

Drive-in to 1950s America

This text is about drive-in cinemas. These are large open-air cinemas. People park in front of a big movie screen and watch the film from their cars. Drive-in cinemas were very popular in America in the 1950s, but some people still like to go to them today. Maybe you can find one near you.

What to do —

- 1) Open out the folding pages, and read the non-fiction text *Drive-in to 1950s America*.
- 2) Then hold the pages to your nose and take a sharp sniff to breathe in the information. That probably won't work though, so read the text again anyway.
- 3) Now check out the questions...

Turn the page. →



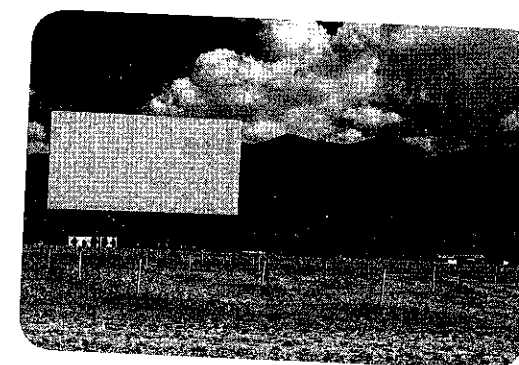
Drive-in to 1950s America

America in the 1950s is often remembered for its colourful diners with black-and-white checked floors, or for the polka dot dresses and cool leather jackets that people wore.

Many features of 1950s culture now belong in the history books, but lots of people still experience a thrill at the thought of this highly glamorous period. As these fifties fans will tell you, there's no better way to relive the 1950s lifestyle than to take a trip to a drive-in cinema.

Movies in the Great Outdoors

The drive-in movie theatre — essentially a big outdoor cinema — has become an icon of life in 1950s America. People park in front of a large white screen and are then able to watch a film from the comfort of their own cars.

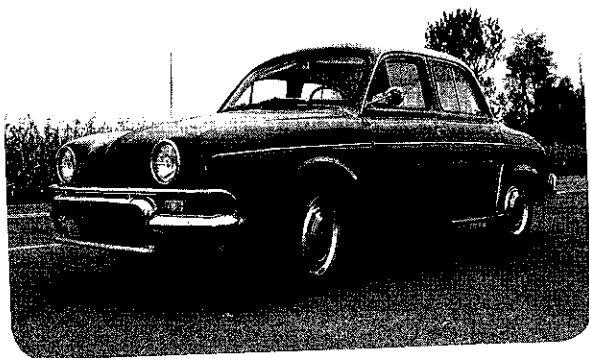


Drive-in cinemas revolutionised the movie-watching experience in the USA. At that time, the only other way for most people to see a film was to go to an indoor cinema, but these weren't always convenient. For example, the parents of young children needed a babysitter if they wanted to go to an evening screening at an indoor cinema. At a drive-in, parents could enjoy a film while their children slept in the back of the car. Drive-ins were also more convenient for pet owners, who could bring their furry friends along without fear of disturbing others.

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The Origins of the Drive-in Cinema

Although there were a few outdoor cinemas in the early 1900s, the trend really got going in the 1930s. This was thanks to a man called Richard Milton Hollingshead Jr, who worked for his father's company selling car products. He noticed that people devoted a lot of time and money to their cars, and that they *really* liked going to the movies. Putting these

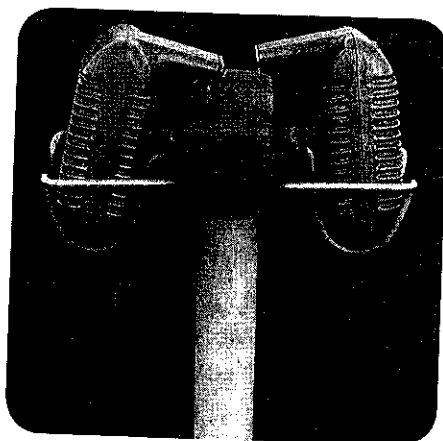


two things together, Hollingshead Jr had a brainwave — perhaps people would like to watch films from their cars. To test out this idea, he nailed a white screen between two trees, placed a radio behind it and attached a film projector to the front of his car. He also created a special

ramp system so that the cars in each row were at different heights. This ensured that everyone had a clear view of the screen. In 1933, once he was sure the idea would work, Hollingshead Jr opened up the first proper drive-in cinema, with room for around 400 cars.

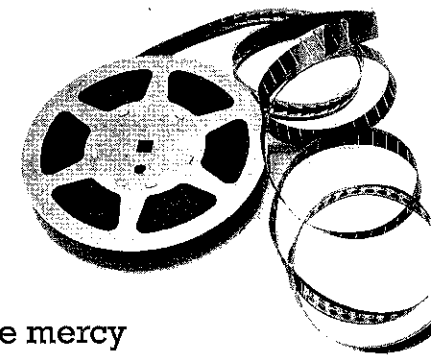
Sound Struggles

There were a few teething problems for the first drive-in cinemas. The film's sound had to be blasted out through massive speakers, which led to poor sound quality and to tension with people who lived nearby. Other techniques were tried, including speaker-posts located near each car, and speakers that hung on the cars' wing mirrors, but the solution only really emerged when built-in car radios became more common. People would tune in to a specific frequency, over which the film's audio was played, allowing them to hear it clearly and easily.



Movie Misery

Despite their popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, drive-in cinemas often struggled to make a profit. They could only screen films at night, which meant that the number of films they could show each day was very limited. They were also at the mercy of the weather, since rain and fog could put people off attending. Even worse, because they didn't make much money, they could only afford to show films that had already been screened at indoor cinemas. These older films just didn't draw in the crowds in the way the latest blockbusters did.



Drive-in cinemas were also hit hard by the march of technological progress. From the 1970s, it became ever easier for people to watch films at home. As a result, drive-ins were no longer the most convenient option for the movie-loving families and pet owners who had once found them so appealing.

Drive-in Cinemas Today

In the twenty-first century, drive-in cinemas continue to face an uphill battle. However, they are still treasured by those who want to experience a taste of the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood; a time between the 1930s and the 1960s when American movie-making was in its prime.



The majority of drive-in cinemas are found in the USA, but a few have begun to pop up around the UK, thanks to the popularity of American culture. Despite Britain's notoriously wet weather, a trip to a drive-in cinema can be an enjoyable and entertaining experience, offering movie-goers the opportunity to travel back in time and across the Atlantic without even stepping out of their cars.