

Our Annual “Mooning” Of Amtrak In Laguna Niguel

It occurs the second Saturday in July each year in Laguna Niguel, an otherwise quiet commuter town of 56,000, located just north of San Juan Capistrano in suburban Orange County, California.

But on this special day, and lasting for but a brief few seconds each hour, about a hundred people gather along the chain link fence in the parking lot behind the Mugs Away Saloon to give Amtrak passengers a special salute from those gathered: they get “moonied.” The crowds start to gather before dawn and the faces seem to turnover every few hours, to be replaced by a new group who can’t wait to bare their butts to the passing trains. It is most crowded between 10am and 4pm. There is a definite carnival atmosphere among the crowds of people too, with cars, camper trucks, motor homes and motorcycles parked all along the street. Some people brought their pets along: I saw dogs, cats, a snake, a parrot, and even an iguana. There was even a guy in a wheelchair, who carefully stood up for a few seconds and dropped his pants as the train rolled by.

Interestingly, in the 26 years this has been going on, no one has ever taken credit for organizing the annual event. There is even a web site that gives directions and train schedules, but the web master there says it is for “information only” and he is not in charge either.

We asked one of the “non-organizers” how the tradition got started, and he told us that one night in 1979, a man named K.T. Smith told his buddies at the bar that he’d buy a drink for all who would run outside to the rail road tracks and “moon” the next train, which many did. Word spread, and the local newspaper, The Orange County Register, ran a story about it. The story attracted more people to the bar, and the tradition began. In order to keep the mooning under control the Orange County Sheriff’s Department made a verbal agreement with the bar not to arrest anyone as long as it only happened one day each year and certain rules of decorum were maintained. “The deputy people have been very considerate and liberal in the past,” said one non-organizer. “We warn people not to expose anything except their butts to the train. As long as we follow those guidelines, we never get hassled.” Those may be the unofficial rules, but at least once each hour you can count on a pair of female breasts being revealed as well.

Locals claim that in 26 years they have never made an arrest or ticketed any of the participants.

For passengers on the train, this also seems to be an anticipated event. The Amtrak line parallels Interstate highway 5, and trains carry passengers between Los Angeles and San Diego. Unlike most Saturdays, the Amtrak cars are filled to near-capacity with passengers to see the “moon show.” Most trains actually slow down to half speed as they approach “Ground Zero” so that people with cameras and camcorders can record the view through the large glass windows.

Inside Mugs Away is a wall of photos commemorating the rears of hundreds of people who have participated over the years. The bar also sells souvenir T-shirts and even a DVD movie. Adding to the festivities, a band named the “Moonies” (what else?) plays inside from noon until the last train passes around midnight. During the day the bar serves cold beverages and an outdoor vendor grills hamburgers.

After dark, “Night Mooning” has become popular also. Participants bring flashlights or Coleman propane or gasoline fuel camping lanterns and hang them on the chain link fence with wire coat hangers.

Said one mooner, “I like night mooning better because it is less crowded, the air temperature is a little cooler, and we can do more creative with our lights.”

The Mugs Away Saloon

located at:

27324 Camino Capistrano
Laguna Niguel, CA, 92677.

Directions:

1. Take the I-5 [Santa Ana Fwy] south.
2. Exit at Crown Valley Pkwy, Turn Right
3. A short block later, turn RIGHT (North-West) onto Forbes Rd.
4. Next street, turn RIGHT (East) onto Getty Dr
5. Bear RIGHT (South-East) onto Camino Capistrano.

