

Car lovers to restore red caboose

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MADISON – Local classic car aficionados are pitching in to help restore perhaps the city's most recognizable landmark.

Members of the Mississippi Classic Cruisers car club will be helping to repaint and refurbish the red caboose on Main Street next to the railroad tracks.

They will sand-blast, prime and paint the bright-red train car, peeling away any cracked paint and rust that has accumulated and giving it a shiny new look.

The club hopes to have the project completed by the club's fourth annual car show in Madison scheduled for Oct. 26 and Oct. 27. The two days scheduled for painting the caboose are Oct. 13 and Oct. 20.

The car show is part of the city's annual Scarecrow Festival, which includes a contest for the best-dressed scarecrow, and a parade that includes the cars.

Ward 5 Alderman Michael Hudgins, who was appointed to lead a commission to restore the caboose, said that the car club was a natural choice for the job, since they have a great deal of experience with such work.

Hudgins was assigned to work on the project about two weeks ago by Mayor Mary Hawkins-Butler, and his thoughts quickly went to his fellow classic car lovers.

"They've got the right equipment we need to get the job done," said Hudgins, who is a member of the Classic Cruisers club himself and the proud owner of a tan 1973 Ford Mustang.

The job should be completed in two days, according to Hudgins, who issued a call for volunteers a few weeks ago and is still looking for folks to help the car club.

"Anybody who wants to pitch in and help will be appreciated," he said.

Tom Phillips, a member of the club who lives near Annandale and owns a 1976 Chevy Corvette, said that he understands why the city wants a makeover for the caboose.

"It's a landmark. When people are coming into Madison, you say, look for the red caboose," he said.

"We want to be a good citizen to the city of Madison. Madison has given us a great deal of support in pulling off this car show," said Mike Martin, a member of the club from Madison who owns a 1969 Chevy Camaro.

The car club not only has the right equipment for the job, according to Phillips, but it will also help



Photo By Andrew Ujifusa

From left, Madison residents Larry Chedotal, Ward 5 Alderman Michael Hudgins, Tom Phillips, Mike Martin and Paul Tankersley, behind Phillips' 1969 Chevy Camaro and in front of the red caboose at the Madison Cultural Center. All are members of the Mississippi Classic Cruisers car club that will help restore the caboose before the Scarecrow Festival on Oct. 26 and Oct. 27.

the club, since it plans to host the car show in October right next to the red caboose at the Madison Cultural Center.

He noted that the caboose will be a somewhat bigger job than restoring an average classic car, since it is about six to seven times larger than a car. Scaffolding will also be necessary to reach higher parts of the structure.

Those painting the caboose also want to make sure that they don't damage the plants around it.

Hudgins said that he is trying to locate members of the Madison Garden Club to make sure that they can repair the caboose without damaging the garden.

The lettering on the caboose that says "Madison the City" will have to be re-painted by professionals, according to members of the club.

Of the car club's 280 members statewide, about 100 live in Madison, according to Phillips. Last year, about 250 club members showed up to attend the "cruise-in," an increase from 100 in its inaugural year.

Other local members of the car club who will volunteer to restore the caboose are Louis Oursler, Jeff Kelly, and Mark Hardy.

Those who are interested in helping restore the caboose can call Hudgins at 601-898-8565.