching the cars drive by. One day, Lyke was Scooping the Loop in a friend's car. He explained that they had "borrowed" a fire extinguisher from Union Hall at Ripon College and passing the jocks they sprayed them with the fire extinguisher.

Dave Florek stated that "before I had my driver's license, I rode my black bicycle and Scooped the Loop all day long." His first car was a 1955 Ford, which had a lever on the floor to active the windshield wiper fluid. The passenger side fluid tended to squirt off to

the Loop. She recalled that girls would sit on parked cars and boys would go by in their cars and "toot to the girls." Kuhn explained that another tradition was if you were married in Ripon, the wedding party after the ceremony would Scoop the Loop while continually blowing their horns before going to the wedding reception.

A May 15, 1986 *Commonwealth* stated that "Some say that the teens who Scoop the Loop are mostly from outside of town, but to a Ripon visitor it doesn't matter who is behind the wheel of the car that makes traffic downtown move at a snail's pace because of our 'loop 500.'"

The article suggested that the city look at the problem and "an ordinance to stop loop scooping could be passed." In 1992, Scooping the Loop was banned due to traffic congestion, street safety, incidents of street fights and other issues.

However, after a 27-year absence, the Ripon Chamber of Commerce and Ripon Main Street successfully petitioned the city to bring back this popular tradition once a summer as an official event in 2019. Today, a new generation enjoys this beloved tradition in downtown Ripon.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.riponhistory.org, facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/.

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