

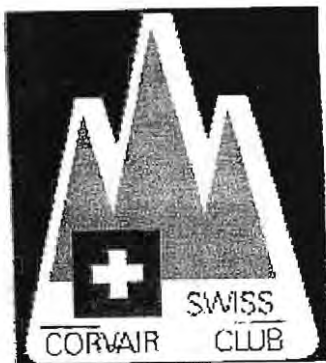


Corvairsation

www.corvairs.org

Tucson Corvair Association
Volume 27, Number 12

Tucson, Arizona
May 2003



"They're everywhere! They're everywhere!"

from the editor..... Two more mid-month event before the summer doldrums set in. Check the "TCA Events at a Glance" for the latest. To caravan to Kartchners Caverns, we will leave Triple T no later than 2:30 PM (*Sunday, May 18*) so as to arrive there on time.

The latest TCA roster is included in this issue. We had promised the new roster at the first of the year, but computer gremlins and procrastination caused delays. Even now there are one or two omissions, which will be put into the computer when it is back up.

Minutes from the April meeting will be available at the May meeting.

Thanks to Van for the *Esquire* article. Very interesting!

Drive those Vairs. Enjoy!

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 (COSA), 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 July and 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.

COSA Membership Dues are \$30 per year (\$70 for 26 months) and include a subscription to the COSA Communique, a monthly publication. COSA 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 \$3.00 per 4-line ad to all others.

Deadline for materials submitted for publication in the Corvairsation is the 10th of month to the Editor.

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A Letter from the President

As the temps creep up here in the desert we all need to stay cool, including our air-cool friends in the garage or carport. If you are like me, you will risk being a few minutes late for an appointment to find a shady spot to park your Corvair. The hot dry air can turn that soft supple interior into a dry crusty piece of parchment in no time. Your efforts to keep your car cool, both on the outside and inside, will pay off. Check your levels all around, keep the fuel tank full to reduce evaporation, shine up the paint too because a reflective surface stays cooler than a dull finish.

For you thrill seekers and spelunkers looking for something cool to do, we will descend into the "Bat Cave" at Kartchner Caverns on Sunday May 18. The cave, located 35 miles southeast of Tucson, is "the most carefully and technically developed cave in the world" according to the US Forest Service. Look for more details on the trip elsewhere in this issue.

Of course, one of the easiest ways to be cool in the desert is to get out and make the scene in your air-cooled Corvair.

Happy motoring,



Arizona Air Quality and Classic Cars

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) is considering acquiring EPA approval for changing the emissions inspection program for collectible vehicles. In order to evaluate the air quality impact of emissions from collectible vehicles the ADEQ needs to hear from us. They need to know how many vehicles that might qualify and how many miles are driven annually. The data will be compared to vehicle testing results from like model years in the non-collectible fleet.

If your car is a Corvair; is covered by a "collectible vehicle or classic automobile" insurance policy that restricts mileage and requires the owner to have another vehicle for personal use; is maintained primarily for club activities, exhibitions, a private collection, and is used only infrequently for other

TCA Events at a Glance

MAY 2003

- 14 WED TCA Board Mtg. Chili's Grill, 4911 N. Stone 6:30pm
- 18 SUN *Cave Run to Kartchner Caverns* - 2pm- meet at Triple T Truck Stop, 5451 E. Benson Hwy (I-10 & Craycroft).
- 28 WED Regular monthly meeting - 6pm. Optional dinner at 6:20, meeting starts at 7pm. Mountain View Restaurant 1220 E. Prince Road.

JUNE 2003

- 11 WED TCA Board Mtg. Yankee Doodle Pizza, 1929 E. Grant Rd. 6:30pm.
- 21 SAT *Oracle Heights Pool Party and Potluck* 2045 W. Omar Dr. 3pm-6pm.
- 25 WED Regular monthly meeting - 6pm. Optional dinner at 6:20, meeting starts at 7pm. Mountain View Restaurant 1220 E. Prince Road.

JULY 2003

- 15-19 T-SAT 2003 *CORSA International Convention*, Carlisle, PA
- 20 WED Regular monthly meeting - 6pm. Optional dinner at 6:20, meeting starts at 7pm. Mountain View Restaurant 1220 E. Prince Road.

purposes, then your vehicle may have an impact on the analysis.

A survey form requesting basic information was distributed at the April membership meeting and will be available again at the May meeting.

For more information, call Nancy Wrona at the Air Quality Division at 602-771-2308.

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 Beatle 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 "Corvair" 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 Corvair'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. The 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 no-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 Corvair. 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."



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For Sale: Corvair parts - Large outdoor yard full of Corvairs of every model. Call Barry Cunningham (520) 733-7387.

For Sale: 1966 110 hp Corvair engine. Ran fine until teeth stripped off of the cam gear. Sitting more than 10 years. Originally equipped for California smog req. No carbs or alternator. \$150 or offer. Call Herb (520) 751-9500.

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