

Rock 'n' roll tour of America

A tattoo festival draws big crowds, writes **Mary Bolling**

'SORRY, I only date guys with tattoos." The T-shirt message couldn't be clearer and according to market-stall owner Rod, the women are snapping them up.

I don't know if I could be that discriminatory, but if I was — well, I'd be in eligibility heaven.

Melbourne mate Lil and I have road-tripped south, from Los Angeles to Costa Mesa.

Our destination is the huge Orange County Fairgrounds, where half a dozen different entry points lead the way to massive recreational vehicle shows, boat shows and homewares shows.

But there's no mistaking where we're headed.

Pimped-out, low-down customised cars make slow progress over speed bumps, and colourful elbows stick out windows in the Californian sun.

And once out of the car, we can hear the buzzing.

In a shed the size of Queen Vic Markets, Musink Tattoo and Music Festival brings together hundreds of tattoo artists and other tattoo-loving exhibitors, all raring to get their needles into the crowd.

A three-day event, each day ends with live music from some of the most tattooed names in rock 'n' roll.

In its second year, the festival of ink and rock is the brain-child of celebrity ink artist Kat Von D, whose reality tattoo show *LA Ink* has scored the 27-year-old worldwide fame and the heart of Motley Crue bassist Nikki Sixx.

And really, 27 years after Aussie rockers Rose Tattoo had a hit with tattoo anthem *Scarred for Life*, it's a wonder no one had the idea before.

With exhibitors from all over the US, thousands of multi-coloured patrons browse stalls of tattoo art, clothing, accessories, and even household items — skull doorstops and tattoo bandages.

And with doors open at noon, a well-stocked bar and no bands on until 7pm, there's plenty of time for music lovers to consider a lasting tribute to their favourite band.

After all, another feature of the festival is a tattoo competition, with award categories including best music-related piece.



links

southbound: Head to Orange County, south of Los Angeles, for laid-back beach culture and lifestyle, www.visitcalifornia.com

live and local: The Slidebar on Commonwealth Ave, Fullerton, offers weekly free shows, rock'n'roll karaoke and a rockstar clientele, www.myspace.com/theslidebar

get the needle buzzing: If you like painful commitment, head to Kat Von D's High Voltage Tattoo in LA and apply to be on the show, www.highvoltagetattoo.com

sun, sun, sun: Show off any skin adornments at beautiful Laguna Beach, also host to a string of arts festivals during summer, www.lagunabeachinfo.org

deal me in: Get across all Sin City has to offer, www.visitlasvegas.com



Blog with Mary at <http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/rocknrolltour/>

An amazingly life-like Johnny Cash face takes out the prize. Another patron, unimpressed his elaborate full-back Ramones presidential seal didn't get a look in, confides that the Man in Black was a non-inked cleanskin.

No such un-tattooed sacrilege on the band stage, though.

There's plenty of ink credentials among the headline acts over the three days, including rockabilly darling Reverend Horton Heat.

Lead singer Reverend Jim Heath

professes his band thought tattoos were cool when no one else did.

Other hardcore and metal acts include Atréyu, Throwdown and Manic Hispanic.

While even Britney Spears bears a few tats these days, it seems punk will always have the strongest links to tattoo culture. But the history books show it was blues queen Janis Joplin who first popularised rock star tattoos, showing off a Florentine bracelet on her wrist, and a red heart on her right breast, in 1970.

The headliner was Danzig, whose band the Misfits, and their distinctive skull logo, have inspired a couple of generations of tattooed punk and metal fans.

And judging by the crowd, there's plenty more generations to come.

The children's clothing stalls sell baby T-shirts proclaiming "when I grow up, I want to be tattooed".

One father tells me that kitting out his two-year-old son in rockabilly gear is cheaper than getting new tattoos for himself. Fair enough.

While the whirr of needles is tempting, I decide that new tattoos and rockabilly children are out of my price-range.

Instead, the moshpit in front of fast-and-furious St Louis band Story of the Year provides plenty of rock mementos, with my ears ringing and limbs bruised for 24 hours.

Not quite scarred for life, but long enough for now.

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YOUR SAY Have you been to a US rock festival? Share your experience with readers: shstravel@heraldsun.com.au

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