

Late Night Taco Bell
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A stream of ten cars snaked around and outside the parking lot, blocking traffic at 1:48 a.m. on Saturday. The most popular time at the most popular Taco Bell in Colorado.

Two men holding beers and skateboards stood between two cars near the end of the line. One of the men approached a car window.

“Can I use your seatbelt to open my beer?” said Eric Harvey, a student at the University of Colorado.

Wedging the bottle cap under the seatbelt buckle he broke the top free and with a small, “thanks,” he returned to the line.

Three people on the sidewalk talked with large arm gestures and gleaming faces about their menu decisions, conferring and exchanging opinions.

After an agonizing 15 minutes, a car rolled up to the front of the brightly lit board. A purple, metal box with holes in it started talking.

“Hi, how are you? Order when you’re ready,” said Taco Bell employee Rosa Guitron.

Engines rustled as the cars slowly crawled along the cement pavement toward the coveted window. Two security cameras monitored outside.

“Hey man, do you want a hit?” a passenger in one of the cars said to a man standing outside. The man opened the bright blue car door and disappeared behind the tinted back window.

The Taco Bell off Broadway and Baseline is ranked third in the U.S. in sales and first in Colorado compared to other U.S. Taco Bells, according to Taco Bell Team Trainer Justin Beckstein. On Friday and Saturday night from 11:30 p.m. to 3:00 a.m., the tacos, burritos and nachos are wrapped, handed over and digested in a blur.

“Coming to late Night Taco Bell is more than just the food. It’s an experience.” Shift Manager Mike Cowart said. “I’ve had people tell me, ‘it’s just the thing to do.’”

“They’re always so drunk. You never know what’s going to happen.” Cowart said. “On really busy nights when the line is really long, people will turn on the music, get out of their cars and just walk around.”

“One time we had a guy so drunk he fell asleep at the menu board,” Cowart said. The Taco Bell employees tried to rouse the man but he wouldn’t wake up. They had to call the police and tow the car.

Another time Cowart saw two guys yelling at one another in line. They parked and then fought – after picking up their food, of course.

“CU people are crazy.” Taco Bell Employee Daisy Cardoza said with a smile. During the ten months Cardoza has worked at Taco Bell, she has seen a man throwing up at the drive thru window, two guys who asserted that they did not have to pay for their food because they were “at a *hotel* trying to park a car,” and “this guy [who] was like really tall but dressed like a girl.”

“The CU kids make it fun.” Cardoza said with a positively upbeat attitude.

As the cars slowly drove away and others came to fill their spots, six employees hustled to keep up with the heavy flow of traffic. Three men speaking only Spanish slid orange wrappers down a silver metal counter, deftly loading tortillas with the same ingredients: shredded cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, and ground beef. Pungent aromas of foreign spices, fresh veggies, and cleaner fluid permeated the air.

The Einstein Bros., Starbucks, and Arby’s in the same parking lot were dark and silent. Cars with music blaring continued to sit with lights and engines running. The drivers and passengers continued to wait for their late night fix. Rosa Guiton’s voice squawked through the box.

A sign on the Taco Bell window read, “Open Late.”

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