

Corvairisation

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Tucson Corvair Association
Volume 26, Number 10

Tucson, Arizona
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Lance Jordan's V-8
Corvair
See more at
www.v8corvair.com



Tucson Corvair Association
25th Anniversary
1975-2000

Tucson Corvair Association
Established 1975

Corvairsation is a monthly publication of the Tucson Corvair Association, which is dedicated to the preservation of the Corvair model of the Chevrolet Motor Division of General Motors. The Tucson Corvair Association is a chartered member of the Corvair Society of American (CORSA), Chapter 857.

Monthly Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month, except December. One technical/social event is planned for each month except August.

Membership Dues are \$15 per year for singles and \$18 per year for families. Initial dues are \$15 for singles and \$22 for families (includes name tags). Make checks payable to Tucson Corvair Association.

Change of Address: Report any change of address or phone number to the Membership Chairperson. Do not report such changes to the Corvairsation Editor.

CORSA Membership Dues are \$27 per year and include a subscription to the CORSA Communique, a monthly publication. CORSA membership is not required for membership in the TCA, but is highly recommended. See any TCA officer for more information.

Classified Ads are free to members and \$2.50 per 4-line ad to all others.

Deadline for all materials submitted for publication in the Corvairsation is the 10th for that month's issue. Mail or deliver all materials to the Corvairsation Editor.

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Prez Says:

It's car show time again! What a beautiful day for a car show. The Casa show was in full swing and it was absolutely automobile heaven. With 1000 cars present and perfect weather, our Corvair club display was a complete success. I'd like to thank all those who worked so hard to bring their cars to the show. Thank you!! Your cars were beautiful.

One more car show to go. We are the host club at Little Anthony's Diner (Nov. 11). Please come out on that Saturday afternoon for another good time.

Are you looking forward to another great Christmas party? Be sure and get your reservations in by the first week in December.

Remember, November is drive your Corvair Month! Happy Corvairing!!

Barry

Tucson Corvair Association Hosts Little Anthony's Diner Car Show November 11, 4 P.M.

from the editor.....

Yes, this years Casa show was really great. We had an ideal location on the grass in the center of the field with good (lots of) traffic on both sides of us. Thirteen Corvairs were beautifully displayed and many visitor stopped to talk about our Corvairs and tell us about theirs, past and present. This show was one of our best! Thanks, Allen and Tim, for all your planning and the shade you brought. Did I say the cars looked great? Yes! Lot of washing and polishing on the Corvairs. More about the Casa show next month.

Looking on past the fan belt toss at (GWFBT) Palm Springs, our next mid month activity is the Little Anthony's Show at 7010 East Broadway. Bring your Corvair along with a friend or two at about 4 in the afternoon for fraternizing with some of the other local car folks. As the host club member, you will be privileged to park under the ramada which is the focal point of the show. More information and detail will be available at the October meeting.

This months feature articles provide more about the history of Corvairs and their relation to people. Enjoy! Drive that Corvair!!

The regular monthly meeting of the Tucson Corvair Association was called to order at 7:45 on September 27, 2000, by president Barry Cunningham.

Treasurer Allen Elvick gave a report on the club's finances and it was approved as read. Dave Baker reported that the library was intact and available to members. Tim Green, as vice president announced that 14 cars had come to the show at Pep Boys. It was decided that those who were going to be in the Casa de los Ninos car show would meet at the cafe on the southeast corner of Ajo and Country Club and go together to the ball park.

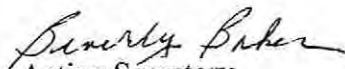
It was a pleasure to have Mark and Cathy McKenna back in attendance at the meeting and to have them rejoin the club. We also met John and Amy Torpey, who joined too.

Barry postponed the drawing until October, as we only had one donation. He, Allen and Don Robinson will bring gifts at that time. We were reminded of the car show at Little Anthony's on the 11th of November and the GWF-BT&SM in Palm Springs on the 4th of November.

A informal tech session followed. Dave told of his fixing of his turn signals and Gordon Cauble passed around pictures of the Daytona Beach Convention.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,


Acting Secretary

Recalling the Corvair (Esquire, September, 1986)

Everyone knows how much Elvis Presley loved Cadillacs. He gave Caddys to his relatives and there was the famous pink one for his mother. He gave Caddys to the guys in his retinue, he even gave Caddys to total strangers, on impulse. But to Priscilla Presley, before they were married and when she was still in high school, Elvis gave a red Corvair.

That was the kind of car the Corvair was: a practical but fun car, a sporty car but not a sports car, a car with style and pep but nothing the girl could get in trouble with. After school, Priscilla would load her chums into the red Monza--the Corvair always looked best in red--and head off to the hamburger stand.

The Corvair was small but sleek, with lines as different from the fines of most American cars as a Beetle cut was from Elvis's D.A. They were fleet, subtle European lines, suggested by Porsche, Alfa Romeo, and BMW. A long, flat, finless rear deck covered its rear-mounted, air-cooled, "pan-cake six" aluminum engine. The car's grill-less front hid the absence of a radiator behind a Cheshire grin--the double headlights in their drop-shaped enclosures and a button-nosed center ornament gave the Corvair a face that was feline, if not downright feminine.

The Corvair was launched in 1959 as General Motors' first compact, with the emphasis on economy, but what lent it the immediate affection of the public was its sportiness. The name was meant to echo the sporty, nautical tones of "Corvette" and the dashing, piratical ones of "corsair," and the shape carried out the theme.

It is the shape that in the last few years has won the Corvair a place in the hearts of car buffs and a happy niche in the world of collectible cars. The shape and, of course, the technical innovations: not only the rear-mounted engine, but the four-wheel independent suspension, the unibody construction, the turbocharging—all now standard parts of Detroit's "Euro-style" sell, but then years ahead of their time.

"The Corvair was the last innovative car that Detroit turned out," says French Lewis, a mechanic from Englishtown, New Jersey, who has been repairing and restoring Corvairs for twenty-five years. Lewis's sentiments reflect a

view of the "Cor" as "the poor man's Porsche," a proposition firmly accepted by the eight thousand-odd members of CORSA (the Corvair Society of America) and the many restorers who, since the early 1980s, have been driving up the prices of classic models by 1(K) percent a year for the most prized models, the Monzas and Corsas.

One man recently advertised a "never titled" 1969 Monza with only eighteen miles on the odometer in the classifieds of the Corsa Communique for \$10,000. Cars in less fine shape still go for \$4,000 or \$5,000.

That the Corvair should have become the darling of collectors is only one of the many ironies that have attended its fortunes. To the average consumer, of course, the Corvair name is most readily associated with Ralph Nader. For the Corvair's innovations were also the source of its bad reputation, an image created by scores of lawsuits and by Nader's singling out its handling problems in his 1965 book, *Unsafe at Any Speed*. As much as any car, the Corvair was the inspiration for the government regulations that followed Nader's book and the investigations of the Ribicoff Committee. The irony here is that the problem Nader cited—a tendency for the rear wheels to "tuck under" in turns and for the car, with its weight to the rear, to fishtail out of control—had been fixed years before.

Still, the cover-up of the Corvair's problems and the paranoia that its revelation elicited from the top echelons of Detroit, the whole sordid story of the private detectives and the mysterious temptresses GM sent after Nader in an effort to discredit him, damaged the reputation of all Detroit.

GM president James Roche was forced to issue a humiliating apology to Nader in front of a Senate sub-committee, and the huge monetary settlement of Nader's civil suit against the auto giant funded his subsequent crusading.

The Corvair was an exception from the start. Only the personal charisma of Chevrolet chief Ed Cole, who had been nursing his pet idea of a small, rear-engine car since the 1940s, had made the Corvair Possible at all. No energy crisis, no sudden surge in import buying, had driven Chevrolet to produce the Corvair. It is true that by 1959, when the car was introduced,

there were definite suggestions that the huge cruisers of the 1950s had had their day. But in those days, it didn't take Detroit so long to move with trends. In the late 1950s the industry shaped the Corvair, as well as its compact brethren the Ford Falcon and Plymouth Valiant. to be the car of the 1960s.

The Corvair was the strangest of the three, a car of almost willful eccentricities. It felt odd, in 1960, to get into a car that lacked the huge pipe-like hump of a drive shaft. Odd cooling vents punctuated the rear deck, and there was a funny little overhang over the rear window, borrowed from BMWs and suggesting the brim of a catcher's backward baseball cap. Some of the details were even stranger, like the shift control for the automatic transmission, a lever like the controls of a toaster oven projecting from the dashboard.

One of the eccentricities was a serious flaw. The European cars on which the Corvair was modeled had semi-independent suspensions. The Corvair, however, began with the fully independent suspension common to front-engine sports cars. With 60 percent of the Cor's weight aft of center, it tended to slide in a turn. A good driver could handle the slide-it even give a kind of road-rally quality to turns-but the average American driver used to the huge dreadnoughts he did not so much drive as aim, was unprepared.

GM executives quickly discovered the problem: test drivers rolled two of the first Corvairs on the test track. But the game stubbornness that enabled Ed Cole to get the Corvair built kept him from addressing the problem, despite the efforts of other GM executives. Not until Cole was promoted and Bunkie Knudsen became head of the Chevy division in 1961 was anything done. Knudsen had to threaten to resign, but he got his way: the rear wheels were linked with a tie bar.

But it was too late. In 1964 a certain Rose Pierini, who had lost an arm in a Corvair crash in Santa Barbara, successfully sued GM for damages. 'Me list of Corvair crash victims and lawsuits grew--comedian Ernie Kovacs was killed in a Corvair. Chevrolet put together a team of top legal talent and technical witnesses, including racing driver Stirling Moss, to defend the car, but the record provided Ralph Nader with all the ammunition he needed.

The Corvair's low power, compared to other compacts, had probably doomed it before

Nader. By the mid-1960s the compact market had split into the buyers of cars like the nonsense Chevy II and the fun-loving patrons of Lee Iacocca's Ford Mustang. The car continued in production through the 1969 model year. The last Cor, an Olympic Gold Monza, rolled off the production line at Chevy's Willow Run plant on May 14, 1969.

It took more than a decade for the car buffs to rehabilitate the Cor. An early fan, Fulton Floyd of Loris, South Carolina, owns fifty-two Corvairs, many of which he picked up in the early 1970s for a couple of hundred dollars apiece. For years, he has driven a Corvair every day, choosing each morning either a '65 sedan with air or a '66 turbo convertible or the latest Corvair he's restored. Floyd owns more Corvairs than anyone he knows of, and he's planning to hang on to all of them. When the Corsa folks get together for their annual conventions, however, stories circulate of some fellow in Ohio with more than a hundred "under cover," or the guy in Louisiana who totals his by the acre.

Floyd's Corvairs all date from 1965 or later. Beginning with the 1965 model year, the car was restyled. These "series II" Corvairs, reflecting the influence of Italian Pininfarina and Ghia designs, are some of the loveliest of 1960s machines, with more rounded contours and a slim, graceful version of the rear "hips" that, in exaggerated form, were to dominate auto design in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The finest may be the 1966 Monza, although some argue for the some argue for the turbocharged 1962 Monza Spyder with Kelsey-Hayes wire wheels (of which only four hundred sets were produced).

The waning of the energy crunch made collectors begin to look anew at 1960s cars, and the Corvair's oddities would always have attracted interest. But the true boosters seem to have taken up the car's cause chiefly because they think it got a raw deal. In their telling, it always figures as one of the most important cars of all time, the abandoned model, the road not taken.

"You can't buy a new car today," swears French Lewis, "for anywhere near the money, that's as good as an old Corvair."

CHEVROLET CORVAIR FAILURE AT ANY SPEED?

by Michael Tesmacher

I own a Chevrolet Corvair. The car is the tangible result of a post-divorce mid-life crisis and an attempt to recapture my youth with a vintage '60s convertible. I never sought out the Corvair; it just came along and hooked me. Invariably, while out on drives over the last seven years, people would approach me and comment about the car and Corvairs in general. The majority of the comments are positive: "My mother (father, uncle George, aunt Tillie) had one of those. It's a great car." Occasionally someone asks: "Isn't that the car that would flip over (catch fire, engine fall out, etc.)?" Others remark about Ralph Nader and his 1965 book "Unsafe At Any Speed," which devoted all of chapter 1 to the Corvair's unique handling characteristics. The car was and still is a good and safe vehicle. However, I have to admit that the Corvair had some perceptual problems in the marketplace that brought about its demise.

On October 2, 1959, General Motors' Chevrolet division introduced the 1960 Corvair to enthusiastic audiences. It was a new and radically different design for an American manufacturer. During the mid-1950s, Volkswagen's Beetle had become popular with economy-minded Americans. Taking a cue from this trend, GM decided to create an economy car—economical to operate but smaller than other American automobiles. Powered by an air-cooled six-cylinder engine—a first for Chevrolet—it was referred to as a "flat six," since the cylinders were horizontally opposed rather than in the typical "V" configuration. Not only was the engine unique, but its rear location was a radical departure from the norm.

Perhaps the Corvair was a 'niche car' that was never able to master its niche.

The 1960 model was offered in two body styles, a 2-door coupe and a 4-door sedan—available in two trim models—both which were somewhat austere. Later that model year the "Monza" was added as the line continued to expand. In '61 Chevy added a pair of vans, a pickup truck and a station wagon, all with the engine mounted in the rear. In 1962 came the first Corvair convertible, along with the first mass-produced American turbo-charged car, the "Spyder."

While early sales were promising, the other large American manufacturers quickly challenged with compacts of their own. Chrysler introduced the Dodge Lancer and Plymouth Valiant, while Ford countered with the Falcon and Mercury Comet. These other compacts were less expensive and more traditional. Even Chevrolet, like the other manufacturers, introduced a more "conventional" car to compete in the economy market. The Chevy II, which later became the Nova, was introduced in 1962.

What the sporty Corvair did have going for it was style. Even before the introduction of the Spyder, automobile enthusiasts were referring to it as a "poor man's Porsche." But in 1964 Chevrolet introduced another sporty car, the Chevelle, and Ford unveiled the legendary Mustang. This signaled the beginning of the end for the Corvair.

While the Mustang quickly gobbled up market share, the Corvair continued to enjoy a loyal following who liked its distinct handling. It was this same handling, however, that was the basis for several lawsuits against General Motors. The Ralph Nader book "Unsafe At Any Speed" portrayed the Corvair as unstable and prone to rollover accidents. While many would attribute the failure of the Corvair to the book, the handwriting was already on the wall in the form of declining sales.

Interestingly, 1966 would have been the last model year, had the Nader book not drawn so much negative publicity. Even the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) had opened an investigation into its handling. There was simply no way GM could halt the line without appearing to "cave in" to the charges, so production continued, albeit in limited numbers, through the '67, '68 and '69 model years. Ironically, the NHTSA report, released three years after Corvair's demise, would exonerate Chevrolet of all charges, concluding that the Corvair was no more prone to accidents and rollovers than any other comparable car of the period.

Was the Corvair a failure? It's a matter of perspective. General Motors produced nearly 1.8 million Corvairs over 10 model years. The Corvair pioneered such technological advances as turbo-charging, true four-wheel independent suspension and unit-body (or unibody) construction, and its independent suspension was adapted for later model Corvettes. Perhaps the Corvair was a "niche car" that was never able to master its niche.

Today, 41 years after its introduction and 30 years after production ceased, the Corvair still enjoys a loyal following. The Corvair Society of America (CORSA) has a membership of over 5,500 people with 130 local chapters found everywhere from Idaho to Amsterdam.

I own a Corvair or maybe the Corvair owns me. It's kind of hard to say when the top is down and I'm driving east on Long Island's Southern State Parkway on a brisk, sunny day. Unsafe at any speed? Ralph Nader eat your heart out.



From Failure Magazine. www.failure.com

OCTOBER 2000 TREASURER'S REPORT

BEGINNING CASH ON HAND.....\$1952.05

INCOME: (ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE)

Ads.....	00.00
Raffle Tickets	00.00
Casa Entry Fees.....	35.00
Merchandise.....	0.00
Cans.....	00.00
Name Tag.....	<u>4.00</u>
	39.00

DUES:

Mark and Cathy McKenna.....	4.50
John and Amy Torpey.....	<u>4.50</u>
	9.00

TOTAL INCOME (ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE).....\$48.00

EXPENSES: (ACCOUNTS PAYABLE)

Stamps	23.10
Name Tag.....	0.00
Casa Entry Fee (14 cars).....	<u>70.00</u>

TOTAL EXPENSES: (ACCOUNTS PAYABLE).....93.10

ENDING BALANCE: (CASH ON HAND).....\$1906.95

Respectfully Submitted,

Allen Elvick

Parts & Spares

For Sale: 1962 4-Door Monza, Automatic, Factory air conditioning, 85k original miles. \$3250. Call Dick (520) 299-4723.

For Sale: Corvair parts - Large outdoor yard full of Corvairs and Parts, Call Barry Cunningham at (520) 747-9028.

For Sale: Corvair engine (RA) 95 hp no carb or sheet metal, Partly disassembled \$100. Also 110 hp engine parts. Cheap. Don (520) 297-1356.

For Sale: 1961 ramside, 110hp, A/T, Like new paint, interior with many extras. \$5700 asking price. Call Vic at (520) 768-6062 or e-mail at vic@mohaveaz.com.

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