

# Group Corvair Comments



GROUP CORVAIR'S NEWSLETTER FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA

VOLUME XLIX, No. 4 April 2021



# **Barbara Torbert** (At the Virginia Vair Fair, Leesburg, 2010)

Group Corvair is sad to announce the passing of long-time member Barbara Torbert on March 15, 2021. Most recently, Barbara was Vice President of Group Corvair.

Barbara, and her husband Gus, joined Group Corvair in about 1984 when they bought an early-model Corvair and discovered Group Corvair. They rapidly became enthusiastic and active members with Barbara taking a lead on fund raising. Through her efforts, Group Corvair made some significant contributions to Children's National Hospital with money raised via contributions and food sales at our shows and flea fairs.

Barbara was an outstanding organizer of events. She really came into her own when Group Corvair sponsored the 1991 CORSA International Convention in New Carrollton, MD. She took on organizing the tours with a particular

emphasis on the dinner cruise on the "Spirit of Washington". I can remember that evening well. We had about 300 people signed up for the dinner cruise and we had to get them from the hotel to the waterfront in downtown D.C. There was no reasonable parking down there and even if there had been, the likelihood of all 300 people finding their way and getting there on time was essentially zero. Barbara's solution was a professional bus company. On the night of the dinner cruise, seven luxury tour buses arrived at the hotel. We'd had everyone gather in the hotel ballroom by 6 p.m. and then promptly at 6, lined them up for the buses. Each bus could handle about 44 people; each loaded as fast as people could board and was dispatched on its way with the next bus pulling in right behind. Talk about military precision! Everyone arrived at the dock safely and on time. And Barbara managed to get them back to the hotel again just as efficiently.

Over the years, Barbara continued to demonstrate her ability to organize events, among them a group outing to the Sultana Downrigging at Chestertown, MD, a sailing tour of the Baltimore harbor, tour of the Solomons Island Maritime Museum, Suicide Bridge Dinner Cruise, a visit with Charlie Johnson's Stanley Steamer restoration shop in Wellsville, Pa, and many more! While they were all great, if I were asked which was my favorite, I'd have to pick the group ride on the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad in our own, private, dining car.

She was elected to be Group Corvair's Vice President starting in 2016 and has held the post ever since. As V.P., she kept a sharp eye on club business.

We will all miss her.

### CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

Check with sponsors on all events for the foreseeable future!

### **April**

20 – Group Corvair (Zoom) Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

### May

- 18 -- Group Corvair Meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 22 NECC Motorsports Track Day, New York Safety Track. Visit <a href="www.neccmotorsports.com">www.neccmotorsports.com</a> for details.

#### June

5 – 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Orphan Car Tour from Burkittsville, MD to Bluemont, VA. Limited to "orphan" cars (discontinued makes – yes, they've said that Corvairs qualify) at least 25 years old. For information: <a href="http://www.orphancartour.org/">http://www.orphancartour.org/</a> or contact Jon Battle, 540-364-1770 or <a href="mailto:tourdirector@orphancartour.org">tourdirector@orphancartour.org</a>. (This will be contingent upon the coronavirus pandemic situation. The organizers will be reviewing things in mid-April so be sure to check their website for updates.)

15 – Group Corvair Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

### July

- 20 Group Corvair Meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 17—23—CORSA National Convention CANCELLED. I believe they plan to put this back into the normal rotation so the next west coast CORSA Convention should now be in 2024. Atlanta, GA will host the convention in 2022.
- 31 NECC Track Day, Pocono Raceway North Course. Visit www.neccmotorsports.com for details.

### **August**

17 – Group Corvair Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

### **September**

21 – Group Corvair Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

#### October

16 – Rockville Antique and Classic Car Show – Tentative.

19 – Group Corvair Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

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## From the Oval Garage Bob Hall

What a difference a few degrees makes if you don't have a heated garage. We're getting into perfect "shade tree mechanic" weather, which is great for oil changes, brake work, and just general maintenance. Ever notice how

much easier it is to unbolt something when it's 70-75 degrees?

On a somber note, Gus Torbert lost his wife Barbara in March. She was Group Corvair's long time Vice President and one of our chief organizers. She was a key part of the 1991 Washington DC convention and everything Group Corvair related before and in the years after 1991. She was also an organizing force for her and Gus's Northwestern High School reunions which my wife (also a NW alum), Carol, and I looked forward to and enjoyed annually. Please keep the Torbert family in your thoughts and prayers. See further remembrances of Barbara below.

Byron LaMotte has suggested a weekend Tech Session on synchronizing carburetors—especially four carb setups--so we are exploring the best place to do this and to see if there are other Corvairs besides Byron's that could benefit. Please email me and Jim Simpson if you are interested in joining us (and let us know if you have been vaccinated against Covid19) so we can firm up a date, time, and place at the end of April or early May. (Masks would still be required, but the CDC says those vaccinated can safely meet).

Stay safe and enjoy driving your appreciating classic Corvairs.



## Minutes of the February Virtual Meeting

**Marolyn Simpson** 

On March 16 Group Corvair held its virtual meeting with eight participants. Members started logging on at 7:30 and Bob Hall called the meeting to order at 7:38 pm. Jim Simpson made a motion to accept the minutes of the February meeting as they appeared in the last newsletter. Bob Walker seconded the motion.

Jim gave the treasurer's report. During the last month, the bank deposits were for dues and there was an expense for Zoom.

Bob H. has been in contact with Barbara Frailey on the garage sale of Pete's tools. Barbara thinks the sale has gone well. There are still some items left including a metal lathe. It is in good condition and parts are still available for it. [Note: the lathe and other tools have been spoken for.]

Bob H. brought up the topic of the Jay Leno video of his '66 Corvair Corsa turbo. It is bright red and looks like it is in good condition although not entirely stock. Among the modifications is a change to an SU carburetor. The bottom line is that Mr. Leno seems to love the car. Several club members had recently seen the video.

The car show season will be starting soon. Jerry Yates brought up a show that will be at the Green Turtle restaurant in Edgewater in April. It is sponsored by the FAA. So far there is no decision on whether the Rockville show will take place this fall.

Several topics came up for discussion. One was on various projects that GC members have had done at the Corvair Ranch. Bob H. has information on a painter used by the Ranch. Others were on Kevlar brakes, brakes used in racing, the status of switching to disc brakes (and brakes in general), and fuel pumps.

Recently there was a fire in a barn on Harry Yarnell's property. (Harry and Carol Yarnell live in Perryman, north of Baltimore.) There was an electrical fire in a barn that destroyed 11 cars, none of them were Corvairs. Adding to the misfortune, he had a large amount of Corvair parts stored in that barn and because they were not associated with any of the cars that were destroyed, insurance did not cover the Corvair parts. If you have a significant collection of cars, parts or just about any collectibles, it might be worth having a conversation with your insurance company.

Jim talked about and article in the new Road & Track magazine (Vol. 4, undated) that gave some background and insight on the famous Corvairs crossing the Darien Gap adventure back in 1961. While the promotional video they produced is fascinating, it doesn't show just how hard it really was.

Jim S. has sorted through a box of the early Corvair newsletters, including some of the very early "Windmill" and "CORSA Quarterlies" from Pete Frailey's collection. After filling out Jim's collection, there are quite a few left (a stack about 10" high), so if anyone is interested in them, let him know.

Dave Edsinger made a motion adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 9:44 pm.

## Forty, Thirty and Twenty Years Ago This Month Jim Simpson

The April 1981 issue of *Group Corvair Comments* was pretty short at thee pages but we did seem to be busy with a Championship autocross and a tech session scheduled along with our regular meetings. The 'Vair Vendor had two cars for sale – a '66 Monza with factory air and a '67 Monza 4-door. And that was about it!

Apparently many CORSA chapters were busy over the winter based upon the April 1981 *CORSA Communiqué*. The issue was devoted to chapter news. Rocky Mountain CORSA issued its invitation to their "Rally to the Rockies" CORSA Convention coming up at the end of July. But the big draw of the *Communiqué* continued to be the CORSA Classifieds – nine pages of cars, parts, and services. Yenko Stingers YS-102 and YS-108 were listed, \$4,500 and \$6,000 respectively.

In April 1991, we were less than four months out from our CORSA Convention. The *Group Corvair Comments* was all about our upcoming CORSA Convention with two pages of reports and plans. Somehow, we also managed to fit in a number of tech tips, mostly picked up from other newsletters. And closing the newsletter were three cars for sale – '63 Spyder coupe, '64 Monza coupe and a '65 500 coupe.

The April 1991 *CORSA Communiqué* cover was definitely in keeping with April Fool's Day featuring a lot full of Corvairs at "Nader Auto Sales". It was staged by the Massachusetts Corvair clubs at a car lot owned by a distant relative of Ralph Nader. On the inside cover were photos of a couple modified cars, one of which had a "continental kit" mounted out back. Seth Emerson had published a letter in the February *Communiqué* that generated several responses. Seth, who lives in San Jose, California at the south end of San Francisco Bay, suggested that based upon emissions, it was no longer appropriate to drive a Corvair as a daily driver. He compared the 800 ppm of hydrocarbons that his well-tuned '65 Monza produced with the 20 ppm that his '86 Corvette produced. Forty times as much pollution. The responses were as you might expect ranging from the equivalent of "they'll have to pry my Corvair from my cold, dead, hand" to it's just not economical to buy a new car. CORSA

didn't seem to be having any problems with candidates for the Board of Directors with 16 people running. In our update on the upcoming Washington CORSA convention, Ward Bourgondien noted that the convention hotel was filling fast. Jean Allan wrote an interesting article about a little-known customized version of the Corvair, the "1963 Lost Cause". Very few were produced, not surprising given the \$19,000 price tag! The CORSA Classifieds were down to four pages compared to the nine a decade earlier.

The April 2001 issue of *Group Corvair Comments* was almost entirely focused on upcoming car shows and rallies. We had details on seven plus listings in the calendar for a handful more. We had four cars being offered ranging from a free '62 project car to a '66 Monza convertible. In addition, Pete Frailey was cleaning house; among the goodies he listed was a "rust free" late model coupe body!

Once again, April Fool's Day was the theme for the cover of the April 2001 issue of the *CORSA Communiqué*. It featured a Corvair-based "Nader Cab Co." car. (Based upon the body work, I believe the car was a SCCA road racer.) Under Tech Topics, several well-known repair shops and vendors weighed in on the apparent decreasing quality of new Corvair fuel pumps. The two repair shop owners said that they had switched to installing electric fuel pumps due to too many failures with the new mechanical pumps. The vendors defended the mechanical pumps but did point out that they had to be manufactured to very high standards. The CORSA Classifieds was a mere shadow of its former glory with only two pages of cars (only 12 for sale), parts and services.

## **Getting to Know Our Members**

Jim & Marolyn Simpson

When we left off last month, we were in Topeka, Kansas, with a new-to-me Corsa turbo. I was about to graduate from college, the Viet Nam war was at its height, and I was trying to decide on my future. A quick talk to the Navy recruiter (his eyes lite up when I said I was getting a degree in physics), a couple interviews in Washington, including with Admiral Rickover, and I was signed up to join the rapidly expanding nuclear submarine fleet.

So, in August 1969, I drove from Topeka, Kansas, to Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Newport, RI. According to my logs, I averaged about 19 mpg and gas was about \$0.39 a gallon. During my four months at OCS, I had a few free weekends, so while in New England I dropped the Corvair off at John Fitch's shop in Falls Village, CT. I had them install most of the items in their catalog that would go on a turbo car – Koni shocks, a Lucas "Flame Thrower" high beam headlight, Aeon progressive rate springs, leather steering wheel wrap, Fitch's quick steering arms, a steering damper and more. But I declined the "904-styled" roof and actual "Sprint" emblems. I liked the looks of the car as it was. And while it was there, I had them diagnose a minor "miss" at idle; that turned out to be a burnt exhaust valve, so they also did a complete valve job.



Next stop after commissioning in December was nuclear power school in Vallejo, California. So, there was another cross-country trip in the Corvair! I knew that Chevrolet had offered quick steering for the Corvair, so I checked with the local Chevy dealer and sure enough, they could order one. When it came in, I made use of the Mare Island Navy Base hobby shop garage and installed it. Between the Fitch quick steering arms and the new steering box, the steering was "responsive"! (I didn't know then that Chevrolet had fast steering arms to match the quick steering box.) Topping it all off was a set of 14-inch wheels and radial tires, Dunlop SP-57 "dog bone" tread ER-70/14 on 6" wide rims up front and GR-60/14 on 7" rims in back. They really transformed the road manners.

Six months later it was time for another road trip. In June 1970, I'd finished the academic portion of my nuclear power training and it was off to Idaho Fall, Idaho for hands-on training. At that time, the Navy had nuclear power prototype reactors out in the desert near Craters of the Moon National Monument. Three of us convoyed from Vallejo to Idaho Falls; two in Corvairs (my '66 turbo and a roommate with a '66 Corsa convertible 140 hp) and the third in a '69 Firebird. We left at midnight – the earliest we could pick up our orders – and we headed east on I-80, flying low climbing the Sierras. We passed just north of Lake Tahoe and crossed into Nevada sometime just before dawn. Nevada didn't have daytime speed limits at the time and we took advantage of it as my gas mileage shows – 15.7 mpg on this trip. We finally called a halt in Pocatello around 3 p.m. and found a motel to get some sleep.

Five of us rented a large house on the edge of Idaho Falls for the six months we were going to be there. The Navy would not allow us to drive to the training site – we were on shift work with a deliberately stressing schedule and in the early days of the program too many sailors had serious crashes due to falling asleep behind the wheel. So as far as work was concerned, it was a bus ride. So that gave me another opportunity to have work done on the Corvair!

This time it was an engine rebuild (at 53,000 miles) to rectify a couple of problems. The first, and most serious, was a stripped spark plug thread in one of the cylinder heads. (My fault, I tried taking a plug out while it was still hot.). The second was a scored cylinder; this one I blame on the first owner. There was a local "expert" and he seemed to do a good job. He did the rebuild using all stock parts while I handled the removal and replacement of the engine in a tiny garage next to the house we had rented. Once the engine was back in the car, I broke it in on the local roads. After following the 500 miles break-in recommended in the owner's manual, I took it for a serious "test drive". I-15 was a brand-new Interstate that ran up through Idaho Falls. It had a beautiful smooth surface, straight, level runs for miles at a time, little traffic, and most importantly few, if any, highway patrol cars. (I don't recall seeing any in the six months I lived out there.) The car cruised just fine at 70 mph. And at 80. And at 90. And then I put my foot into it and watched the boost gage, tachometer, and speedometer climb. At 119 mph and 5500 rpm (keep in mind the larger tires) the engine was still pulling and seemed to want to go faster yet, but I decided it was fast enough and backed off. I just checked my logs and I was averaging just over 16 mpg so there must have been a lot of "low flying" on the roads around there.

And here's another digression. Between the five of us renting the house, we had a rather eclectic mix of cars – my Corsa turbo, a 140 hp Corsa, a Lotus Europa, '69 Firebird, and a Fiat 124 Sport Coupe. Just down the road from our rental house, there was a used car dealer, and we'd periodically check out what was on the lot. One day I spotted a '68 Z-28 Camaro; medium blue that just about matched my Corvair. So, I stopped by to give it a test drive. Back then, the salesman would just toss you the keys and let you go. Frankly, I was a bit let down by the Z-28. It ran, and ran well, but all the power was at the top end, and overall, it just didn't seem any peppier than my Corvair. (Keep in mind that Idaho Falls is at about 4,800' elevation; that's enough to drop the output of a normally aspirated engine. Turbochargers do great at keeping power up even at altitude.) In addition, the handling and braking certainly didn't match my Corvair. So, I thanked the salesman and handed the keys back.

After passing the nuclear power exams (both written and oral) and being certified by both the Navy and the old Atomic Energy Commission as being qualified to run a nuclear power plant, it was off to Submarine School in New London, Connecticut.

So, another 3,800 mile cross-country trip in the Corvair, with stops in Phoenix, Arizona to visit my mother and in Kansas to visit my fiancé, Marolyn. From New London, it was down to Norfolk, Virginia to join my submarine. Six months later, it was up to Portsmouth, New Hampshire with the submarine as she went into a year-long overhaul. (Oh, yes, Marolyn and I were married in the interim...)

Submarine overhauls keep everyone onboard busy, particularly if you are newly assigned young officer. I had effectively three jobs going simultaneously. One was organizing and supervising the portion of the crew under me to carry out their part of the overhaul package. Second was to stand watches to ensure the safety and security of the submarine – that was a full 24 hours every third day. And finally, I had to "qualify in submarines" which meant that I had to study the construction and operation of the submarine so I would be able to operate it once we were back at sea.

So, I didn't have a lot of time on my hands, never-the-less, we did a fair amount of work on the Corvair up in Portsmouth. The original Chevrolet acrylic lacquer just didn't hold up to constant exposure to salt air and other contaminants surrounding Navy bases despite the coats of wax I'd put on it. And the trim was showing the affects of a lot of road miles. So, we had it repainted by the local Ford (!) dealer while the local Chevrolet dealer gave me some decent discounts on buying new trim. (By this time, it was 1972 and I'm sure Chevrolet wanted to unload it's Corvair parts. If I'd only had the foresight, I'm sure I could have stocked up on fast steering boxes, AM/FM radios and other unobtainable pieces.)

When I think back upon it, I'd done a lot of work on the Corvair in those first five years I'd owned it. But it had never actually let me down alongside the road.

But despite all the love and attention, by the mid-1970s the Corsa was getting a bit worn and ready for either replacement or some serious restoration work. By 1974, I'd left active duty with the Navy and we'd moved to the

Washington area and hooked up with Group Corvair so there was something to keep up our enthusiasm over Corvairs. Plus, the used car value of any Corvair in the early-to-mid 1970s was in the few hundred dollars at most so we decided to semi-retire the Corvair and buy a new car for daily use. Actually that decision was forced by the first time the Corvair actually let me down – the clutch pressure plate spring cracked making the clutch engagement rather loose. Sort of like driving a powerglide.

We moved into a house with a garage in 1977 and soon thereafter the restoration began. We found a body shop that took care of some minor rust issues and then we stripped everything from the car with the exception of the headliner. Our enthusiasm carried us to the point that the engine had been completely overhauled (bored cylinders, TRW forged pistons, magnafluxed and balanced lower end and more) and all the suspension had been cleaned, painted, and reassembled ready to install. But then there was still more body work. It was in good shape and we'd had the existing (minimal) rust taken care of, but the underside needed to be stripped of all the dirt, grease, and especially the aftermarket undercoating that had been sprayed on early in its life. Talk about a mess. So there it sat.

(To be continued.)

## **Leaving Your Corvair to Someone?**

Did you know that Maryland allows you to designate a beneficiary on your Corvair's title upon your death? This will transfer the title without it being part of the estate. Check the MVA site <a href="https://mva.maryland.gov">https://mva.maryland.gov</a> for details.

### 'Vair Vendor

**Wanted:** Used steering box. I'm still looking for a used steering box. The particular year is not important, I just want a complete box to rebuild. Do you have a worn out one that I can salvage? Jim Simpson, 240-232-2820, <a href="mailto:simpsonj@verizon.net">simpsonj@verizon.net</a>.

For Sale: Miscellaneous Parts: EM bumper brackets (8 of 10, not bent or otherwise damaged, some surface rust, 11 bumper bolts included, \$10); LM brake shoes (Clark's, full set front and rear, used for less than 50 miles, \$38); '66 single brake master cylinder (Clark's, used for 4 years w/o any problems, \$30); '62-'63 single master brake cylinder for metallic brakes (Delco part #5464275, nearly new, needs secondary seal, \$35); Widened LM wheel (one wheel, 13", widened to 7", stock 5-bolt pattern, \$18); LM rear brake hose (Clark's, new, 2 @ \$10 ea.); '65 – '69 110 Hp heads (pair, complete with valve, springs, etc., cast #3878566, not used since last refurbishment, \$250/pr); EM dipstick boots (2 @ \$3 ea.). Shipping is extra. Contact Bob Walker, bobrstn@gmail.com.

**For Sale:** Two Sets of 13" Custom Wheel Covers. Remember "Racing Covers", "Moon Covers" or "Baby Moons"? From Pete Frailey's estate, there's a new-in-the-box set of spun aluminum "Racing/Moon Covers" including the original instruction sheet. Asking \$30 each, OBO. Proceeds go to Barbara Frailey.



And I also have a set of "Baby Moon" covers, same price (\$30 each, OBO) for sale. Contact Jerry Yates, 301-262-8428 or yatesj@verizon.net.



Spun Aluminum "Racing/Moon Cover"

**For Sale:** Set of four 1965 13" wire wheel covers with three prong spinners in excellent condition plus matching set of six 13" x 5 1/2" steel rims. \$750 plus shipping. Don, 302-313-5552 or Don.lintvet@gmail.com

## **Tech Topics**

**Follow-up on Steering Box Lubrication**: In the January newsletter, I listed a couple possible alternatives for filling the steering box. Apparently, that set off a series of other people to report on their favorites. One that should be mentioned is Alco 00 EP grease. It is a "pourable" grease, manufactured by Spectrum Lubricants, a division of Phillips 66. It is reportedly a 600-weight lube used in tractor and farm equipment gear boxes, and mower differentials. Because it is pourable, it will flow into the recirculating ball area of the steering box. Most farm supply and mower repair stores should stock it.

Another recommendation from our own Mike Coale is John Deere Corn Head Grease, part number AN102562. John Deere describes it as an "extra-soft grade of lubricating grease" being formulated for slow-speed gear cases. It resists water, is excellent over a wide temperature range (-30 to 330 F) and contains anti-rust properties.

**Carburetor Balancing:** The newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Corsa Corvair Club, *The Denver News*, has a good article on carburetor balancing. While this is described in the Corvair shop manuals, this article emphasizes the iterative nature of the process as well as the fact that "balancing" and "synchronizing" are not synonymous. While the article is too long to reproduce here, if you are interested, I can send you a copy. Just drop me an email — <a href="mailto:simpsonj@verizon.net">simpsonj@verizon.net</a>.

**Ignition Condensers:** Apparently there has been an uptick in ignition condenser failures. I guess we shouldn't be too surprised considering how all cars have moved to electronic ignition and only antiques like our Corvairs use them anymore. So, if you have an ignition problem, don't look just at the points, consider swapping the condenser as well. As far as I know, there's no simple way to test them unless you have something like an ignition oscilloscope. (It's been decades since I've seen one of them!) If you need a replacement, don't scrimp, buy a quality brand (Bosch, Echlin, Standard) from a reputable source such as NAPA.

## A Sampling of Murphy's Laws

I'm sure you've seen many of these before, but they are worth repeating:

First, and most important, remember that Murphy was an optimist! Things will always turn out worse.

If there is a possibility of several things going wrong, the one that will cause the most damage will be the one that does go wrong.

If you perceive of four ways something can go wrong, and find a way to circumvent all four, then a fifth way that you haven't prepared for will promptly develop.

If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.

Nature always sides with the hidden flaw.

The degree of stupidity of your actions is directly proportionate to the number of people watching you at the time.

## **CORSA YouTube Channel**

In case you haven't heard, CORSA has its own **YouTube** Channel. It's relatively new, but so far there are five videos ready to view. Four of the videos are recordings of CORSA monthly Meet-Up Zoom events, the latest is a primer on replacing the front windshield lower channel.

To find the CORSA Channel, go to <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf2gOCkRq2GLOHDhHBgvTXA">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf2gOCkRq2GLOHDhHBgvTXA</a> and look for the large "C" on a green circular background.

And while you are out "cruising the net", go over to the CORSA web site (<a href="www.corvair.org">www.corvair.org</a>) and take look at the new merchandise that CORSA is offering. This includes a whole new line of apparel including T-shirts, Sweatshirts, Polo shirts, pullovers, and ball caps. And there is more to come. Plus, as a CORSA member, you get a discount! (There's a direct link to the merchandise: <a href="https://shop.primodesigns.net/corsa/shop/home">https://shop.primodesigns.net/corsa/shop/home</a>



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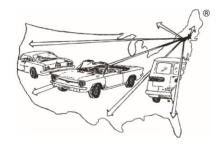
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Rob Neighbour took his '66 convertible out for a drive in the country.