

On the Air

Newsletter of the Arkansas Corvair Club ■ CORSA Chapter 722

March 2007

Volume 20, Issue 3

German couple stranded in Corvair in Shelbyville, Tennessee

by Clint Confehr

Reprinted from the *Shelbyville Times-Gazette*, July 5, 2006

A German couple vacationing in America bought a Chevrolet Corvair to drive through these Southern states, but it broke down in Bedford County on their way to the Jack Daniel Distillery.

"The car gives me more headaches than the whiskey," said Dirk Bensinger, 64, of Rosenheim, a town 40 miles southeast of Munich and just four kilometers from the Autobahn, where he retired as a Daimler Chrysler sales executive.

While stranded in Shelbyville, Bensinger and his wife Greta took it all in stride. It was the fifth time the Corvair broke down in 10 days, but they saw it as another opportunity to meet people and get a unique view of America.

Tuesday evening, they took a walk around Shelbyville's public square where Wayne Hitchcock, a local insurance agent, was doing the same with his family. They said hello. Hitchcock realized they were from Germany. Hitchcock had lived in Germany both as a member of the U.S. military and a civilian; he is fluent in the language.

The two families ate Italian food together just off the square Wednes-

day night and Thursday and Hitchcock introduced Bensinger to Dwayne Pogue's body shop.

So, what does a retired Mercedes Benz sales chief think about the price of gasoline in America? And what about hybrid vehicles generating electricity to increase gas mileage?

"The price that Americans are paying for gasoline now is about half of what Germans pay for their vehicles' fuel," Bensinger said.

Turning to the question about hybrid vehicles--powered by a combination of electric and internal combustion engines, "We have the buses in the big cities that work that way," Bensinger said.

"People who can afford a new car are buying low-consumption vehicles," Bensinger said, quickly noting one of the company's diesel cars gets 35 mpg.

But what about his affection for the Corvair, described by environmentalist and political gadfly Ralph Nader as "Unsafe at Any Speed" in his book of that title decades ago?

"It wasn't as bad as that," Bensinger replied about the allegation that the independent rear sus-

pension was prone to rolling Corvairs sideways in sharp turns.

"Ralph Nader also took after the Volkswagen, and Germans loved the Beetle" since it was the "people's car" after World War II, he said. "It was a very solid car; not safe, but solid. You could replace parts and get them for nearly nothing."

Both the VW and the Corvair had rear engines and were rear-wheel drive vehicles.

"The VW had a higher consumption than the Corvair," Bensinger said, also criticizing the size of the VW's front trunk and small storage area behind the back seat.

His preference for backroads touring would appear to be an extension of his career. Bensinger led "world-wide sales," he said. His customers were tourists, the American, French and British military, their soldiers individually, and civilians touring Germany.

Two of Frank Sinatra's daughters bought Mercedes Benz cars from Bensinger, including Nancy Sinatra, who may be best known for the hit single "These Boots Are Made for Walking." In 1970, the sole of one of her boots

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"Corvairs bring friends together."

German couple stranded *continued*

pushed the gas pedal in a 250 SL that cost about \$5,000.

At that price, the car's a bargain now, but all things being relative, Bensinger notes that the currency exchange rate is now about \$1.25 per Euro.

"Three years ago, it was 85 cents for one Euro," a decline in the dollar's spending value overseas, Bensinger said.

Currency exchange rates made gas cheaper here for the German, who points out his government imposes a 75 percent sales tax on gasoline.

And, like Americans, he complains about the administration.

"They don't just take it for roads," while Tennessee's gas tax is dedicated to highway projects, Bensinger said. "They take it for whatever they get in their heads."

Meanwhile, Bensinger's changing attitude on Corvairs is exceeded by his admiration for the 1959 Chrysler-manufactured Imperial Southhampton. He owns one and says it "represents the best way of style of a big auto industry with lots of technical efforts." He likes the smooth-shifting automatic transmission controlled by dashboard pushbuttons.

The front swivel seats are nice too, he said. They help an overweight passenger turn to get out of the car.

Bensinger's father designed motors for Mercedes Benz and his son sells trucks that weigh more than 40 tons, he said.

So, he's steeped in the industry and his fascination with the Corvair--despite its frailties--caused him to stay in Shelbyville while Bill Cassady's Auto Works got the car back on the road.

Bensinger said he bought the car in Bridgeport, W.Va., for \$7,500, plus another \$500 for brake repair. During the five subsequent break-downs, the distributor failed.

"You would have thought a tank fired its gun behind you," he said. "In Bowling Green, Ky., the engine started making noise like crazy."

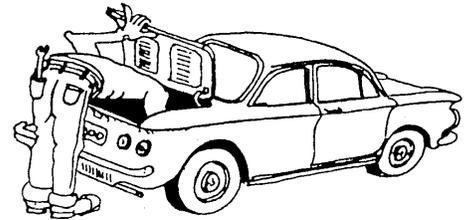
The turquoise Corvair is the Bensingers' second. His wife liked their four-door model, but "Mercedes didn't like me to keep it and that's why I had to sell it," he said.

"Problems are to be expected from vintage cars," Bensinger said. "Besides, it gives us a chance to meet people and make friends."

While in Nashville, they went to the Good Guys Car Show, then visited friends in Franklin before they started to drive to Lynchburg to tour the distillery. During their tour of West Virginia, they went to a vintage car show and won the prize for being the visitor from the most distant location. The prize was free accommodations for five people at a motel between Charleston

and Morgantown.

How could that be better than three nights at the Super 8 Motel on North Cannon Boulevard? ■



Happy Birthday
to our ACC associates
born in April.

Kermit Parks
April 9

Cortney Claypool
Mary Beth Claypool
Christel Espejo
April 12

Jim Latture
April 13

Ernie Gray
April 22

Larry Drannon
April 26

Pam MacSorley
April 30

Happy Anniversary
to
Butch & Meredith Chapman
April 11

Larry & Pat Drannon
April 25

ACC Dues Alert

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

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

Dues are **\$20.00** for regular membership and **\$15.00** 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 David Carter
Butch Chapman
Bill MacSorley
Jerald McKown
Harold Pearce
Bob Piggot
Mike Shroyer

Due Mar James Carter
Ernie Gray
David Schneider

Please disregard if you've already paid.
Thanks for your generous support. ■

ACC February Meeting Minutes



Bill Smith

The Arkansas Corvair Club met at Just Like Mom's restaurant, on Kiehl Avenue, in Sherwood, on Tuesday, February 20.

The meeting was called to order by president Ken Franson. The meeting was well attended with 18 members present.

Ken introduced two ACC members, Travis and Pat Geaslin, who had traveled from Bonnerdale, west of Hot Springs (in Hot Spring County). Travis is in the process of restoring a 1960 Corvair 700 which he purchased new and drove off from the showroom floor in California, only to have the car stolen in 1964. The car was found again 42 years later in a salvage yard in Arizona.

There were no minutes to read from the previous month, as the club did not hold a regular monthly meeting in January.

Announcements

Elvis King announced that Clark's Corvair Parts has published an updated catalog and supplements. Elvis stated that he will inquire with Clark's about discounted pricing for group orders.

Old Business

Cathy Smith offered words of thanks to Stew and Ronnie MacLeod for hosting another in their long succession of holiday parties for our Corvair club. Cathy commented on the good food, fellowship, and high spirits enjoyed by everyone at the January 6th event.

Bill Smith shared information about Clyde Jones' recovery from back surgery. Clyde's surgeon was optimistic that the recent operation might provide the relief Clyde is seeking from his chronic back pain. However, as in the past the healing will take time.

Members discussed the fact that we

have **not** decided on a location or activity for our annual Corvair convocation, usually held at the end of April, as a weekend getaway event.

Several members suggested locations: Camelia Franson suggested Eureka Springs; Joe Espejo suggested Murfreesboro; and Meredith Chapman suggested Branson, Missouri. However, everyone agreed that it may be too late to organize a weekend event for late April. Instead, members discussed holding a weekend event later in the year.

New Business

Bill Smith reported that he received an e-mail message from Doug Simon, newsletter editor for the Corvair Club of Cincinnati. Doug wrote to ask permission to reprint two articles from our club's February 2007 newsletter. The two articles of interest are titled "CORSA International Convention returns to Detroit for Homecoming 2007" and "Wikipedia--the open-source Web encyclopedia features articles about the Corvair." Bill stated that he told Doug to feel free to reprint anything from our newsletter and to please indicate that the information is reprinted from *On the Air*, February 2007, the newsletter of the Arkansas Corvair Club.

Aaron Swift suggested that our club consider compiling all of the technical tips, that we have featured in our newsletter over the years, and publishing them in a single document, such as a booklet. This is an excellent idea and might make a useful small publication to share with our members and other CORSA members. The project will require some work, possibly some expense, and further discussion. Elvis King offered to go through his newsletter issues, prior to October 1995, to locate tech tips from 1988 through September of 1995. If our club wants to make this happen, we should name a committee to own the project. We should discuss this topic during old business at our March meeting.

Frank Campbell suggested that we might leave old or extra copies of the

CORSA Communiqué in the lounge areas of local Chevrolet dealership to attract interest in CORSA and in our Arkansas Corvair Club. This idea has merit, if we can convince members to give up their magazine copies. Also, we could inquire to see if extra copies are available from the CORSA office.

Frank Campbell reported that an early Corvair is featured in scenes from the recently-released movie, *Zodiac*, about the notorious Zodiac serial killer who murdered at least five people in the San Francisco bay area, from 1968 through 1969. (*Editor's Note: The Movie-Style section of the March 2 edition of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette features an image of the early Corvair as depicted in the movie.*)

Ken Franson mentioned that he had seen a movie about a warlock which featured a Corvair automobile.

Also, Ken Franson suggested that we consider having door-prize drawings at our monthly meetings to encourage attendance.

Keith LaCrosse showed members a set of X-Beam ratcheting crossbeam wrenches, which he purchased at a local Napa Auto Parts store. The wrenches are high-quality tools that would work well for many Corvair-related mechanical tasks. The wrenches are manufactured by EASCO Hand Tools. For more, see www.gearwrench.com.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Smith

Former ACC member Robert "Bob" Berry died unexpectedly

We are sad to report that former ACC member and past president Robert "Bob" Berry died unexpectedly on Sunday, March 11. Bob underwent surgery for colon cancer, on February 26, at St. Vincent's Hospital. He was released and returned home to recuperate. Bob was a true gentleman. He will be missed. ■



On the Air

Arkansas Corvair Club
370 Windwood Drive
Cabot, AR 72023-8344

Place
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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 at **Just Like Mom's** Home Cooking restaurant, 3140 E. Kiehl Ave., in Sherwood.

February Meeting

The ACC will meet Tuesday, **March 20**, 7:00 p.m., at Just Like Mom's, on Kiehl Ave., in Sherwood.

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: Ken Franson, 608 Ridgelea Ave., Sherwood, AR 72120, 501 835-6005.

Vice-President: Meredith Chapman, P.O. Box 243, Jacksonville, AR 72078, 501 676-6693.

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; Ronnie MacLeod, 821-3622; Clyde Jones, 479 774-6789; Bill 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

ACC Webmaster: Ken Franson, 608 Ridgelea Ave., Sherwood, AR 72120, 501 835-6005.

Web Address

Arkansas Corvair Club Web site:
<http://corvair5.tripod.com/acc.htm>

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.