



Group Corvair Comments

GROUP CORVAIR'S NEWSLETTER FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA



VOLUME L, No. 3

March 2022



Lowrider, reportedly in Japan.

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

March

15 – (The Ides of March!) – **Group Corvair Meeting**, 7:30 p.m. It will be another Zoom meeting! Details for joining in the meeting will be sent to all members the weekend before. (If you don't get them, contact Jim Simpson.)

April

19 -- **Group Corvair Meeting**. Perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic will have receded to the point where we might be able to consider an in-person meeting?

May

17 – **Group Corvair Meeting**

June

21 – Group Corvair Meeting.

July

12 – 16 – CORSA International Convention, Peachtree City, GA. Host hotel is the Crowne Plaza Atlanta SW Peachtree City Hotel and Conference Center. Convention rates are \$119 + taxes; the hotel is taking reservations via IHG reservations at 877-227-6963. Use the Group Name: CORSA and the Group Code: TUS for these rates.

19 – Group Corvair Meeting.

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From the Oval Garage

Bob Hall

Unfortunately, I was AWOL from our February meeting because of other obligations that took too long to complete, but I understand from Jim and Jerry that there was good discussion of possible activities that included some face-to-face activities including our cars this spring.

Sunday March 13th is the first day of Daylight Savings Time in 2022. For those of us who don't have a garage it is the first day of the annual peak of Corvair projects because of the extra hour of day light (unless you start your work at dawn) and warmer weather.

I've continued to sort through my Corvair treasures but haven't done any real work on my cars (except the water pumpers) for the past few weeks. I've been tempted to scrap my A.I.R. [Air Injection Reactor – ed.] parts, but I'm concerned that if I do the federal government will require that the original smog equipment on my '68 be in working condition. The only thing worse than having too many parts is getting rid of them and then discovering six months later that you now have to look for and pay for a part that you once had. There is a corollary to Murphy's Law for every situation.

If you are looking for anything Corvair please let me know or let Jim know so he can list your request in the newsletter.

Bob

Minutes of the February Virtual Meeting

Marolyn Simpson

Group Corvair is still meeting virtually on Zoom. At 7:35 members starting logging into the February 15 meeting with the final count being six. There was general conversation while we were waiting for folks to join the meeting. Topics included the lift in Phil Richardson's garage and Bob Walker getting his car running even though it still needs more work. Don Hibbard said he still plans to have club members over to his house, but no time has been set. He also gave an update on the condition of his car after it was used in a recent Disney movie. It did suffer some paint damage from the attachment of cameras and related equipment during the filming. He is having repairs done; apparently the fees they paid for using the car will be more than enough to cover it.

Since our president was unable to attend the meeting, Jim Simpson started the official meeting at 7:55. There were no corrections to the minutes as reported in the January newsletter. As part of the treasurer's report, Jim noted that several members had already paid dues for 2022. Since we decided not to charge dues this year, the money will be applied to next year. Jim has notified those members that they are now paid up through next year. Jim made a motion to pay the Corsa chapter dues of \$35; Jerry Yates seconded it. The motion passed.

Don said that he would like to host the club at his house when the weather is warmer. He suggested possibly grilling on the patio. The plans will be discussed further in late April or early May.

We still have a vacancy for the position of vice president. If anyone is interested, please notify one of the club officers or bring it up at a meeting.

The Camaro Club is planning to have another show, this time near Frederick. (Their last one was in Annapolis Junction.) As an improvement, the official judging will take place where the car is parked instead of in a separate area. Last year many of the cars missed out on some of the people's choice votes because they were not on the show field.

There was some discussion on several topics. These included brakes and various types of brake fluid, electric fuel pumps, and the Pertronix II ignition test experiment.

Phil has been working on his white '69, one of three he owns. It's currently in the body shop for minor repairs and new paint. He said he may go back to using 13-inch wheels. A discussion on 13-, 14-, or 15-inch wheels followed.

There was a motion to adjourn. The Zoom meeting ended at 8:40.

Member Reports

Curt Shimp

Why a Corvair??

Why indeed. Already as a teenager in the 50's I was a car guy. Before I was 16 and could drive, I was pulling engines with a homemade A frame and taking them apart. I was not so good at putting them back together. Every year there were major changes in cars with ever bigger engines, multiple carbs, and fuel injection of which I had 2. Power and noise that is what I wanted. Then off to the service and when I got back it was a first year 409 strictly for the drag strip.

My commute to work was fairly long and my new 400 CID Oldsmobile with a 3:89 gear got poor mileage and so I thought I would get an economical commuter car for work. I found a guy who was willing to trade his '62, 102 hp, 4 speed, Monza coupe for a '56 Corvette with a blown engine. I enjoyed this car beyond the good gas mileage but did not really bond with it. That is, I kept my hands off the engine, wheels/tires, exhaust, and suspension. After all it was supposed to be just a commuter car. What I really did like about it was light steering and maneuverability. In the winters in the Chicagoland area I would often challenge my buddies to a drag race in the snow. I quickly took to over-steer and thought that all cars should exhibit this type of handling. I even had my favorite Corvair corner on a remote country road. I could get the rear end to hang out a bit and kind of drift through the corner. Soon bored with my Olds 442 I bought a new '67 Camaro with wide oval tires, quick steering (it was manual, ugh), and positrac. Just for kicks I thought I would take it out to my favorite Corvair corner. It had so much under steer that I plowed right off the road and into the corn field. I kept the car less than a year.

And then my brother-in-law invited me to go to watch an autocross or Gymkhana. I was hooked. This was a sport that I had to get into. There were a number of car clubs in the area, usually marquee specific, that joined to host these events on a rotating basis. There were usually one to two events each month from spring to fall. But what kind of car to get? The British sports cars cost more than \$3,000, way too much for me. Besides when they went around tight corners the inside rear wheel would lift up, the tire would spin in the air, and the car went nowhere. I did not want a car like that. Then one day I came across an older British car magazine. In it they had a technical article about Chevrolet's 2nd generation Corvair. They were really impressed by the new suspension. They went into details about the double-jointed half shafts, the, I think, trapezoid movement of the rear suspension that kept the rear wheels vertical during compression and rebound, and the width between the wheels compared to the length of the car. They noted that Pontiac had a marketing term called "wide track". They said the new Corvair for its

length was even wider. But the one feature that sold me was the roll center. They said the roll center, the horizontal axis running lengthwise through the car around which the car wanted to rotate (i.e., rollover), was so low that it was below ground. Impossible I thought. But I had to have this car.

So off to the dealers to get all the brochures I could. No Internet then on which to do my research. I was pleasantly surprised at what Chevrolet offered on this car. They had features like positrac, F41 suspension, 4 speed, quick steering, and a 4-carb engine, wow. I never had a car before that had more than 3 carbs. So, I ordered a 500 with all the go-fast goodies. Back then you did not have to buy from a couple of trim levels. You had a menu of every option Chevrolet offered and you could check the boxes for the ones you wanted. No need to get a vinyl roof if you wanted an FM radio. And best of all I got it for about \$2,200. Take that you Brits. Why a 500 instead of a Monza or CORSA? Well, my girlfriend could not sit next to me if I had bucket seats. We had this arrangement where I could keep my arm around her, I would work the pedals, and she would do the shifting. Oh yea, this is about the Corvair.

Soon after I took delivery of my new Corvair I began to auto cross with it. At the very first event I was approached by a guy driving a Yenko Stinger, whatever that was, who asked if I wanted to join a Corvair Club and so I did. So now I had a not only a new venue in which to immerse myself but also a group of people to share my enthusiasm and provide much wanted information about this rear engine, 4 carb, flat six powered car.

Okay, so that is how I got into Corvairs. But in 10 short years I had already owned 15 different cars a number of which, like Corvettes, that most would consider more desirable. First, I really bonded with this car spending hours working on it to make it more competitive at the autocross events. Things like making sure the fan belt flew off on the first shift, lots of negative camber, aftermarket quick steering arms on top of the quick steering box, stock looking 13" Corvair wheels that had been widened and the questionable practice of rubbing sticky resin on the tires before each run. Then there is the uniqueness of the car. But most of all it was the social life and friendship of fellow Corvair owners that came along with ownership. And now, almost 60 years later with continuous Corvair ownership, I still communicate with and visit those very first club members.

I can't end this story without some closure on that first Corvair. Remember my favorite Corvair corner? I took the new Corvair there with the expectation of more of the same, that is, a graceful slide through the corner. But no, that did not happen, and I was disappointed. So, 3 more times I entered this corner each time upping the speed and still nothing until it dawned on me that the Corvair was going through the corner right where I pointed it, no under steer, no over-steer and at a much higher speed. So how did the Corvair do at autocross events? Mine and other Corvairs were very competitive in the late 60's and through the 70's. Cars were separated into a number of classes and then by street tires or racing tires. I often won best time of the day against all makes and models that raced on street tires. It got to the point where the Corvair was set up strictly for auto crossing, so I bought another late model for my everyday driver. Eventually Illinois rust got to that first, new Corvair and I sold it. So, what happened to the replacement Corvair I bought in 1975? I still have it and can say that I have driven it to the 4 corners of the US and down into Mexico. In addition to CORSA I have been a member of 7 different Corvair clubs. And still, the Corvair experience has not ended for me. I currently have a number of projects both active and planned for my Corvair. I also am planning on attending 5 Corvair events this year in my Corvair that range from Colorado to Georgia. So, in the words of Sonny & Cher, "And the Beat Goes on".

(Curt Ship would win the "long distance" award hands-down if he ever came to one of our meetings. After a career with Mobil Oil in the Virginia suburbs, he retired and moved to Silver City, New Mexico. But he retains his connection to the area and is a dues-paying member of Group Corvair as well as being a regular attendee of the CORSA International Conventions. Among his current projects is a "big bore" Corvair engine.)

Phil Richardson

Phil sent an update on the restoration of his 1969 500 coupe. It's serial 3153 (out of 6000) which puts it just about in the middle of the last year of Corvair production. He reported that it's been in the shop for about six weeks so far for body work and paint. It's mostly stripped down to bare metal except for the tail end. The front and roof are all done and in primer with just a few minor dings to repair. The doors, hood and rear decklid are all done and primed and the interior parts cleaned and painted. Cowl panels have also been media-blasted and primed for paint.

The only unwelcome surprises so far have been a sizeable dent in the passenger door that had just been filled with Bondo and some rust holes in the driver's side lower pillar rear window channel. The shop removed the Bondo and correctly repaired the door dent and cut out and rewelded the rust areas. Phil says they did a great job on that, and it looks perfect. Otherwise, the front and rear window channels look better than Phil expected.

Phil says the shop is making good progress and that he's really looking forward to it being done.



(Phil Richardson is probably our second farthest out member. He lives in Port Republic, down near Patuxent Naval Air Station. He's held various positions in Group Corvair including President as well as a stint as the newsletter editor. His major claim to fame in the Corvair world is being the owner of 0.05% of the total number of 1969 Corvairs ever made. He owns 3, one of which is a parts car.)

Mike Coale

Mike Coale and I (Jim Simpson) had a recent exchange of emails talking about things Corvair and the following is a quick summary.

Mike started chasing and collecting Corvairs about 10 years ago. He's learned a lot about them over the years including what are an amazing number of changes between model years including what seem to be just running changes. For instance, he noted that the doors for every year from at least '65 – '68 are different even though the cars are outwardly the same. In '66, the doors gained an extra hole for a modified window regulator. The outside mirror placement changed somewhat as well. And of course the '67 and '68 doors are each different from the '65-'66 doors. *(According to the Chevrolet Corvair parts book the '65 and '66 doors are interchangeable, the '67 is unique and the '68 and '69 doors are interchangeable again. But you can be sure there were both plant-to-plant differences along with various running changes.)*

He reports that the cars have become too expensive now, something he says he never thought he would say. Cars that he paid \$500 ten years ago, are now bringing \$2,500. Even good doors are bringing \$500 each.

That said, Mike had reached 18 at one point and is now starting to think about thinning his collection and settle in on his "keepers". Among the ones likely to go are a pair of '65 convertibles (one Corsa, one Monza) and a '64 convertible.

And Mike collects cars other than Corvairs. He estimates that he has about ten other cars and trucks and is still looking for more. One in particular would be a very clean '65 – '72 Cadillac, preferably a Fleetwood.

(Mike Coale is the third-generation owner and proprietor of Coale's Automotive in Millersville, MD. The business started with his grandfather, Bob Coale, with "Bob's Garage", a one pump, one-bay service station in Crownsville. Mike now runs a 5,000 sq-ft facility with four car lifts, a 18,000 lbs. truck lift with full-service, state-of-the-art facilities including for diagnostics, alignment, and air-conditioning. And he's an avid collector of Corvairs.)

An Objective Look at Corvair Safety

Bob Hall

The following article is almost 55 years old, but still resonates. I don't have access to the "hush hush New York insurance study" the author cites, but I worked for GEICO in the 70s and have had insurance on my Corvairs for 50+ years and our cars have always had low insurance rates both liability and comp and collision. They were the same as six-cylinder Mustangs, Falcons, Darts etc. and lower than a V8 Mustang in the past. Statistically Corvairs have not been less safe to drive than contemporary vehicles. But then you know that. Bob.

Corvair May Gain Niche in History as Safest Car (July 1967)

Joseph M. Callahan

"Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell toll; it tolls for thee."

Substitute "car's death" for "man's death" in the above quotation from John Donne and you describe the scene in Detroit today, as the Corvair hovers between life and death.

Currently it appears that there will be a 1968 Corvair. Pete Estes, Chevrolet General Manager, continues to insist inside and outside GM that Chevrolet will build the Corvair as long as there's a market for it.

But that the Corvair's existence should even be in question is a sad situation, diminishing almost everyone — the auto industry; the critical authors; all past, present, and potential future Corvair owners; the reporters who thoughtlessly echoed the irresponsible charges against the car; the legislators who indirectly used it to secure their safety legislation; the lawyers who unsuccessfully tried to "convict" the car in court; Ed Cole, Corvair's creator and GM executive vice-president and Kai Hansen, Chevrolet staff engineer on the Corvair.

There's no reason why the latter two shouldn't have been as proud of this car as the Ford engineers were of the Mustang.

And all Americans may be a little diminished and chagrined in the next few years, for there's a good chance that, as we learn more about auto safety, the Corvair will become known as the safest—and most defamed—car in American history.

These are strange and almost fighting words in this country where all other cars are built with front engines. But as the auto companies learn more about collapsible or energy-absorbing front ends, they're finding out that, if all other things are equal, the "crushable" (and consequently, the safest car) has these features:

- 1, No engine in the front end because the engine block just refuses to fold up at either a controlled or uncontrolled rate. Thus, an abrupt and high G-force jolt is imparted to occupants when the engine smacks an obstacle.
2. The largest percentage of weight in the rear end. This is a subtle and not widely understood factor that permits the rear-engine car to methodically grind its nose into a barrier, so that the car absorbs more of the energy of impact and the occupants absorb less.

Some hints that the Corvair actually is safer than many other cars are just appearing. One example was the hush-hush New York insurance study which recently show the Corvair to be among the safest cars driven in this country today.

Frankly, the Corvair doesn't especially appeal to this reporter. But the US, auto industry and the entire motoring public are much poorer today because of the assault on the Corvair.

GM, Cole and Hansen had the guts to try something different. And they're being roasted almost solely because they were different. The incentive for any company or any engineer to suggest a different type of car—or even a different component—is greatly reduced. And how else do you ever build better cars or components?

One of the most common complaints about today's cars is their sameness. Yet, many of these same complainers criticized the Corvair for its differentness.

When Corvair was introduced eight years ago, one engineer interpreted them as "an experiment—an effort to strike out in a new direction to determine if such a car could succeed in the U.S. market."

None of us guessed that the Corvair's existence would be threatened by writers and legislators and that this car would become an instrument for raising doubt about all U.S. cars.

Could anyone have guessed that the Corvair would become the focal point the cause celebre of a Congressional probe into the industry's performance in the realm of vehicle safety? Car buyers are getting slightly safer vehicles as a consequence. But we're still only on the fringe of solving the national traffic problem.

Corvair owners, an intensely loyal group, are being diminished because their judgment and taste have been ridiculed, and their property is being depreciated by the harsh criticism.

The law firms and the individual attorneys who tried systematically and confidently to start and to win more than 100 Corvair lawsuits and to separate GM from a few of its millions were also diminished. Their time and energy have all gone for naught, as GM has won all but one of the five Corvair design cases that went to the jury. The verdict in one case was against GM, but this decision was later set aside by the trial judge.

Possibly, America's judicial system is the one entity that hasn't been diminished by the Affair Corvair. In several sections of the country and in several quite different cases, the Corvair—America's first automotive defendant—has been found not guilty.

It appears that whether you're a rich underdog or a poor overdog isn't nearly so important in the courts as the honesty of your case.

Vair Vendor

For Sale: Pair of steel automobile ramps, \$40. Bob Hall, 301 213 9852, HallGrenn@aol.com

For Sale: (\$500 Price Reduction!) Five Clark's reproduction real wire wheels. Four used with Maxxis 185/80-13 tires and one new in the box. Four early model adapters, two knockoffs, and a lead hammer. One of the used wheels and one adapter has damaged teeth and notches. A 17-page PDF file with more details and many pictures available. Asking \$3000/OBO (\$500 price reduction), located near Petersburg, VA. Contact Wade Lanning at wblanning@comcast.com or call/text 804-586-1023.



The Early-Model Corvair Influenced Many Car Designs Including This Japanese Hino "Contessa". Bob Hall

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Our catalog lists over 15,000 parts for your Corvair. We carry engine parts, body panels, upholstery and much more! There are 1,000's of reproduced items available, pages of technical information and lots of other helpful hints.



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