

On the Air

Newsletter of the Arkansas Corvair Club ■ CORSA Chapter 722

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Chevrolet Corvair - Failure at Any Speed?

Michael Tesmacher

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I own a Chevrolet Corvair. The car is the tangible result of a post-divorce mid-life crisis and an attempt to recapture my youth with a vintage '60s convertible.

I never sought out the Corvair; it just came along and hooked me. Invariably, while out on drives over the last seven years, people would approach me and comment about the car and Corvairs in general. The majority of the comments are positive: "My mother (father, uncle George, aunt Tillie) had one of those. It's a great car."

Occasionally someone asks: "Isn't that the car that would flip over (catch fire, engine fall out, etc.)?" Others remark about Ralph Nader and his 1965 book "Unsafe At Any Speed," which devoted all of chapter 1 to the Corvair's unique handling characteristics. The car was and still is a good and safe vehicle. However, I have to admit that the Corvair had some perceptual problems in the marketplace that brought about its demise.

On October 2, 1959, General Motors' Chevrolet division introduced the

1960 Corvair to enthusiastic audiences. It was a new and radically different design for an American manufacturer. During the mid-1950s, Volkswagen's Beetle had become popular with economy-minded Americans.

Taking a cue from this trend, GM decided to create an economy car—economical to operate but smaller than other American automobiles. Powered by an air-cooled six-cylinder engine—a first for Chevrolet—it was referred to as a "flat six," since the cylinders were horizontally opposed rather than in the typical "V" configuration. Not only was the engine unique, but its rear location was a radical departure from the norm.

Perhaps the Corvair was a 'niche car' that was never able to master its niche.

The 1960 model was offered in two body styles, a 2-door coupe and a 4-door sedan—available in two trim

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From your ACC President

Hot Springs canceled — considering Crusin Branson Lights weekend and Corvair Resort stay in August.

Our February meeting—and our first at the NLR Western Sizzlin'—worked out okay, after we moved to a dry room. Our next meeting (March) will be in the "sun room," and we're hoping for a dryer experience.

All in attendance agreed to give the Western Sizzlin' another chance as soon as there was a problem they hurry and corrected it. All the rain that day and the flooding in our meeting room, wasn't the entirety of the restaurant's causing.

We agreed to cancel plans for an early May reunion in Hot Springs, due to too many members having schedule conflicts with the May 10-11 weekend dates.

If anyone is interested in still going to Hot Springs on Saturday, May 11th, and spending the night, please notify me, Allan Embrey, 501-834-5373, or e-mail BigALinLR@msn.com, before our March meeting. I will still try and get the party barge for a

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March meeting at Western Sizzlin Steak House in North Little Rock

On Tuesday, March 19, we will once again meet at the Western Sizzlin' Steak House restaurant, 5306 JFK Boulevard, in North Little Rock. The restaurant is

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"Corvairs bring friends together."



Failure at any speed *continued*

models—both which were somewhat austere. Later that model year the "Monza" was added as the line continued to expand. In '61 Chevy added a pair of vans, a pickup truck and a station wagon, all with the engine mounted in the rear. In 1962 came the first Corvair convertible, along with the first mass-produced American turbo-charged car, the "Spyder."

While early sales were promising, the other large American manufacturers quickly challenged with compacts of their own. Chrysler introduced the Dodge Lancer and Plymouth Valiant, while Ford countered with the Falcon and Mercury Comet. These other compacts were less expensive and more traditional. Even Chevrolet, like the other manufacturers, introduced a more "conventional" car to compete in the economy market. The Chevy II, which later became the Nova, was introduced in 1962.

What the sporty Corvair did have going for it was style. Even before the introduction of the Spyder, automobile enthusiasts were referring to it as a "poor man's Porsche." But in 1964 Chevrolet introduced another sporty car, the Chevelle, and Ford unveiled the legendary Mustang. This signaled the beginning of the end for the Corvair.

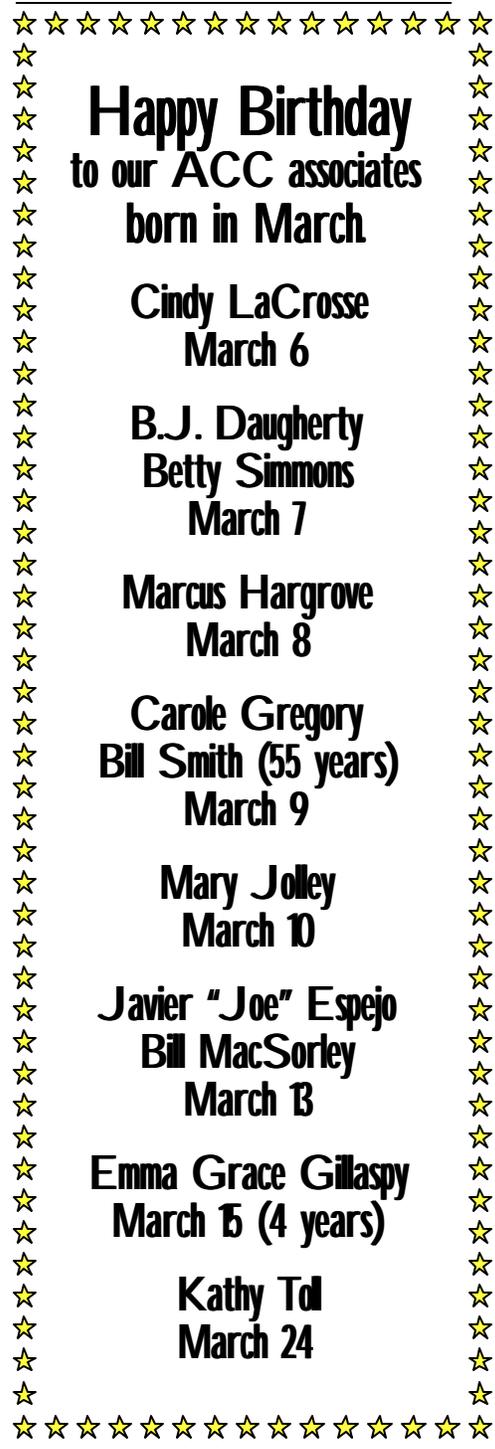
While the Mustang quickly gobbled up market share, the Corvair continued to enjoy a loyal following who liked its distinct handling. It was this same handling, however, that was the basis for

several lawsuits against General Motors. The Ralph Nader book "Unsafe At Any Speed" portrayed the Corvair as unstable and prone to rollover accidents. While many would attribute the failure of the Corvair to the book, the handwriting was already on the wall in the form of declining sales.

Interestingly, 1966 would have been the last model year, had the Nader book not drawn so much negative publicity. Even the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) had opened an investigation into its handling. There was simply no way GM could halt the line without appearing to "cave in" to the charges, so production continued, albeit in limited numbers, through the '67, '68 and '69 model years. Ironically, the NHTSA report, released three years after Corvair's demise, would exonerate Chevrolet of all charges, concluding that the Corvair was no more prone to accidents and rollovers than any other comparable car of the period.

Was the Corvair a failure? It's a matter of perspective. General Motors produced nearly 1.8 million Corvairs over 10 model years. The Corvair pioneered such technological advances as turbo-charging, true four-wheel independent suspension and unit-body (or unibody) construction, and its independent suspension was adapted for later model Corvettes. Perhaps the Corvair was a "niche car" that was never able to master its niche.

Today, 41 years after its introduction



**Happy Birthday
to our ACC associates
born in March**

**Cindy LaCrosse
March 6**

**B.J. Daugherty
Betty Simmons
March 7**

**Marcus Hargrove
March 8**

**Carole Gregory
Bill Smith (55 years)
March 9**

**Mary Jolley
March 10**

**Javier "Joe" Espejo
Bill MacSorley
March 13**

**Emma Grace Gillaspay
March 15 (4 years)**

**Kathy Tol
March 24**

ACC Dues Alert

In an effort to keep everyone informed about the status of your ACC membership dues, we are publishing a membership *Dues Alert* in every issue of *On the Air*.

The *Dues Alert* lists names of members who are past due, those due for the current month, and those due the following month.

Dues are \$15.00 for regular membership and \$10.00 for associate members. Please mail payments to: **Arkansas Corvair Club, P.O. Box 627, Little Rock, AR 72203.**

Here are the names that are **Past Due** and due in **March**.

Past Due
Bob Berry
Frank Cahill
Don Coget
Eric Evans
Chuck Jolley
Keith LaCrosse
Weaver Majors
Jerald McKown
Glen White

Due Mar
James Carter
Lynn Gates
Bill Smith

Please disregard if you've already paid or mailed your check. **We appreciate your support.** ■

ACC February Meeting Minutes



JB King

The Arkansas Corvair Club met at the Western Sizzlin Steak House, in North Little Rock, on Tuesday, February 19, 2002.

We were happy to welcome Warren and Debbie Rogers to our February meeting. They recently purchased a 1964 Monza convertible, from Corey Holtz, which they plan to restore.

We were also pleased to welcome new member Ken Franson to our February meeting.

President, Al Embrey, reported that the May 10-12 weekend he had obtained reservations for us in Hot Springs is Mother's Day weekend. We all agreed that this would not be a good time to plan our weekend reunion. Al said he would cancel the reservations.

We discussed the possibility of attending the Branson Antique Car

Parade, August 15-18, and staying at the Corvair Resort and Motel in Branson. The AAA-rated resort offers clean, comfortable rooms and suites and the location is convenient to major Branson attractions.

Al asked if we would be interested in touring the newly-renovated Arkansas Governor's Mansion, as a club activity sometime in coming months. Members voted in favor of this activity and Al said he would research the details and report back at our March meeting.

New member Ken Franson asked if members would be interested in having him set up a Web site for Corvair club. We voted for him to pursue this for us.

Al reminded us that nominations for new officers are due at our next meeting, on March 19.

Members agreed to meet at the Western Sizzlin' location again in March, but also to be looking for other possible meeting sites. From our February experience, the Western Sizzlin does not appear to be suitable as a permanent meeting location.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

JB King

March means nominations for ACC officers

Once again it's March and that mean's basketball and it's time to nominate ACC officers for our 2002-03 business year.

Our elected officers are President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. As our Arkansas Corvair Club by-laws state, "Nominations for elected office will be made from the floor or in writing at the meeting one month prior to the election. At least one person must be nominated for each office. The April meeting will be the election meeting, with new officers taking office in May.



If you would like to run for office or nominate someone—or in some cases, avoid being nominated—make sure that you attend this month's meeting at the Western Sizzlin Steak House, 5306 JFK Boulevard, in North Little Rock.

We will announce our slate of candidates in the April newsletter and elect our 2002-03 officers at our April meeting.

Please help keep our Arkansas Corvair Club going strong by lending your leadership. Our club is only as successful as you make it. ■

President's Message *continued*

tour around Lake Hamilton. I won't cancel the rest of the rooms until a later time. I am still holding six rooms for Saturday night.

Our newest member, Ken Franson, has graciously offered to build and host a Web site for our Corvair club. We look forward to learning more about Kens plans and progress with the new Web site at our March meeting.

Making our club known on the Web should be a big plus for our club's promotion and recruiting efforts.

At our March meeting we'll be nominating officers for our 2002-03 business year, so please plan on attending this meeting.

I will be traveling to Wichita, Kansas sometime during mid March. If the weather gets bad, I might not make it back by March 19. And, no, I don't want to do this again next year, as I have a lot going on with my family right now. So, please don't nominate me in my absence.

Hope to see you at our next meeting on Tuesday, March 19. And, don't forget to let me know if you're interested in Hot Springs.

Best regards,

Al Embrey

Failure at any speed *continued*

and 30 years after production ceased, the Corvair still enjoys a loyal following. The Corvair Society of America (CORSA) has a membership of over 5,500 people with 130 local chapters found everywhere from Idaho to Amsterdam.

I own a Corvair or maybe the Corvair owns me. It's kind of hard to say when the top is down and I'm driving east on Long Island's Southern State Parkway on a brisk, sunny day. Unsafe at any speed? Ralph Nader...

**2002 CORSA International Convention
June 25 - 29, in Flagstaff, Arizona**



On the Air

Arkansas Corvair Club
370 Windwood Drive
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Place
first class
postage
here.

FIRST CLASS

*"Promoting the maintenance,
enjoyment, and preservation of
the Chevrolet Corvair."*

Arkansas Corvair Club Information

Meetings

The Arkansas Corvair Club (ACC) meets on the 3rd Tuesday of each month. We are currently seeking a new permanent meeting site and will publish the new location ASAP.

March Meeting

The ACC will meet Tuesday, **March 19**, 7:00 p.m., at the Western Sizzlin Steak House, N. Little Rock.

Join us at 6:00 p.m. for food and fellowship prior to the meeting. The club offers an array of merchandise for sale—oil filters, gas filters, hats, decals, patches, T-shirts and more.

Officers

President: Allan Embrey, 16 Algonkin Place, Sherwood, AR 72120, 501 834-5373.

Vice-President: Clyde Jones, 333 Links Dr., Apt.3010, Texarkana, AR 71854, 870 774-6789 (evening).

Treasurer: Elvis King, 21305 N. Mill Rd., Little Rock, AR 72206, 501 888-1224 (evening).

Secretary: JB King, 21305 N. Mill Rd., Little Rock AR, 72206, 501 888-1224 (evening).

Elected Board: Allan Embrey, 501 834-5373; Christel Espejo, 501 834-0806; Larry Levy, 501 868-5825; Cathy Smith, 501 843-8413.

Appointed Board: Pending.

Committee Chairs

Membership: Elvis King

Publicity: Bill Smith

Newsletter Editor: Bill Smith, 370 Windwood Drive, Cabot, AR 72023, 501 843-8413.

Newsletter Advertising:

Non-members and businesses:
\$100/year full page; \$60-½ page;
\$35-¼ page.

Program & Events: Open

Technical & Safety: Keith LaCrosse, 26 Woodlawn Dr., Beebe, AR 72012, 501 882-5040.
Butch Chapman, P.O. Box 243, Jacksonville, AR 72078, 501 676-6693 (day time).

Points: JB King

ACC Mission: The mission of the Arkansas Corvair Club (ACC) is to promote the maintenance, enjoyment, and preservation of all types of Corvairs and related vehicles, and to advance and improve driving skills, automobile safety, and the Corvair's image.