

On the Air

Newsletter of the Arkansas Corvair Club ■ CORSA Chapter 722

June 2007

Volume 20, Issue 6

Unappreciated at any speed - Part 2

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

by Tara Shiova

Story is reprinted from the *San Francisco Weekly News*, August 20, 1997, and continued from the May 2007 issue of *On the Air*.

Part 2 -

Part 1 of the story, Unappreciated at any speed, concluded with the following statement:

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.

Part 2 of this story resumes with the aftermath of Ralph Nader's 1965 book about automobile safety.

The author of the book, an ambitious young public interest lawyer named Ralph Nader, called the Corvair "the one-car accident." He alleged that the 1960 to 1963 models were inherently dangerous because the swing-axle suspension of the Corvair caused the rear wheels to tuck under and the car to lose control and

overturn.

More than 100 lawsuits were filed across the country, many of them spurred by Nader's book. GM was not found responsible in any of the eight cases that went to trial. The company did extensive road tests and spent hundreds of thousands to defend the Corvair. But the bad buzz had begun, and it refused to stop.

By 1966, General Motors had effectively abandoned the Corvair. All bets were on the new Chevy Camaro as a competitor against the Mustang. The last Corvair rolled off the production line at Ypsilanti, Mich., on May 14, 1969.

Three years later, a U.S. Department of Transportation study exonerated the Corvair. The two-year examination concluded that the '60 to '63 Corvairs were at least as safe as comparable models of cars sold during the same period.

But by then, nobody really cared about the Corvair. Nobody, that is, ex-

continued on page 2

Corvairs on the Grand Prairie in Des Arc

On Saturday, June 2, in the early morning hours, six Corvairs and 11 intrepid members of the Arkansas Corvair Club converged on Cabot, as an interim rallying and departure point for the 30 mile drive to Des Arc, in Prairie County.

The reason for the Corvair congregation in Cabot and subsequent drive to Des Arc was to display our vehicles in an informal car show organized by Darrell Turner, the chief of the Des Arc police department. Chief Turner had contacted Elvis King, in May, and invited members of the Arkansas Corvair Club to participate in the June 2 car show.

In addition to the car show, on the weekend of June 1-2, Des Arc also was hosting its annual Steamboat Festival, which is billed as a family festival featuring free entertainment, a carnival, 5K run, 3-on-3 youth basketball, bass tournament, beauty pageant, and arts and crafts on Main Street.

Following a pleasant drive from Cabot, on Highway 38, our caravan of six Corvairs arrived at the Des Arc

continued on page 3

Inside:

July Birthdays & Anniversaries.....	page 2
Membership Dues Alert.....	page 2
May Meeting Minutes.....	page 3

"Corvairs bring friends together."



Unappreciated at any speed *continued*
 cept Corvair lovers.

On a recent Wednesday evening, a half-dozen Corvairs fill the parking lot behind the Orinda Public Library -- all 1966 models, all in fine condition. Members of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the Corvair Society of America are here for their monthly meeting. In Corvair circles, the club is known by its acronym, CORSA, also the name of a Corvair model made in 1965 and '66. (No one knows how many of the 1.8 million Corvairs made between 1960 and 1969 remain in existence, but CORSA has about 6,000 members internationally and two chapters in the Bay Area. An affiliate, the Corvair Preservation Foundation, operates a museum of Corvair history in Richmond, Va.)

Hoods and trunks are popped open; a dozen Corvair fanciers wander from car to car, talking Corvair talk in the last of the day's light. Almost everybody has brought a car -- those who haven't gaze admiringly at the others, peering at engines, chrome, and body-work.

Conversation suddenly stops. All attention shifts to the top of the driveway, as if a beautiful woman had just arrived. "She" glides down the slope, a shiny-sleek, newly painted dark blue 1966 turbo-charged Corsa convertible with a white top. Appreciative murmurs all around.

Most members present this evening are middle-aged or older, and all but one are male. They are an extremely mechanically inclined group -- many are weekend tinkerers and home garage inventors. These are the ultraenthusiasts. Many own multiple Corvairs -- extras supply spare parts -- and plan to restore some or all of them.

Club members agree that Corvair acquisitiveness is an addiction of sorts. Chris Rogers, a past president of the club, owns 12 Corvairs, including a 1960 two-door Corvair 700 that his great-grandmother bought new.

Another member, Richard Hall, has 10. His collection includes a rare, though somewhat homely, 1961 Lakewood station wagon (only 5,591 were ever made), which takes him on his 100-mile commute between Tracy and Fremont each day.

Why so many?

Hall just shrugs and smiles: "It's kind of like those potato chips, you know ... you can't just have one."

Mention Ralph Nader's name in the company of Corvair enthusiasts, and expect everything from dismissive laughter to disdain or anger. The word "asshole" tends to come up.

"The Mustang killed the Corvair -- not Nader," Dave Newell says firmly. "Nader's book just added a premature wound."

continued on page 3

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 **June**.

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

Due Jun Frank Campbell
 James Reed

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

Happy Birthday
 to our ACC associates
 born in July.

Clyde Jones
 July 1

Aaron Swift
 July 4

Barbara Koenig
 July 16

Happy Anniversary
 to
 Joe & Cristel Espejo
 July 1 (46 years)

Frank & Mary Campbell
 July 5

Ken & Camelia Franson
 July 7 (10 years)

Stew & Ronnie MacLeod
 July 7 (33 years)

John & Barbara Coffey
 July 9 (46 years)

ACC May Meeting Minutes



JB King

The Arkansas Corvair Club met at Just Like Mom's restaurant, on Kiehl Avenue, in Sherwood, on Tuesday, May 15.

The meeting was called to order by president Ken Franson.

We were pleased to welcome members Todd and Shirley Sanders, from Danville (Yell County). Todd and Shirley are the proud new owners of two convertibles--a 1964 four-speed and a 1969 Powerglide. The 1969 has

7,600 miles.

The Sanders acquired these cars in Dallas, in December 2006, and they joined the Arknasas Corvair Club in January 2007.

The minutes from the April meeting were approved as published in the May newsletter.

Old Business

Butch Chapman reported that there were 229 participants in the South Bend Fire Department's Poker Run. The event raised \$3,000 for the Fallen Firefighters' Memorial.

New Business

Elvis King announced that Darrell Turner, police chief at Des Arc, phoned him and invited our club to participate

in a car show, in Des Arc, on Saturday, June 2. There will be no judging or competition for this show and no entry fee. The purpose of the show is for owners of antique and collectible cars to get together and display their cars for the community. Bill Smith volunteered to talk to Chief Turner and to send more information to ACC members via e-mail.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

JB King



Unappreciated at any speed *continued*

(Nader, who heads the Center for the Study of Responsible Law in Washington, D.C., initially expressed interest in being interviewed for this article; a spokesman later said the lawyer had no time to talk.)

Newell has been campaigning on behalf of the Corvair since he bought his very first, a 1962 station wagon, when he was a sophomore at Hayward's Mount Eden High School.

"I was always defending it. People would tease me all the time. They'd say things like 'Nader's nightmare' and 'unsafe,'" says Newell. "I even wrote a paper defending the Corvair against Nader's charges in my sophomore year. It was titled 'The Corvair: Fun or Fatal?'"

Like many enthusiasts, Newell is dedicated to vindicating the Corvair.

"The Corvair section of Nader's book is full of misinformation and insinuation," Newell says vehemently. "The Corvair made a convenient scapegoat because it was so different."

Even Corvair adherents acknowledge that the earlier Corvairs could be a challenge to drive. And everyone agrees that the rear suspension could have been more stable.

Yes, Corvair drivers needed to read the owner's manual and mind their tire

pressures, because of the extra weight on the rear wheels resulting from a rear-mounted engine. And yes, the car had a tendency to oversteer -- a phenomenon shared by all rear-engined autos, because their weight distributions cause their rear ends to swing wide in a curve.

But Nader and his supporters took an extreme view of the Corvair. They dismissed driver error and road conditions as possible causes of Corvair rollover crashes and alleged the car itself was dangerous -- and that GM knew it.

But there was never any proof that the Corvair was inherently dangerous.

By the time *Unsafe at Any Speed* appeared in November 1965, Chevy had already improved the rear suspension that made Nader so uneasy. In the 1964 Corvair, Chevy added a new front sway bar and a new transverse leaf spring in the rear, which made it more stable. And in 1965, Chevy made further improvements. The completely redesigned Corvair had, along with its new sleek look, a new rear suspension that kept the rear wheels from tucking under.

Eventually, even the attorney who had led the legal crusade against the Corvair gave up the fight. David Har-

ney, whose law partner had lost his son in a Corvair accident, began the crusade against the car in 1960. Eight cases went to trial; GM was not judged responsible in any of them. (In one, the company agreed to a \$70,000 settlement to curtail the negative publicity that the case was generating.) ■

Corvairs on the Prairie *continued*

High School, on Main Street, just after 10:00 a.m.

As our group of six Corvairs--three early and three late-models--maneuvered into position on the high school lawn, ACC member Frank Campbell was waiting for our arrival. Frank mentioned that all heads turned our way, as our Corvairs moved onto the school lawn to join the display.

Indeed, it was an impressive sight to see six Corvairs arrive to join the dozen or so vehicles gathered for the Saturday display.

ACC members attending included Frank Campbell, Joe and Christel Espejo, Clyde and Dee Jones, Elvis and JB King, Keith and Cindy La-Crosse, and Bill and Cathy Smith.

Watch for photos from the Des Arc show in your July newsletter. ■



On the Air

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

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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.

June Meeting

The ACC will meet Tuesday, **June 19**, 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.