

CORVETTE SCRIPT FINAL VO APRIL, 1997

Chapter 1: Introduction;

Automobiles may be transportation to some people but to many it's a love affair. There are special cars that are the epitome of the word classic. These cars hold a unique place in the hearts of their owners and those who can only dream of owning them. This is the story of one such car.

Although steam powered vehicles had been built in Europe and America since the 1700's, most people mark the automobile's beginning as 1885, when Karl Benz produced the first commercially manufactured automobile.

In 1893 in America, Charles Duryea demonstrated his automobile and in 1896, Henry Ford built his quadrocycle.

In 1896, Duryea became the first to mass-produce automobiles, building 13 identical ones in Springfield, Mass, his company would eventually be bought from him and become Chevrolet.

In 1903, there were 1000 automobile manufacturers. This same year the Ford Motor Co. was founded and produced the model "A" which went 30 mph and cost \$850, which was a lot of money then.

Henry Ford revolutionized the assembly line by moving the car past the men instead of the men moving to the car which saved time and lowered the price from \$850 to \$300, making it possible for everyone to own his model T.

In 1908 William C. "Billy" Durant incorporated General Motors.

Backed by Durant, Louis Chevrolet, a Swiss racing driver and engineer created the "Classic Six" and incorporated the Chevrolet Motor Car Company on November 3rd, 1911. (photos Chevrolet book) In 1914, when Chevrolet announced the "490" well over 46,000 orders were received. By 1918, Chevrolet would become part of GM.

The car changed people's lives. City folk went to the country, sometimes unexpectedly running into other people. Roads were still more suited to the horse and carriage but you could drive through a 1000-year-old California redwood. As the automobile's popularity grew, so did traffic and parking problems. Cars became bigger and more luxurious. The electric starter replaced the hand crank making it easier for women to own cars.

In 1925, 25 million cars were produced in America. Clearly, the love affair with the automobile was well under way and style emerged as an important aspect of cars. These are just a few examples.

Duesenberg's high performance cars stunned the world, the J model with 265 hp and SJ series with 320 horsepower, which would be like introducing a car today with 1000 horsepower!

Chapter 2: The Birth of the Corvette/1950's

The first post World War II car was brought out by Studebaker.

Flush side styling became popular. Car sales boomed. The automobile had evolved from utilitarian means of transportation to a stylish, high performance car.

General Motors took notice of the fact that during the war, GIs had driven European sports cars such as the M.G. and Morgan and had brought some back to the states.

Up to 1953, American manufacturers were only building big, family sized luxury cars. But taking a cue from the Europeans, this was about to change.

Introduced at GM's Motorama at the Waldorf Astoria January 1953, the Corvette was such a hit, people lined up for over 30 minutes just to get a glimpse of America's first, and to Corvette owners, only, sport scar.

There were 300 built in 1953, but only 180 sold for just over \$3,000. It came as a convertible in Polo white with a Sportsman red vinyl interior. It had a top speed of 108, reaching 60 mph from a stop in 11 seconds. Its engine nicknamed the Blue Flame was a straight 6.

This is a 1953 Chevrolet promotional film. Notice that the driver has to reach inside to open the door because it came without door handles. However in addition to the speedometer, it had a tachometer to measure engine revolutions.

Harley Earl, Zora Arkus Duntov, Bill Mitchell and Ed Cole are considered the fathers of the Corvette. Because of a lengthy aluminum strike, the very first Corvettes were made of a revolutionary new material, GRP, (Glass Reinforced Plastic) which became a permanent part of the Corvette.

Due to last minute holdups not all of those first 300 cars, all convertibles, looked alike, some had different hubcaps or other parts.

Harley Earl and Ed Cole wanted to design a car to compete with the European sports cars such as Jaguar, Porsche, Mercedes and Ferrari. The Corvette is often referred to as the American Ferrari.

In 1954, 3265 were built, all convertibles. Production switched from Flint Michigan to St. Louis.

In 1953 and 54 Corvettes were all automatic. A 3-speed transmission was an option in 1955. This 54 convertible is completely original with a 6 cylinder, 235 cu. in. engine with 185 horsepower. Only 3,400 of these cars were produced. Red, pendant blue, black and white were available in 1954, but in 1953 all the cars were white with a red interior.

Zora Duntov joined the team during the first year; Bill Mitchell followed close behind and in 1959 succeeded Earl as Head of Styling.

They hoped to keep the price down by using existing Chevrolet parts and chassis - this made for an exceedingly difficult design problem.

It didn't take long for Ford to come up with their own idea of an American sport scar. Within a year and a half of Chevrolet's introduction of the Corvette, Ford introduced the Thunderbird. It was a sleek 2-seater sport scar. Sept. 9th, 1954, it rolled off the assembly line.

The 1955 Corvette had the innovative 265 cubic inch V8 engine, the first Chevrolet V8 since the war.

The SS Prototype Corvette racecar was built to compete at Sebring. It reveals the style elements to come. Bill Mitchell, who was crucial to Corvette's evolution, stands to the right. Notice its fierce looking shark teeth grille.

1956 could have been the end of the Corvette but Zora Duntov helped create a new design, which included the trademark side indentation; also it was the first year a hard top was available. The V8 went from 210 bhp @ 5200 rpm to 240 @ 5800 rpm.

At GM's Motorama at the Waldorf Astoria, the restyled 1956 Corvette and other GM models and prototypes are displayed. Buick's Centurion; Oldsmobile's Golden Rocket; Pontiac's Club de Mer; Chevrolet's Impala looking like a Corvette station wagon and Pontiac's Firebird II which takes us on a journey through a futuristic world.

In 1957 Racing at Sebring, the Corvette won in its class, 20 laps ahead of the nearest Mercedes 300. This win put it in the history books.

The 1957 Corvette had a fuel injection system designed by John Dolza and Zora Duntov and optional 4-speed transmission. The engine was a 283 with a single 4-barrel which had 240 hp. Another 283 engine had two 4 barrels they called 2 Quads which improved the horsepower by about 10 to 250 hp. It came with a soft top and a removable hard top.

The '57 had 2 front head light while the '58 had four. In 1957, Duntov officially became chief of Corvette production. Options that year included a left side mirror, radio, heater, brake light warning and windshield washers.

The 57 taillights were open as opposed to the 58's that were covered.

In 1958, Corvette had 5 engine sizes, 9000 sold and more chrome was added.

Here you see a line up of Corvettes from 1953 through 1958.

In 1958, the other American 2-seater, the Thunderbird went to a larger four-seat configuration and Corvette was now the only legitimate American sport scar.

In 1959 the Corvette had less chrome, better suspension.

Chapter 3: 1960's;

In 1960 sales topped 10,000, helped in part by Thunderbird's shift from a 2 to 4 seater. Four Corvettes competed against the likes of Porsche, Ferrari and Mercedes, in the grueling 24-hour Le Mans Race in France. Only one Corvette finished, taking eighth place but it surprised and impressed the Europeans. Unlike the most of the other cars, which came in a trailer, the Corvettes drove to the race, fueled up and went into the competition.

In 1960, Bill Mitchell, while in the Bahamas, caught a shark and had it mounted. He thought the body shape would be ideal for the new XP-775 prototype, which would be called the Mako Shark. He gave it to Larry Shinoda, who stylized the shark's jaw and teeth and even the coloring, a gradation from light gray to dark blue. The story goes that the paint shop repainted Mitchell's shark to match the car since they couldn't get the car to match the shark!

In 1960, Gary Laughlin asked Sergio Scaglietti, who build the bodies for Ferrari's 250 GTs, to build a hybrid car using the Corvette chassis and engine and Scaglietti's body. Only 3 were built and it never fulfilled its racing hopes but it is highly appreciated for its styling.

The 1961 Corvette had minor changes except for the restyled flattened rear deck. This design would be reflected in models until the mid-1970s.

The 61 was the last year for the two tone and the big white walls. It was the first year for the trademark quad taillights. The tail changed from the 1960 to what's called a ducktail, which is actually the back end of the Sting Ray. This new back allowed the seats to be pushed back and allow for greater legroom.

The front grille was also changed — there were no more teeth, but it still had the same shape and thin chrome horizontal lines. The 61 has a 283 cu. In. engine with 230 hp. There were 5 engine sizes available, all 283's. The highest horsepower was the fuel injected 315 hp., which had more than 1 hp. per cubic inch. The 61 had spears and chrome around the cove.

The 1962 was one solid color and did not have chrome encircling the cove. This is one of the last of this model made in July of 62 with the original Hatteras maroon stock color. It has a 327 engine with 340 hp. It still has the original hubcaps, engine and transmission. It has a hard and soft-top.

A secret project nicknamed "Operation Mongoose" was begun to challenge Shelby's Ford Cobras. The car that resulted was called the Grand Sport whose production began in 1962. The following year at Watkins Glen, the Grand Sport would have its first victory. Also that year three Grand Sports with 350 bhp engines went to Nassau to race. In race after race, they decidedly beat Ford's Cobras. Technically, a hundred were supposed to be built, however only five were ever produced.

This white 62 corvette is #1156 out of about 15,000 made that year. It has a 327 engine with solid lifters, 340 hp. And a 4 speed T-Tram Transmission. This was the last year for exposed headlights. Notice the blacked out front grille and the different logo on the hood. It had less chrome.

1962 would mark the end of the second design era; a radical change was about to occur. Bothered by rumors that Ford was creating a high performance sport scar to challenge Corvette; Chevrolet decided a dramatic change was in order. This comparison shows the major styling change.

In 1963, the revamped Corvette appears as the famous Sting Ray. It remains one of the most innovative automobile styling designs. It was an instant hit, doubling Corvette production. Available as a convertible or coupe, it remains one of the most exciting cars ever built. Its design, influenced by aerodynamics, was the flattened wedge, pop up headlamps, cutoff rear, split rear window and recessed taillights. The rear window divider makes the few unaltered ones, very collectible.

The 63 was the 1st year they had a coupe. 1953 to 62 were all Convertibles. It was also the 1st year for the rotating; hide away lights and the split window in back. The louvers on the hood are just for styling. The 63 also have the two horizontal side vents that don't operate. And behind the door you can see the indentation but there's no vent or blowers. From 63 to 67 different gas lid emblems and rocker panels marked each year. Notice that Sting Ray was spelt in two words at this time. The Sting Ray was an outgrowth of the Q car prototypes begun in 1957.

For the Sting Ray owner, the most popular Red or silver with leather seats, positraction rear axle, blackwall tires on alloy wheels. Due to popular demand, Chevrolet had to add a second shift and dealers reported owners waiting months for their cars to be delivered. Production surpassed 20,000 units.

This 1963 Sting Ray belonged to Harley Earl, who was the designer of the original Corvette.

In this rare film shot at the General Motors Grand Prix proving grounds, a group of Chevrolet research and development engineers and Zora Arkus Duntov, flanked by 2 famous Corvette race drivers, Dr. Dick Thompson and Dave McDonald, are about to evaluate a new, all American sport scar - the Corvette Sting Ray.

(archive file)

In 1957 all the automobile manufacturers had agreed to stop competing in racing, however Bill Mitchell, out of his own pocket and other Corvette engineers continued to support racing, doing it out the back door. Racing has always had an influence on the design and engineering of the car.

The 1964 Corvette had a single rear window and smoother, quieter ride.

This 64 Riverside Red coupe Sting Ray has a 327cu in, 250 hp, automatic power glide engine, power steering, brakes and windows. A blower motor operates through the louvers behind the door recalculates the air inside. Like the 63, the 64 has 2 fake louvers on the side. From 1954 –1966, the rear end stayed basically the same. The 67 had a back up light over the license plate.

Thunderbird had changed out of its sport scar beginnings to become a luxury 4 seater, but Ford had another car on its mind. In 1964 the Mustang was born. Despite the huge success of the Mustang, Chevrolet once again, decided to keep the Corvette a true 2-seater sport scar.

Chevrolet realized that Corvette's appeal was crucial to maintaining its youthful and high performance image. The Sting Ray styling would continue through 1967.

The 1965 had all around disk brakes and an optional 396 CID porcupine head engine boasting 425 horsepower dubbed "Turbo Jet 396."

1965 was the first year for the 396 big block engine with 425 hp. The big block was made from March of 65 through the end of the year. It came as a hardtop or convertible. In this Glen green convertible you can see the side pipes, which were added for the 1st time.

This blue coupe has a 250 engine with power steering and power brakes. 1965 was the last year for fuel injection and the 1st time Corvette introduced disc brakes to replace the drum brakes. There were 5 engine sizes available. The slits are vertical and open to help cool the brakes as opposed to the 63 and 64 models that had closed horizontal vents that were just for decoration.

In 1966, fuel injection was dropped as too costly since it added about \$538 to the price. In 66 they came out with the 427.

The 1967 was the only year for the front scoop and for the 1st time Rally wheels became available with several tire options—this one has white walls. The back up light is over the license plate.

The 4 speed 67 Sting Ray has a big block 427 engine with 3 carburetors. It has two tops: hard and convertible.

In 1968 Corvette styling changed again, the blue 1967 sting ray styling has disappeared in the yellow 1968 Corvette.

The Mako Shark II, an experimental prototype and show car, that had been around since 1965, influenced the styling of the 1968 Stingray.

The 1968 had a tunneled roof with removable panels, sloping front end and rear spoiler and proved immensely popular. It went to 100 mph from a stop in 20 secs. A convertible was available with a removable top.

The L88 series only lasted 3 years with 20 built in 67, 80 in 68 and 116 in 1969. The innovation was the aluminum head. The L88 motor came in a car without a heater and screen defroster in an attempt to discourage street use. It had a top speed of 183 mph. In 1967, one lead the grueling 24-hour Le Mans race for 11 1/2 hours before its engine blew up.

The 67 and 68 didn't have fan shrouds so it was easy to overheat if you weren't careful. This 1968 L88 has a 427 engine with a supposed horsepower of 430 but 4 years later Chevrolet issued a memo stating it actually had over 500 hp. Along with the air filter being in the hood of the car, it has 12.5 to 1 compression, 600 lift camshaft, aluminum heads, 336 road gears and J56 racing brakes. Not a streetcar since this Corvette only takes between 100-105 octane racing fuel at a cost of \$4.29 a gallon.

The big block designated ZL1 was a devastating power pack and to discourage road use came without the amenities of a heater, power steering, or air-conditioner.

In 1969 Stingray appeared as one word. This Riverside Gold 350 has a 300 hp engine, the smallest offered that year.

Chapter 4: 1970's:

It had been 17 years since the first Corvettes, named after a World War II French ship, had rolled off the assembly line in Flint, Michigan on June 30th, 1953.

1970, Corvette won Car & Driver's poll as the most popular car, had a manual 4-speed transmission and 390 hp 454 LS5 V8 - the largest Corvette engine.

This 1970 Donny Brook Green convertible is a 1st day production car with a 350 cu in L46 engine with 350 hp, 4 speed transmission, 370 positraction rear end and power windows and steering. The egg crate grilles on the side are different from the 69, which had 4 vents. The grilles also match the front, and the turning indicators are big and square instead of round. The wheel wells are more flared to keep stones from coming up and chipping the body.

There was also a "small block" 350 cubic inch LT1 engine that generated 370 horsepower.

In the seventies fuel consumption; pollution and safety concerns doomed the muscle cars. The L88 needed 103-octane gas and nothing over 91 was to available at the pumps. Interestingly, Corvette had been designed with a safety feature that should it ever be hit head on, the front deck would slide under the driver and passenger compartment.

In 1972 only 3 engine sizes were offered, the smallest number since 1963.

In 1976, Corvette stopped making convertibles, until public demand brought it back in the mid 80's. The 76 had 4 red taillights instead of 2 red and 2 white. The dealer added the luggage rack. 1976 was the last year Stingray was written on the side of the car as well as the last year for front louvers. It has a removable T-top. This corvette has added side skirts and a front spoiler. The 350 engine has 180 hp with a top speed of 135 mph.

In 1977 the 500,000th Corvette rolled off the assembly line. Production reached over 49,000.

1977 was the last year for the small, flat, back window and the first time we see the sport mirrors, which were an option. The 76 had Stingray on the car---the 77 just has the flags. This silver blue 1977 with a 350 cu in automatic engine has 50,000 original miles on it and is completely stock.

The 1978 Corvette again had a styling change: wraparound fastback, rear screen reminiscent of the '63 Sting Ray. It was its 25th Silver anniversary and two special limited edition cars were produced which were collector cars right off the line: the Silver Anniversary and the Indy Pace Car replica.

Chapter 5: 1980's

In 1981 Production of Corvettes changes to Bowling Green, Kentucky.

This 1981 was originally a T-top that was made into a convertible by its owner. The 350 engine with 4-speed transmission has 190 hp reaching over 130 mph. This was the last year for carburetors before Corvette returned to fuel injection in 1982.

1982 marked the end of another Corvette generation with a custom exterior and interior, glass hatchback and crossfire injection 5.7-liter V8 engine. Corvette introduced the hatchback rear window, as well as the crossfire injection system in this 350 5.7 liter 190 hp engine. This is one of the 6,549 silver beige collectors edition Corvettes which were all identical, interior and exterior.

In 1983 another styling change occurred for the Corvette. Derived from a design known as the Aerovette it came from research in the Boeing wind tunnel and produced a more aerodynamic car, also rack and pinion steering was added. However, it was not offered for sale until 1984.

France, so well known for its great wine and food, has serious Corvette fans. The French are often called chauvinistic and xenophobic, however there are those who prefer a Corvette to a Peugeot or Citroen. The Chevrolet Corvette Club de France has existed since 1989. The club has approximately 350 members and about 160 cars amongst them. They generally come to the U.S.A, particularly California, to buy their Corvettes and take them back to France. Corvette Mike in Orange County is a favorite dealer. Two young French club members drove from Lyons, France, in their beautiful 1983 Aerovette to a small medieval town on the Cote d'Azur. Naturally it elicited a lot of envious stares.

The engine of the 1983 is rated at 205 bhp with 290 ft per lbs of torque. New is a 4 speed manual transmission with computer-controlled overdrive. The suspension has more aluminum. The Aerovette styling would last until 1997 when the C5 would debut.

This two-tone champagne 1985 has the Z51 racing suspension modified by Dick Gulstrand for Chevrolet. A black strip divides the two colors on this two-tone champagne corvette with stock wheels.

This was the 1st year for tuned port injection engine instead of the crossfire.

In 1988, Bill Mitchell dies of a heart attack. A Callaway Twin Turbo Corvette reaches a top speed of 254.76 mph at the Transportation Research Center of Ohio.

At this historic meet, every production style Corvette from every year from 1988 back to 1953 was brought together. It gives a wonderful comparison of the styling evolution the Corvette has gone through. Notice the change between the original white 1953 and the burgundy 1988 from the Aerovette styling era.

This 1989 stock 6-speed coupe with the L98 motor was customized by Warner Bros. For the movie Heat and was driven by Val Kilmer and Ashley Judd.

Chapter 6: 1990's:

A new and more rounded rear and front end distinguished the 91 from the 1990. Also the front lights wrapped around in one piece instead of being separated, and the weather stripping carries the same color as the body, whereas the 90 had black stripping. The matching stripping continues to this day. This color, turquoise metallic green, was only used in these 2 years. The grilles on the side changed from 2 verticals to 4 horizontals, and this was the 1st year the taillights went from a circle to a square shape. It has a base L98 fuel injected engine with every option made fully loaded.

The 1995 nose is lower and longer and the back is rounded. The taillights are now oval. An LT1 stock car, it has a 350 cu in engine with 300hp.

Some Corvette owners modify their cars. This black beauty has been subtly altered so that the door fits more snugly and its paint is part plum and part black.

This 1982 modified Corvette has a unique paint job that even carries under the hood.

This 1991 has a ghost phosphorescence gold paint job and the whole side of the car turns golden when bright sunlight hits it. The sides are also done in pearl and in the evening it turns a darker gray. At night the gauges are all red digital, the stripes and the designs inside the hood are all done in freehand. This modified 600hp engine has a 5th geared, by a nitrous canister in the rear, which gives an extra 100 hp at the push of a button. Every nut and bolt is 24 karat gold. The artist signed the car.

This is an evolution of Corvette styles.

The Corvette has always been a style leader as shown by these changes in design from the 1953, to the modern Corvette.

According to GM, there are 5 generations of Corvettes. They are:

1953, the first year.....1963, the revolutionary Sting Ray..... 1968, the 2nd generation Stingray.....1984, the Aerovetteand 1997, the new C5.

Some would argue that 1956, when Zora Arkus Duntov totally revamped the Corvette, should be included.

The new C5 Corvette premiered in January 1997. Its styling is familiar and yet up to date. It has a hatchback and removable roof panels. The C5 as it's called, meaning 5th generation, was originally supposed to debut in 1993 for Corvette's 40th anniversary.

The C5 has a 346 cubic inch, V8 engine. It has aluminum block and heads and 2 overhead valves per cylinder. This forceful 5.7-liter engine has more horsepower and torque and rack and pinion steering.

The C5 defines sport scar practicability. It has 35% fewer parts or 1500 less parts that could need attention. It's easier to get in and out of and the hatchback opens effortlessly. Its lighter and yet it's also an inch longer. There's more room in the interior and the trunk. Priced around \$40,000, Road and Track Magazine says "that there's no car as quick in a straight line in its price range."

Corvette lovers will not be disappointed. It has a top speed of 172 mph, does 0-60 in 4.8 seconds, with horsepower rated at 345 brake horse power @ 5600 RPMs. And of course it remains a true 2-seater sport scar. It has not and will never turn into a luxury sedan.

Corvette fans have a choice of magazines devoted to it. Corvette has a mystique and today hundreds of National and International Corvette Clubs and classic car associations hold

regular meets to share and compare cars, parts, history and experiences and sometimes to compete for trophies.

From its beginning in 1953 through today, the Corvette has always fired the imagination. It represents style, speed and freedom. Corvette lovers are a varied lot, some are purists who won't change a single detail, others are into heavy modifications, some love the old classics, some love the muscle cars but they all agree on one thing - they won't be trading it in for a sport utility vehicle any day soon.

Chevrolet created the Corvette but the enthusiasts: the collectors, the restorers and fans have made it a classic.

(Credits)