



Group Corvair Comments

GROUP CORVAIR'S NEWSLETTER FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA



VOLUME LIII, No. 10

October 2025



Hubert A. "Smitty" Smith

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

October

- 18 – Rockville Antique and Classic Car Show. The gate opens at 8:30 a.m. and all cars MUST be on the field by 11:00 a.m. – no exceptions! Spectators are free and they have shuttle buses from the outlying parking.
- 21 -- Group Corvair On-Line Meeting. 7:30 p.m.
- 28 – Group Corvair Social Luncheon. We're planning on one but want to poll the members first.

November

18 -- Group Corvair On-Line Meeting. 7:30 p.m.

TBD – Group Corvair Social Meeting. Keep an eye on your email.

December

16 -- Group Corvair On-Line Meeting. 7:30 p.m.

TBD – Group Corvair Holiday Social. Time to start planning!

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From the Oval Garage

Bob Hall

We got to see Randy Riktor's 1966 red Corsa convertible when he drove it to our September luncheon which was again at the Green Turtle in Burtonsville. Some of our experts gave it a quick look before we went in for lunch—see photo. If you come to the Rockville Antique and Classic car show on Saturday, October 18th, you'll be able to take a closer look yourselves. After a nice late lunch Bob Walker was awarded another AC blue oil filter for driving the longest distance to attend.

The 2026 CORSA convention was our main topic of discussion during and after our meal. Ron Fedorczak provided publications about the Gettysburg area, the Wyndham Hotel that will host us, and organizational information from several of the last conventions for perspective as we move forward with our planning.

There have been two meetings, October 1st and October 8th, to firm up responsibilities for individual events. To confirm, Group Corvair will be handling the Cruise In/Peoples' Choice on Monday. Individual GC members will then be free to work on the other events for which they have volunteered. Phil Richardson has begun talking with Titus Stewart about the model concourse event.

CORSA will provide vests for us during the Cruise In/Peoples' Choice event. Jim and I have been pushing for clarity on how soon the hotel will allow us to close off the parking area on Sunday, the day before the event, and Titus Stewart is in full support and will discuss this (among a few hundred other questions) with the hotel when CORSA meets with the manager on October 17th and 18th.



We continue to work with CORSA and the other sponsoring clubs to pin down details on things like signage, tables, tents, etc. and we'll keep our club informed.

One final point concerns room registration. Titus has pointed out that CORSA's contract will include a minimum block of rooms that they must pay for and which helps determine how much support the hotel will provide our convention. Anyone reserving a room before our registration opens (sometime in January) will not be included in that block of rooms and will hurt our position with the hotel. Please wait to reserve a room until CORSA opens registration.

I've penciled in our next social luncheon meeting for Tuesday, October 28th, subject to confirmation after we've polled club members for their availability. Watch for an email with details.

Minutes of the September Virtual Meeting

Marolyn Simpson

On September 16, eight Group Corvair members started logging into the 7:30 p.m. Zoom meeting. Prior to the official start of the meeting, Carl Kelsen told us about his progress in overhauling the engine in his unique, Australian-rules, right-hand drive Corvair. Carl has been working with a one-man shop, the sole owner/employee who seems to be happy to have Carl there to provide technical advice. The engine is out, and they are slowly disassembling it looking for any issues. Carl's now ready to take the heads off. He has some concerns about just how to clean the inside of an oil cooler. Dave Edsinger offered his advice. Carl noted that he had found a local company that cleaned and leak-tested oil coolers; he was likely going to use their services. Several members had some tips to offer Carl.

At 7:48 pm Bob Hall, president, officially called the meeting to order. There were no corrections to the minutes, and they were accepted as written in the newsletter. Jim Simpson gave the treasurer's report; there were no changes—no income or expenses—for the last month.

Concerning the 2026 convention, Dave was volunteered to help with the autocross—he accepted. Carl said that he would be happy to give a presentation; he has several topics in mind.

Group Corvair will take charge of the first day car show. This will be a variation on the normal CORSA convention "Car Display" and operate with a less formal set of rules and be more of a cruise-in style car event or people's choice display. It will be on Monday evening, the first day of the convention and will be part of the welcome party. Jim showed an image of the hotel and parking lot on the screen so members could see the layout of the area. We discussed the available space; a quick count of the marked parking spaces shows we could comfortably fit about 240 cars in the area. We have been told there will be 10 trophies awarded. At this point we don't know if there will be any classes or just awards for the top 10 vote winners.

The Harley Davidson lot, which has been chosen for the autocross, is close to the hotel but is smaller than we usually use.

Dave Edsinger said he will look into getting the track for the valve cover races.

The Wyndham Hotel in Gettysburg has experience hosting car shows. It shares a common area with a Courtyard by Marriot, the Gateway Family Diner, and the R/C Gateway Theater. These facilities are surrounded by quite a few parking lots plus there are several undeveloped grassy areas that might be available for the various events.

We still have not seen a sample of the official convention T-shirt.

Our next social meeting will be lunch on September 23. Bob said he would send out the details in a few days.

[Note: The social meeting was at the Green Turtle Restaurant in Burtonsville.]

Jim gave a report of his experience with Vair Tex instrumentation. Pete Faulkner and Jim have been collaborating on a module to control LED dash lighting that has been prototyped and seems to work quite well.

The meeting ended at 8:45 pm.

You Do Want some Group Corvair Apparel!

Group Corvair is going to purchase another batch of club logo apparel. We're evaluating a couple sources, one local and the other a mail-order company where we purchased our last ones some 15 years ago. We can't match exactly the ones we got back then since they are no longer made, but we will look for good quality materials that stand up to wear and are easy to clean.

The default color will be white so our logo stands out and so they can be worn in the sun without overheating. We also plan to get ballcaps. Apparently, the logo will have to be simplified to fit on a hat, but it still should be recognizable as Group Corvair's. We're not entirely sure about pricing – best guess right now is in the \$30 range for a polo shirt and \$15 - \$20 for ballcaps.



Right now, we need a count of how many people want them and a general idea of quantities. Don't forget, Group Corvair is a sponsor of the week-long CORSA Convention in Gettysburg next year and you might want a change of clothes. And of course, your significant other will want some matching apparel as well!

So send a note to Mark Shiffler (mshiphty@gmail.com), Bob Hall (HallGrenn@aol.com), and me, Jim Simpson (simpsonj@verizon.net) so we can start putting an order together. We will get back to everyone to get final numbers and sizes as well as the prices before we put in any orders.

A Big Loss in the Corvair Community

**Wade Lanning, Central Virginal Corvair Club
with additions by Jim Simpson, Group Corvair**

As most of you know by now, Hubert A. "Smitty" Smith of Virginia Beach passed away on September 18 following a recent decline in health. He was a person of exceptional talent, qualities and character, as well as a giant in the Corvair community with many, many friends from coast to coast. Just the mention of "Smitty" at any Corvair show or on the many Corvair forums, people knew of him even without giving his last name.

Smitty is survived by his wife, Helen, of 70 years, four daughters and three grandchildren. He served in the Navy for 31 years, retiring as a Senior Chief Petty Officer.

He was a major figure in the Tidewater Corvair Club since its inception in the 1970's and was a member of CORSA over the same period, and also a member of the Central Virginia Corvair Club for many years.

Smitty and Helen attended many Corvair events over those 50 years in Virginia, surrounding states and across the country. They attended the very first Virginia Vair Fair in Waynesboro in 1980 and the most recent Vair Fair in Richmond this past April, both times driving their '64 Spyder convertible. In addition to Corvairs, he had an old model railroad that ran around the wall in their living room and also collected antique telephones. Below are some memories his friends have shared.

From Allen Bristow: I met Smitty when I was 12 years old. I already owned two Corvairs by then. The first one I bought for 75 bucks with my own money at 10 years old. Anyway, my dad started taking me to the local Corvair club meetings at Hutchins Chevrolet in downtown Newport News. The first meeting a member came up to my dad and said this is not a babysitting place. My dad said he owns the Corvair not me. Smitty quickly came to my defense.

Our friendship grew from there. He and Helen became my second set of parents. Smitty taught me so much about fabrication and mechanics. We had so much fun at the first Virginia Vair Fair in Waynesboro. We traveled together to car shows all over the country in our Corvairs. It's been a tough summer losing my dear car friends. It's hard getting older and now it's my turn to share my knowledge to a younger generation. There

is still a need to know how to set dwell, rebuilding a carburetor or how to spray lacquer paint. God speed Smitty. 92 years well lived and you set an example of how a marriage should be 70 wonderful years. Gonna miss ya.

From David Robertson: The first Vair Fair I ever attended was the one in '83 in Richmond. While the only person I remember meeting there was Allen Bristow, I clearly remember seeing Smitty's yellow with black trim '64 convertible that he had modified. He had even added air conditioning to it. I was impressed. He and Helen racked up many miles in that car, and it was a familiar sight at many a show.

Most of us know 'Spike', the '64 coupe that Smitty built into a racecar. Paul Whelan and he drove it at numerous events and had many adventures in it. Smitty was serious about building the best cars he could with what he had and about competing in events, but he always kept his sense of humor and playfulness. Since he was over 70 at the time, Smitty painted '70+' on the car as its number. One time, he mounted the top of an old Briggs and Stratton lawnmower engine to the turbo air cleaner on Spike, complete with pull cord. He took great delight in messing with people, actually convincing some it was how he started the car!

Paul and Tina used to host a get-together at the farm in Dinwiddie every September. One of the highlights was the autocross in the field. One time, Smitty convinced me to ride with him in Spike before the autocross started. As we got going, he asked innocently, "Dave, how well does your Corsa boost?" "Well," I started to answer. I never finished, as just then the old joker floored it and we blasted off across the field. I was partly terrified and partly delighted and ended up laughing like an idiot.

Smitty was always an 'early' fan. Seems I remember him referring to 'lates' as 'aftermarket' Corvairs and saying they made good engine donors for earlies. This was all in good fun. At the Racers' Reunion at VIR in 2002, it was incredibly hot. It was so hot that a tired Smitty actually accepted a ride in the silver Corsa convertible that the Whelans used to drive. I think he said not to tell anyone.

Smitty was an excellent writer. His literary work appeared in the Tidewater Corvair Club's newsletter regularly, in the *CORSA Communique* often, and occasionally in our CVCC newsletter. I especially enjoyed his recounting of Helen's and his journey to Alaska in a Corvair van, which appeared in the Communique.

Another great story was his retelling of the many challenges encountered while building his customized '1964' station wagon. I believe the title was, "*The Pursuit of Excellence or Exercise in Insanity*". Smitty and Helen went on to put countless miles on that wagon, often pulling their compact camper, which was painted to match the car. The couple and his wheeled creation showed up everywhere. That included our Goat's Milk III tour. At one stop in the mountains, I was playing photographer, trying to get some dramatic shots while Smitty was walking back and forth on the other side of the road. I yelled something to the effect of, "What's wrong?". He made a big circular motion with his hand. My response was, "Huh? What does that mean?" Turns out that was Smitty sign language for, "I lost a wheel cover."

Smitty may have racked up more miles behind the wheel of a Corvair than anyone else. Certainly, he had to be near the top of the list. In all those miles, things did go wrong and things did break, but he never let any problem, big or small, deter him from pressing on. Any breakdown was a learning experience, an obstacle to be overcome through ingenuity and persistence. His knowledge was often gained the hard way, through personal experience.

On the old Virtual Vairs mailing list, the 'Vairologist' was a regular and prolific contributor, freely dispensing his wisdom and opinions to the world, opening each post with 'Smitty says...'. I never got involved in the newer forums, though I'm sure he did. My enthusiasm dimmed after Mark Ellis' untimely passing, but Smitty's never did, no matter what challenges he and Helen faced. Even a near fatal crash several years ago that destroyed his beloved wagon could not stop him. Old age did slow him down, as it does all of us, but he continued to pursue his passion until nearly the end. On his many journeys he made countless friends and touched many lives. Worked hard, helped all that he could, but had a hell of a good time, too.

From Wade Lanning: I first met Smitty at the inaugural Virginia Vair Fair in 1980, where he had driven his 64 Spyder convertible. It was an unforgettable experience for me to meet someone with so much enthusiasm for Corvairs. As I recall he was still using the Spyder as a daily driver to go to work. I vividly remember that he told me in his special way he had "restored it, concourse-ed it, gymkhana-ed it and autocross-ed it, but was

always trying to bring it up”. What an inspirational person! Over the many years since then I would look forward to seeing him & Helen at Corvair shows, where they were always surrounded by their friends.

He was a reliable source about a wide range of Corvair topics. As the current newsletter editor for CVCC, I was very grateful a few years ago when he told me he would submit an article every month. Then not too long ago he apologized to me when he said he could no longer do it due to his health and energy level.

Smitty could captivate an audience of people in person, and had the amazing ability to write fascinating stories and articles, especially about their Corvair travels, many of which had unplanned adventures (also called breakdowns). In addition to Corvair articles, at the encouragement of his family he wrote his life story totaling very interesting 46 pages of reading.

From Russ Davis: One special, funny thing I remember is when we were at a national convention in Portland. Smitty’s fan bearing had gone bad and I jumped in to help. What really impressed me is that Smitty had made a gauge out of a Cheerios cereal box to measure the distance from the block to the bottom of the bearing hub where the fan mounts so it would be correct when we put it back together. It was hotter than hell and we were wearing out quickly. Smitty grabbed the turkey roaster and started to put it back on. I grabbed the fan and said....”Uh, Smitty, should we put this on first?” He said, “damn it Russ, don’t tell nobody.” Sorry Smitty but you can’t beat me now. We probably all have done this or started to in the past. Smitty give ‘em hell up there driving around in your ‘64 wagon.

From Jim Simpson: The front-page photo of Smitty in his full US Navy uniform reveals a lot of how Smitty was formed. In case you aren’t familiar with Navy ranks, he was a Senior Chief Petty Officer with a Naval Aviation Structural Mechanic specialty. I’m assuming that is where he picked up a lot of his mechanical expertise keeping those Navy aircraft flying. Each of those gold strips on his sleeve were for four years of honorable service. While it’s hard to make out his ribbons, I’m pretty sure I can see that he earned a Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Navy Unit Commendation, Meritorious Unit Commendation, and a Vietnam Service Medal. But most interesting are the “wings” above the ribbons – if I am correct, that’s a US Navy/USMC Combat Aircrew Badge indicating he was part of a crew flying combat missions, I assume in Vietnam.

But the right-hand photo shows Smitty in what I always thought of him in his native dress. Relaxed and talking about Corvairs. The photo is from the 1988 Group Corvair Fall Flea Fair. That’s Jack Dempsey on the right. I remember him leading the pack that came up from Tidewater. He was a regular attendee at our flea markets.

I was always a bit in awe of how he modified his cars. I have a photo – which of course I can’t locate now – of his “dual Carter YH” carburetor installation on “Spike”, his race car. Hey, if one carb is good, two in parallel must be better. And he told me about how he would use a bunch of bungee cords on the rear suspension



Smitty’s Final Vair Fair, Still Wearing that Impish Grin
April 2025, Richmond, VA
(Photo Courtesy of Andy Thornton)

trailing arms of his “64” Lakewood while autocrossing to limit their downward travel. His naval aviation mechanical skills sure helped.

From Bob Lewis: He served our country many years in the U S Navy, and I always thanked him for his service every time I saw him. Smitty was always there if someone needed help with Vair problems. He helped me out many times through the years, he knew Corvairs inside and out. Smitty knew what made them tick! I send my condolences, love, and prayers to his family.

God Bless them all, Rest in peace my friend, Bob Lewis

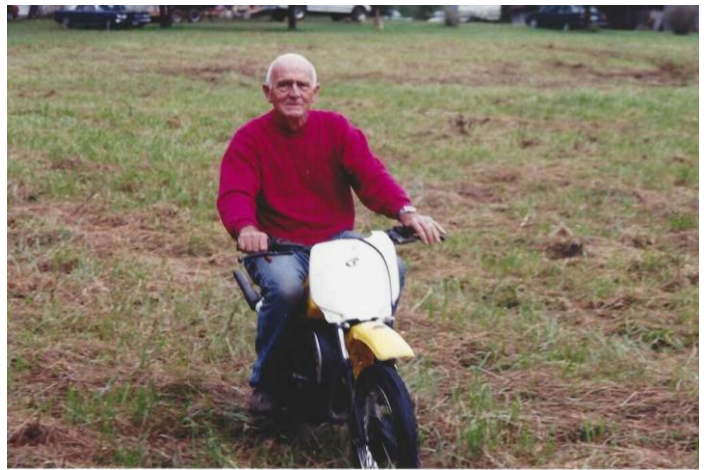
From Curt Shimp: Smitty was a mechanical expert. My favorite “Smitty” Smith tech tip of the month was to hold up a crankshaft vertically and tap it with a hammer. If it rings like a bell, it is good to use. If it does not, it may not be good. I still use this simple check. Note, I can no longer hold a crankshaft up with one hand, so I hang it with a piece of rope... Curt

Smitty was a true celebrity in the Corvair community and will be forever missed.

(Below are some pictures for reminiscing.)



Smitty captivating an audience at the 2004 Whelan Farm Picnic



Smitty Showing his Hell's Angels Skills at the Whelan Farm Picnic.



Smitty's "1964" Monza Station Wagon at the 1991 CORSA International Convention in New Carrollton, MD

(No, Chevrolet didn't make a Corvair Station Wagon in 1964. Yes, this was registered as a '64.)



Smitty, Helen, "De-O-Gee", and Spike the Corvair at the 2010 Vair Fair in Leesburg

Tech Topics

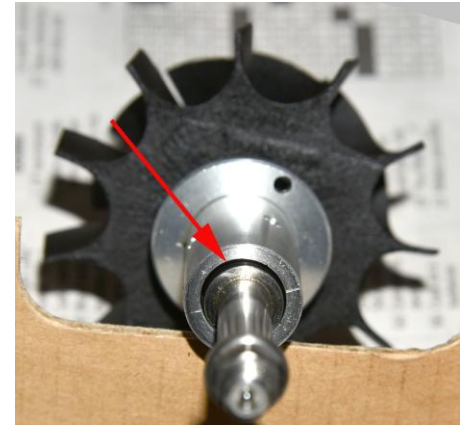
Jim Simpson

When do you shift? Mike Coale brought this up with me. He's acquired a '61 Greenbrier and noted that it has shift points marked on the speedometer. That brought up the question of just which ones had these. Was this common to all Greenbriers? Or was there something special about his? I did some research and found copies of the Greenbrier owner's manual. As it turns out, this appears to be unique to Greenbriers that were equipped with the optional 4-speed transmissions, and indeed, his does have a 4-speed. Why just 4-speed equipped Greenbriers? Well, you'll have to ask the Chevrolet engineers, marketers, or stylists about that. I can see where they wouldn't mark the shift point for powerglide equipped Greenbriers, but why not the 3-speed manual Greenbriers?

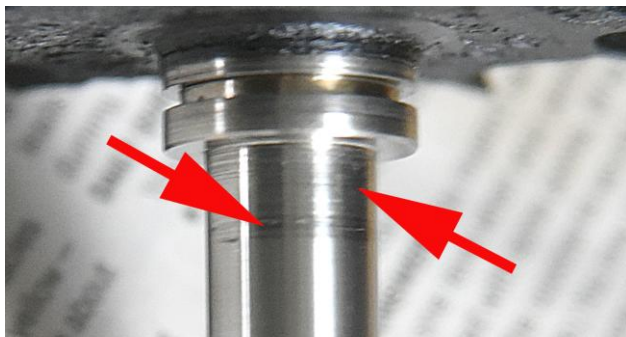
Turbo Troubles! After decades of flawless service, my turbocharger was giving me some problems. First, there was a slight whine from it while the car was warming up and second, it wasn't producing the expected boost. So, it was time to take a look and see what was going on.

Turbochargers are really pretty simple devices. In effect, there's only one moving part – the turbine and compressor wheels connected by a shaft. That shaft rides in an aluminum sleeve bearing that is lubricated by full pressure engine oil. Exhaust gases spin the turbine which in turn spins the compressor wheel – at speeds up to around 60,000 – 80,000 rpm! To make all this work, it all has to be very well balanced and have tight tolerances.

When I tore the turbo down, I found some pretty extreme wear in the sleeve bearing. Normally the clearance is a couple thousandths of an inch; this one measures about 0.050". The shaft shows some scoring marks as well.



Turbine Shaft: Bearing is Reversed to Show Gap



Note Score Marks. The Shaft has been lightly polished.

I strongly suspect a fleck of some hard material got in there somehow. I have my suspicions where it came from but can't prove it. But whatever it was, it was hard enough to get embedded in the turbine shaft. And with that shaft, spinning at several ten's of thousands of times a second, the aluminum bearing just didn't have a chance. As the turbine shaft spun, it machined out the bearing.

There is some slight evidence of the compressor wheel rubbing against the housing, but no noticeable damage. The turbine

wheel itself looks fine, and possibly the shaft could be polished smooth, but Clark's Corvair Parts has reproduced them so rather than take a chance, I'm going to use a new one.

Vair Vendor

For Sale: Early and Late Parts:

'64 3.27 differential, \$40; '64 3.27 4-speed transaxle, \$100; '64 Synder engine lid, \$120;
'64 Convertible top frame, \$65; '64 4-door NOS left quarter panel (GM # 6279405), \$200
'64 2 each front cross members, complete with brakes, shocks, springs. Very good condition: one from a Synder, \$175, other \$150; '62 – '64 Convertible rear quarter window glass, left and right, \$30
'65 – '69 underbody plastic heater duct, \$30; '65 – '69 Convertible corner weight, \$15
? year – Engine cover with fan bearing, \$20; 3 standard transmission bell housings, \$30 each.

Free – CORSA Communiqué from 2016 through 2023. Pickup or mail (\$14.38 for USPS).

Prices are negotiable. Contact Bob Lewis, 301-246-4278, rtl1936@gmail.com.

(5/23)

 **SAVE THE DATE!** 



The 2026 CORSA Convention is being presented by four clubs:

- Mid-Maryland Corvair Club
- Central Pennsylvania Corvair Club
- Group Corvair
- Northern Virginia Corvairs

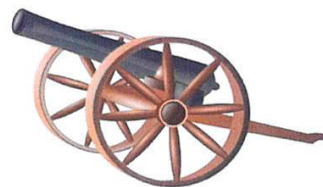
We hope that you will join us for what is gearing up to be the biggest and best convention to be held on the East Coast! Come join in the fun and the history of Gettysburg- tour the battlefields, take a ghost tour, and dine at historic restaurants!

You can even visit wineries, tour car museums, and even spend time at the world-famous Hershey chocolate factory and the fun-filled HersheyPark.

Like the country life? Gettysburg is a short hour drive from the heart of the Amish communities in Lancaster PA where you'll find fantastic dining and shopping.

What's the schedule of events? Take a look at what we have planned:

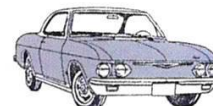
- Monday, June 22nd: Welcome Party
- Tuesday, June 23rd: Concourse
- Wednesday, June 24th: Road Rally
- Thursday, June 25th: Autocross
- Friday, June 26th: Econo-Run
- Friday, June 26th: Banquet and Awards



Tours, technical sessions, and other fun and exciting activities and events are in the works!

Mark your calendars and start planning to

"See You There in Your 'Vair!"



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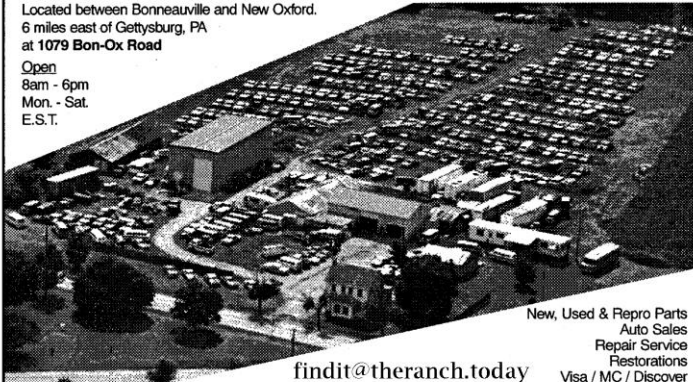
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