

On the Air

Newsletter of the Arkansas Corvair Club ■ CORSA Chapter 722

May 2007

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Unappreciated at any speed

Seventy Bay Area enthusiasts--and thousands more across the nation--don't care what Ralph Nader says. They want their Corvairs.

by Tara Shiova

Reprinted from the *San Francisco Weekly News*, August 20, 1997

Part 1 -

The first thing a visitor sees upon entering Dave Newell's apartment in El Sobrante is the red-and-white vinyl front bench seat from a 1964 truck. But this is no ordinary seat, Newell explains earnestly. It's a talking seat from one of the Chevy auto shows. When what Chevy designers dubbed the "a-point" of someone in need of rest hits the seat, a recorded message is activated. The message extols the comfort and styling of Chevy seats.

The seat goes perfectly with the decor of Newell's apartment--decor that might be described as "all-Corvair." Corvair mementos cover the apartment walls; there are neon dealer signs, performance trophies, and an award that Corvair television ads won in 1962.

A display case opposite the seat contains promotional items that Chevy dealers would give to prospective Corvair buyers--tiny crown-shaped bottles of Prince Matchabelli perfume

in pouches imprinted with the Chevrolet logo, potholders bearing the Corvair insignia, even a Chevrolet fly swatter.

Another cabinet holds more -- a tie bar shaped like the tail end of a Corvair Monza and a musical lighter that plays Chevy's jingle "See the U.S.A. in Your Chevrolet" when you flip the top open.

A self-described Corvair historian, Newell began collecting Corvair items in 1967, when he was 15. He makes his living selling Chevrolet memorabilia--the shelves of boxes and binders that stand floor to ceiling on the other side of the apartment--but his true passion is the Corvair.

Among other things, Newell owns what looks like an overgrown green-and-white bumblebee (it is actually a fishing lure made in the approximate likeness of a Corvair Greenbrier van) and the watch that Chevy engineer Al Kolbe was wearing when he designed the first Corvair engine. Lining the walls of the library are filing cabinets and shelves full of carefully ordered Corvair

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Is the Corvair an orphan?

Those of you who have studied the classic and collectible car marketplace are familiar with the term "orphan car." And if you have visited any of the Web sites or read any of the auto magazines that discuss orphan cars, you know that there is continuing discussion as to what officially qualifies as a bona-fide orphan. Some classify the Corvair as an orphan. While other orphan-car purists claim that the Corvair falls short. Regardless of your opinion, the argument makes for interesting reading.

Reprinted from *Torq-O, The Cog Blog*

http://www.torq-o.com/Cog_Blog_Archives/

Posted by Todd on 1/21/2006 05:23 p.m.

I may have touched a small (very small) nerve with my claim that the Corvair is not an orphan.

Tom Markielewski of Oakfield, Wisconsin, writes:

I have just been pouring over the February 1987 issue of *Collectible Automobile* magazine, one of the few out there which is scrupulously fair to all marques.

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"Corvairs bring friends together."

Note: (15May07) Deleted item here to expand birthdays and correct wedding anniversary date for Todd and Shirley Sanders, correct date is **June 8, 1964.**

Unappreciated at any speed *continued*
documents--everything from photos and blueprints of Corvair prototypes to the training kits Chevy would send to every dealership. And there is more than memorabilia.

In the 1970s, Newell would sometimes come across Corvairs that had died on the roadside. With the help of a friend in the Highway Patrol he would contact the owners. In most cases, they would give him the cars, or sell them for a meager price. Occasionally, he smiles, one would be good enough to drive.

He owns only one Corvair now, a 1961 Lakewood station wagon that he drives occasionally and stores at his parents' house in Hayward. But over the years, he has owned at least 25 of these, the most reviled autos in history, the initial vehicular victims of Ralph Nader--Chevrolet Corvairs. "They come and go like lost children," he says affectionately.

In the last days of September 1959, Chevrolet dealers prepared for the automotive event of the decade -- the unveiling of the brand-new, rear-engine Corvair, the first of a new generation of American compact cars.

Dealership windows were quickly opaqued with multiple coats of Glass-wax. Up went signs: "Coming, FRI-DAY, OCT 2." All the major newspapers ran bold-face ads: "You've got a thrill coming! Corvair, new compact car

by Chevrolet."

It was a time when annual model changes were exciting news. New cars arrived at dealerships cloaked in canvas, shrouded in mystique. Dealers heralded the introduction of the latest models with searchlights and streamers. Families would pack showrooms during "announcement week," eager to see what Detroit had come up with now.

Information about the Corvair -- they took the name from a 1954 experimental Corvette--had been carefully leaked to the public for over a year. The new car had been hyped in the automobile trade publications; *Motor Trend* even went so far as to speculate what the Corvair would look like.

So on October 2, 1959, a Friday, crowds flooded dealerships everywhere, eager to lay eyes on Chevy's new compact. They made their way past the familiar models, past the conservative Bel Air and the flashy Impala. Even the Corvette, usually a guaranteed attention-getter, seemed like old hat.

And then--there it was. Low, smooth, and relatively small, the Corvair was...surprisingly plain. It hardly looked like the news of the year.

But the Corvair certainly was different. It was an engineering marvel - the first mass-produced American

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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 **May**.

Past Due Bill MacSorley
Harold Pearce
Bob Piggot
David Schneider
Aaron Swift

Due May Jim Latture

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

Happy Birthday
to our ACC associates
born in June.

Shirley Sanders
June 6

Lola Piggot
June 14

Buddy Murray
June 15

Keith LaCrosse
June 17

David Reardon
June 30

Happy Anniversary
to
Harold & Julie Pearce
June 4

Todd & Shirley Sanders
June 8 (43 years)

Keith & Cindy LaCrosse
June 29 (28 years)

George & Barbara Koenig
June 29 (49 years)

ACC April Meeting Minutes



JB King

The Arkansas Corvair Club met at Just Like Mom's restaurant, on Kiehl Avenue, in Sherwood, on Tuesday, April 17.

The meeting was called to order by president Ken Franson.

Ken welcomed a guest (now new member), David Reardon, who resides in Hot Springs Village. David is interested in acquiring a Corvair Rampside truck.

Old Business

Hank Wangle updated members on plans for our spring picnic. All

members were encouraged to attend the picnic, scheduled for Saturday, April 21, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., at Woolly Hollow State Park.

ACC Officer Elections

After Bill Smith announced the slate of nominees for club offices, for the 2007-08 term, Ken Franson opened the floor to other nominations.

When no additional nominations were made, John Coffey moved that the proposed slate of officers be elected by acclamation. Bill Smith seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous vote.

Elvis King announced that he had distributed the 20 copies of Clark's catalog, which our club ordered at a special group rate. This depleted the entire stock of catalogs.

New Business

Butch Chapman announced that the South Bend Volunteer Fire Department is holding a poker run on Saturday, May 12th. The purpose of the event is to raise money for the Fallen Firefighters' Memorial.

For a summer activity, ACC members are planning to attend the Arkansas Travelers' Clunker Car Night, at the new Dickey-Stephens Park in North Little Rock. Clunker Car Night is scheduled for Thursday, August 9, 2007. Watch your newsletter for additional details.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

JB King

Unappreciated at any speed *continued*
car with an air-cooled rear engine. Almost everything about it was new, from the lightweight aluminum engine and unit-body construction (the Corvair body was welded in one piece, not mounted on a separate chassis, as was the case with other American cars) to the independently suspended rear axles.

The Corvair was lighter and smaller than its predecessors, yet it was much roomier than the popular VW and other European compacts. Because of its rear engine, the Corvair had more passenger space: There was no transmission hump taking up room in the front seating area. The air-cooled, six-cylinder engine promised good fuel economy in all weather, without the hassles of antifreeze.

At first the car did not sell as well as expected. The ultrabasic Ford Falcon, introduced that same fall, outsold the Corvair by a wide margin.

Then in May 1960, Chevy introduced the Monza, an upgraded version of the basic Corvair. It came with sporty bucket seats and luxury touches, including chrome trim on the armrests and a folding rear seat. Sales took off.

The Monza (named after a famous raceway in Italy) quickly became the top-selling Corvair. Over the next few years, General Motors created a full fleet of Corvairs, including the popular four-speed, turbo-charged Spyder and the practical Rampside truck, which had a loading ramp that dropped to the ground from the right side of the truck.

But in April 1964, Ford introduced the Mustang. The public loved it. The first of what the auto trades dubbed the "pony cars," it was powerful but compact. The Mustang had power steering, power brakes, and a conventional, front-mounted V-8 engine. Corvair sales couldn't keep up.

Chevy hoped to surpass the Mustang with the completely redesigned 1965 Corvair--it was longer and smoother, with an improved suspension system and a more powerful engine. But interest in the Corvair continued to erode.

And then came the November 1965 publication of *Unsafe at Any Speed*, which attacked the Corvair as the embodiment of the evils of the American automobile industry. ■

To be continued... See your June ACC newsletter for Part 2.

Is the Corvair an orphan? *continued*

There is an excellent article on pages 22-48 by Chris Halla on the 1960-69 CHEVROLET Corvair (caps mine).

Absolutely no mention in the very thorough article at all about it being a "companion marque" to Chevrolet (the recent Geo probably comes closer to filling that role), in the same way that Pontiac was to Oakland, Viking was to Oldsmobile, and LaSalle was to Cadillac; all of which never bore their respective parents' marques on the exterior (or if they did, it was very subdued).

There are bowties splashed all over every Corvair ever made. And I am sure they were titled as Chevrolets, not Corvairs. Pages 45 thru 48 show that GM was contemplating making Buick, Olds, and Pontiac versions, the Olds to revive the "Sixty-Six" designation and the Pontiac, the most developed of the three, to be called "Polaris."

I hope this serves to put to rest the idea that the Corvair is an orphan. What do you think? ■





On the Air

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

Place
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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.

May Meeting

The ACC will meet Tuesday, **May 15**, 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.