

pulling in the anchor and pushing off with an oar, then cranking the motor.

"I'm not a baby," I said. I was twelve and big for my age. I was almost as big as he was, I thought. I was about the same age Danny had been when he and his mother moved away.

"Are you stupid then?" he said as we continued down the river.

I remembered my dad saying I looked a lot like Danny and my uncle threatening to shoot him if he ever said it again. "No," I said.

"No what?" he said, speeding up again and maneuvering around a log. He was still frowning but not as hard as before.

"No sir," I said. The sky was a deep blue, and the sun felt warm on my skin. I took out my knife and polished the green pearlized handle with my shirt.

"Okay," my uncle said, steering toward a shady spot. "Let's fish." He handed me a rod and got out the bait. "If we get enough, we'll have a fish fry tonight. You can eat a fish right down to the bone, like a cat," he chuckled, trying to put us both back in the good mood we'd been in when we started out this morning.

I plunked my baited line into the water and watched the circles it made spread further and further apart until they had disappeared and the surface was smooth and still. I could see my reflection in it, the reflection of a silly boy, so filled with hope he could hardly breathe, imagining the fish we would catch, the celebration we would have tonight. Hoping my uncle would smile the way he still did once in a while, his eyes twinkling like a sky full of sunshine.



Rockabilly Rides: 1959 Ford Fairlane.
Photograph by Lisa Chaney.

Delta Sources and Resources

Rockabilly Rides Memphis, Tennessee By LaDawn Lee Fuhr

Memphis, Tennessee is renowned for its musical and cultural contributions to the world. This famous quote ‘the Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg’ is a good description of Memphis’s diverse and eclectic heritage. From W.C. Handy bringing the blues to Beale Street, Sam Phillips of Sun Records discovering Musical phenomena in his own backyard, or Jim Stewart and his sister Estelle Axton creating the Stax Records sound by integrating the sounds of all people, Memphis has been at the epicenter of American musical history. Imagine a young man who would later become the King of Rock and Roll dancing at his high school prom, or a vacuum salesman with a low, silky voice who would go on to become the legendary Man in Black: Memphis has a great deal of heritage that cannot be missed. And Rockabilly Rides will drive you there, and beyond, in style.

Rockabilly Rides is a Memphis Tour experience that takes the visitor back in time along the streets of Memphis, Tennessee when some of the biggest names in music were only dreaming of the future. Visitors experience those stories and landmarks in a classic car that was in style at the same time history was being made in the home of the blues, and the birthplace of rock and roll. Brad Birkedahl and Brandon Cunning are the owners of Rockabilly Rides. Both are accomplished and popular musicians who perform on historic Beale Street in downtown Memphis. Like so many others, they love the sounds that came out of iconic Sun Studio and share those tunes from the stage regularly with audiences from around the world. But they

felt the stories behind the musical gems woven into the fabric of American music history deserved to be told in full.

Working for a local touring company telling Memphis history to a multitude of tourists inspired Birkedahl and Cuning to offer a more intimate insider tour experience by presenting a realistic, up close and personal heritage tour of the River City. And what better way to spark the imagination than in a shiny two-ton time machine identical to those vehicles rocking the streets of Memphis back in the day. With both company founders owning vintage cars, Birkedahl’s a 1959 Ford Fairlane Skyliner retractable convertible, licensed for Sunday driving only, and Cuning’s 1955 Chevy Bel Air, stored and collecting dust in his former Pennsylvania hometown, the idea for Rockabilly Rides was born.

Rockabilly Rides booked their first customer in June 2015. Six hundred and fifty tours later, reservations have nearly doubled every year. The company now sports four classic vehicles that take visitors on their Elvis 101 tour and a Memphis history tour. The Elvis 101 Tour begins downtown at the former site of Lansky Brothers clothing store, a favorite Elvis shopping spot. Next, to the historic Peabody Hotel, home of the Peabody ducks, where Elvis attended his senior prom; then a cruise to Elvis’s home in Lauderdale courts, government housing where he lived as a teenager, Humes High school, where he graduated in 1953, and other must see hot spots.

The Rockabilly Rides Memphis 101 tour covers important aspects of the historical Delta and the South including tours on the blues, the Civil War, the mighty Mississippi River, and the Civil Rights era. By request only is the Million Dollar Quarter Tour, visiting the sites as seen by the original Southern fab four Sun Recording artists Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee

Lewis, and Carl Perkins. Rockabilly Rides has expanded the business with custom transport services such as weddings and hosting VIPs who want to be in a sweet ride while in Memphis. Rockabilly Rides has a 5-star rating from *Trip Advisor* which frequently ranks them as the top city tour in Memphis. The company is featured in the book *100 Things to Do in Memphis Before You Die*, and has hosted customers from all over the world.

The real secret weapons of Rockabilly Rides are the owners/tour guides, Brad Birkedahl and Brandon Cunning. Birkedahl is a native of Tacoma, Washington who began playing guitar at age twelve and transplanted to Memphis twenty years ago to play rock and roll. He has been a mainstay on Beale Street and played the world with legends like Carl Perkins, Wanda Jackson, Billy Lee Riley, The Stray Cats, and DJ Fontana. He is also known for his work with the rockabilly trio, The Dempsey's, with whom he appeared, as legendary guitarist Scotty Moore, in the 2005 Johnny Cash bio-pic *Walk the Line*.

Cunning also boasts an impressive musical

resume. He grew up in Washington, Pennsylvania with a love of all things from the decade of the fifties, especially the music. He also began playing guitar at an early age, and after years of playing in Pittsburgh moved closer to the source, relocating to Memphis in 2007. He spent several years as a radio personality before pursuing music full time. Like Brad, he found himself playing stages with his idols such as Smoochy Smith, J.M. Van Eaton, and the late Sonny Burgess. He is also a well-known Beale Street musical performer.

Rockabilly Rides provides a one of a kind heritage tour experience in Memphis, and is as unique as the city itself. From the birth of the blues and rock and roll music, to the Mississippi mud, Rockabilly Rides, fronted by Birkedahl and Cunning, unveils the classic sights and sounds of the River City. You can follow Rockabilly Rides on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Their web address is www.rockabillyrides.com, and their phone number is 901-264-0819.

They can also be reached at tours@rockabillyrides.com. ▲▼▲



Rockabilly Rides: 1955 Plymouth Belvedere.
Photograph by Brad Birkedahl.