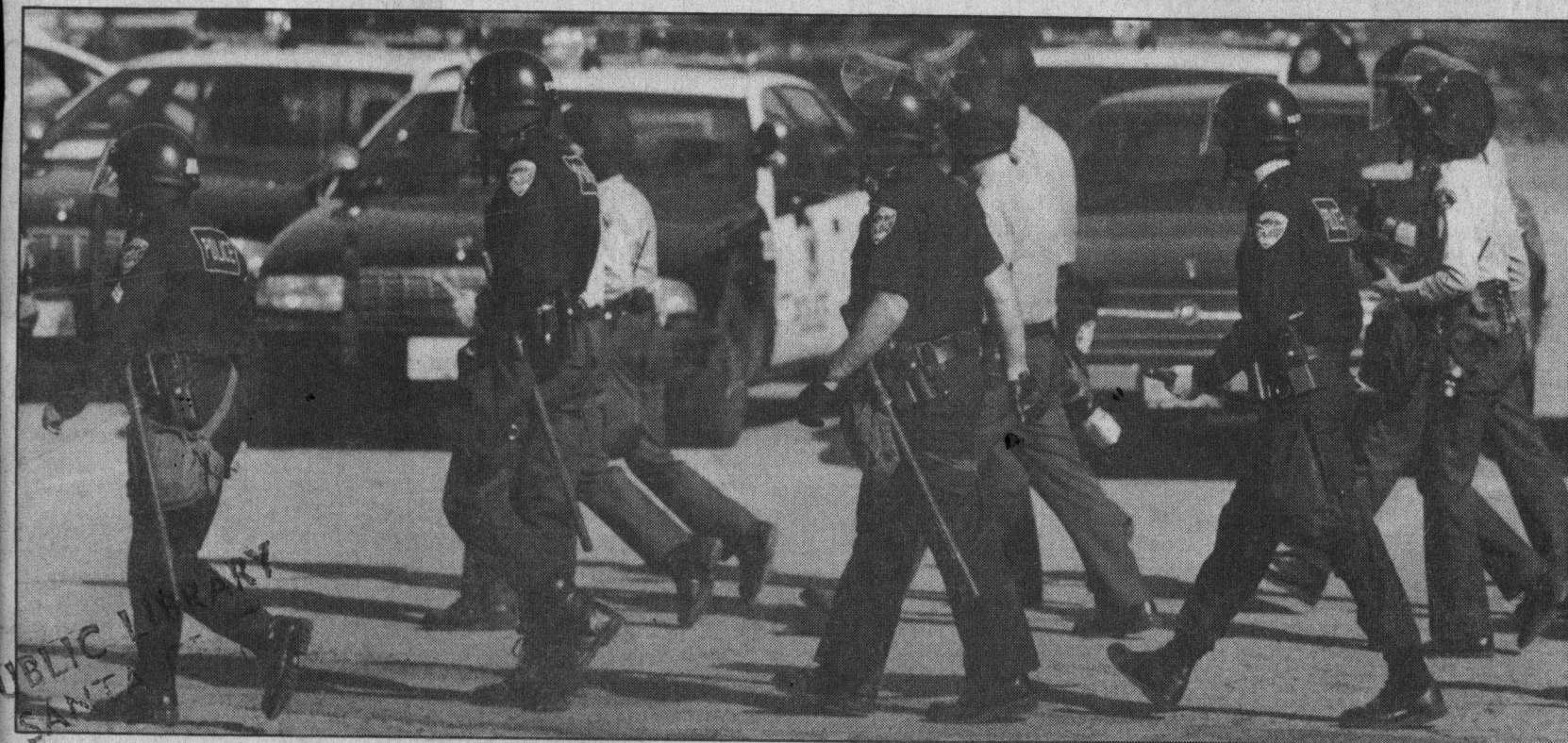


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# Low-riders create havoc



Sheriff's deputies in riot gear break up low-rider show at county fairgrounds.

Photos by Kurt Ellison

## A monster traffic jam in Watsonville

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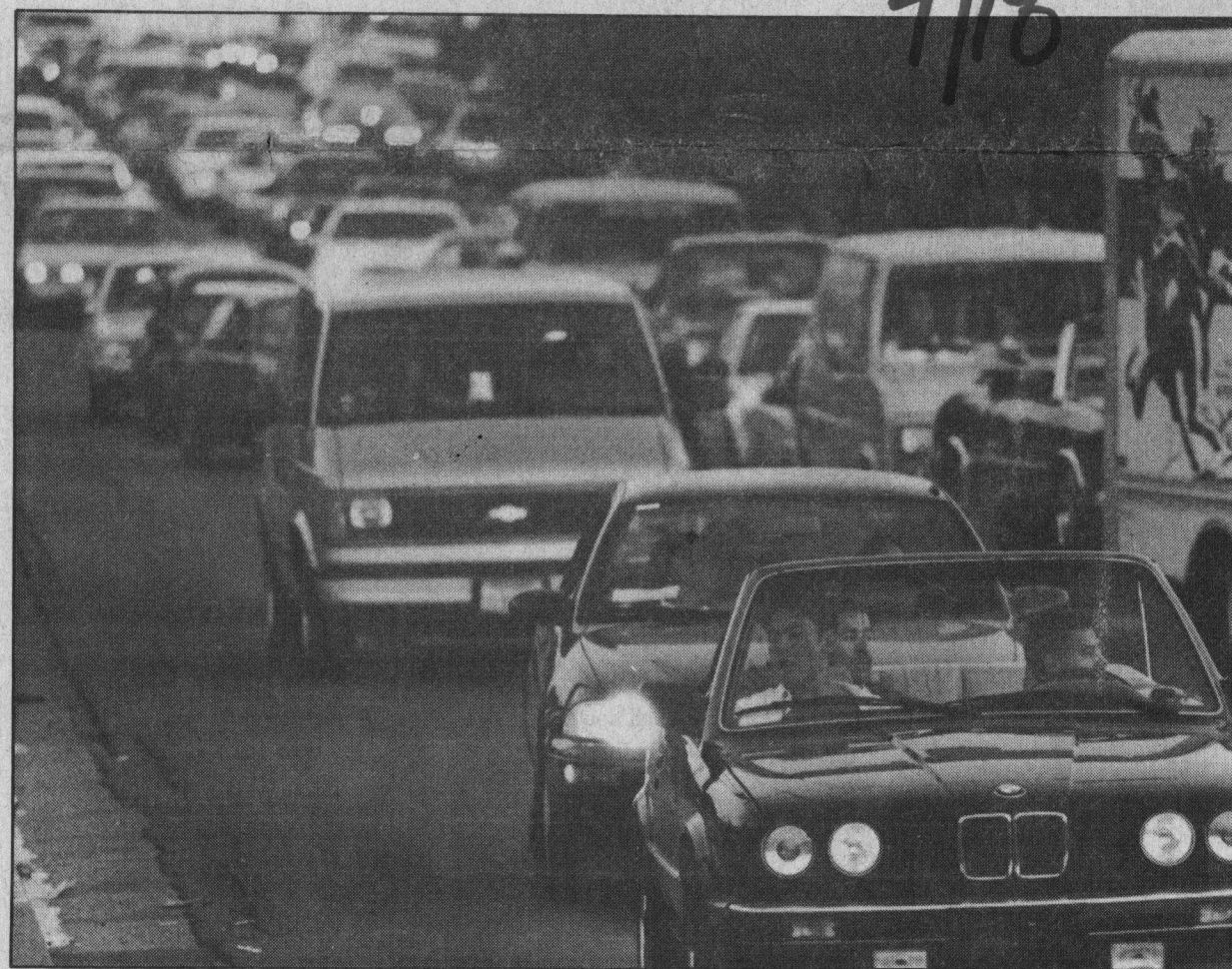
A low-rider car show closed down early yesterday at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds because of numerous fights, sending herds of cruisers into Watsonville, choking city streets for several hours and causing more fights that included at least two stabbings and a shooting.

Autos on numerous thoroughfares in Watsonville moved at a snail's pace from around 4:30 p.m. to about midnight, Watsonville police said. Around 8:30 p.m., police tried to stem the flow of traffic by closing Freedom Boulevard at a couple of spots. This caused many of the cruisers to move to Main Street. Police then closed Main Street around 10 p.m.

Watsonville residents reported taking as long as 45 minutes to travel a distance that would normally take fewer than 5 minutes. Some reported that police would not allow them to drive to their homes on their usual routes after Freedom Boulevard was closed.

Watsonville police, the sheriff's office and county fairgrounds officials have been swamped by calls from residents who were upset about yesterday's traffic conditions and related problems.

The second annual low-rider car show at the fairgrounds was sponsored by LG Productions of Hollister and was attended by about 8,000 people, some of whom drove five hours to get to the show. Authorities said the trouble started about 3:30 p.m., when a couple of scuffles broke out between rival gang members from Watsonville



Traffic on Freedom Boulevard was bumper-to-bumper.

and Salinas. These fights escalated into major brawls involving dozens of people.

John Kegebein, the fairground's chief executive officer, said 50 sheriff's deputies and fairground security guards moved in to clear the grounds. Police, wearing riot gear, formed a human chain and several canisters of tear gas were used on the crowd, which included women and children. Some of the children were infants, Kegebein said, adding that the tear gas was used to quell the fights and not aimed at the rest of the crowd.

"They had no choice but to use tear gas," Kegebein said. "They were like animals. If I had tear gas, I would have used it, too."

He added, "It's really unfortunate that 25 to 30 kids from Salinas and Watsonville started this crap."

He said he was trying to set up a meeting today with County Supervisor Ray Belgard to discuss yesterday's troubles.

Kegebein said the low-rider car show will not be held next year. Belgard said he hoped similar events at the fairgrounds in the

future won't be canceled because of yesterday's troubles.

Several arrests were made at the fairgrounds, but no details were available at press time.

Watsonville police said a man was shot in the leg around 10 p.m. at the intersection of Fifth and Main streets. Police said Frank B. Garcia, 26, of Watsonville, was shot from a passing car as he stood on the sidewalk. Police learned of the shooting around midnight, when they were called to Watsonville Community Hospital, where Garcia was being treated. Garcia's injury was not serious and he was treated and sent home.

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## CARS

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In an unrelated incident but occurring at around the same time as the shooting, Johnny Sanchez, 21, also of Watsonville, was stabbed in the stomach in the 200 block of Main Street, police said. He was also shot at but not hit, police said. Sanchez was taken to Watsonville Community Hospital, treated and sent home.

Police speculated that these attacks could be gang-related.

The Sheriff's Office reported that around 9:30 p.m., a 20-year-old Union City man was hit in the face with a bottle and stabbed with a small object in the forearm on the 1400 block of Freedom. He was also treated and sent home.

No arrests have been made in these cases.

Watsonville Police Sgt. Jim Ihlen said the jammed streets were a real problem for residents.

"The department feels real bad for the citizens," Ihlen said. "We do apologize to the people."

The crowds in Watsonville, he said, "never got out of hand" because police had "roving groups of police" that went from one trouble spot to another, cooling things off before they could erupt into major problems.

Watsonville has been besieged by cruisers after past car shows, but they left the city after a short while. Yesterday's crowd was "very persistent," Ihlen said.

"They didn't want to go home," he said.

One of the reasons for their persistence, Ihlen speculated, was the large number of female cruisers. He joked that in future car shows, only men be allowed to cruise.

Autographs