

## *The Fabulous Sting Ray!*



The above car is a restored '63 split-window coupe from the 'Springs club which took the C2 category at our show last Saturday. Sting Rays, also known as C2s (Corvette, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation), mid-year and occasionally IRS (independent rear suspension) Vettes first hit the streets in '63. Their coming was long-heralded but the actual appearance was a well kept corporate secret until the official unveiling, although there were several clues along the way. The early-year, fixed axel C1s had enjoyed a good run from that first '53 at the Motorama and while there were a lot, a whole lot, of improvements and updates over the C1's decade, they were getting a bit long in the tooth and the '60s brought a lot of enthusiasm and desire for new things. Automotive engineering and design were, as Bob Dylan sang, well.. "The times, they were a-changing".

Most automotive journalists now look back at the Sting Ray and see that as the time the Corvette truly came into its own. In '62 arguably the best, most developed C1 sold 14,531 cars with a base price of \$4,038. In its first year, the new Sting Ray sold 21,513, an increase of 48%! After the initial angst over keeping production of Corvettes in the face of disappointing sales, that whopping increase in sales did indeed put Corvette in showrooms as the "halo car", the one that brought in customers who would probably buy some sensible sedan or wagon just because it was the same company who could built that! Price for the new Sting Ray was remarkably the same as the C1 at \$4,038 for the coupe and a curious \$4,037 for the convertible. For the five year run of the Sting Ray, the base price

increased to only \$4,388. Yes, this was the car which simultaneously created the image of a world-class sports car in the same class as Aston Martin DB4s, Jaguar XK-Es and Ferrari 250s, yet costing less than half of the European cars. Production saw a high of 27,720 in '66 as sales continued strong throughout the Sting Ray's run.

During their reign, Corvettes saw more options than before with multiple engines, transmissions, suspensions, color combinations and amenities, like A/C and automatic radios that could find the station for you! Because of the personalization now available, customers could beat Burger King by decades and get theirs just the way they liked it. That was what customers saw. Beneath that smorgasbord of goodies was GM's entry into computerized inventory control and their first step into the vanguard of information management to drive production. And Corvette was the choice as the most visible car in their line to offer these services, with Cadillac a few steps behind.

One of the best engineering feats on the Sting Ray was the independent rear suspension. Only the aforementioned European sports cars could afford to offer IRS on their products and it would be some 5 years before any other domestic manufacturer would offer it. Additionally, while Corvette offered fuel injection in the C1 era (the "fuelies"), the fuel injected Sting Rays were technology and performance leaders of the day. That included the European cars which were still relying on carburetors to mix their fuel and air. And, as all of us today still appreciate by not paying for the gas-guzzlers tax the Europeans still pay, Corvette's fuel injection systems created amazing fuel economy - something not much appreciated in the 25¢/gal. gas days. I'm sorry, I promise to feel badly about not caring about that back then... Soon.

I mentioned that there were clues about the look of the new Sting Ray before its release. This picture is for a concept car which hit the show circuit in 1961. GM Vice President Billy Mitchell caught a Mako Shark off the coast of Florida and loved the looks of that shark. He talked with Corvette designer Larry Shinoda about that fish and wondered what Larry could do with the idea. Note the "gills" just behind the mouth. And yes, the blended two-tone paint was true to the shark's colors. And what do you suppose the name of this concept car was? Give us your idea during our next meeting!



That was not the only clue. In October of 1960 at the Pacific Grand Prix at Laguna Seca, GM unveiled the Corvette Sting Ray prototype. It was built on the Corvette SS car (see last month's article) which the legendary Fangio destroyed the Sebring lap record with in 1957. Updated, the old chassis had a lot of life left as this car was very quick right out of the box. In '61, Dr. Dick Thompson in this car held legendary battles with the Scarabs and won the Sports Car Club of America's national championship.

What do you think, is there a clue about where Corvette was headed? And who would you think designed this car?

Ah, the Sting Ray. The most expensive collector Corvette ever. The new cars do so much more and do it so much better. But that was a high point many Vette faithful will argue was THE high point of Corvette history.

# ~ Sting Ray Stories ~

A guy offered me a drive in his brand new Stingray roadster: bright red, big block, four speed, yowie zowie. He said to go ahead and nail it. Okay, sure, I can do that. First gear; sideways in smoke. Second; slammed back in the seat. Rapidly approaching the red bar in the speedo, I power-shifted her into third.....oops. That was first. Got WAY into the red bar on the tach. Didn't bother with fourth. Sorry about that. 🤦  
Dave Hill

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My involvement with Corvettes starts with a Mustang. In 1964 I tried to buy a Mustang and could not make a deal with Jess Hunter Ford of Pueblo, we were \$200 apart. I purchased a 1964 Chevelle from Jackson Chevrolet. The car had a 4 speed and a 283 cu inch engine. I liked the car but it did not have much horse power. In 1965 I purchased a Riverside Red '64 Corvette Coup with black interior for \$3500. It had a 327 with 365 horsepower, a very fast car for the period as it would do 60 mph in first gear. This was the first of the five Corvettes, so far, I have purchased over the years. The other cars are: 1975 T-Top, 1986 convertible, 1995 coupe and of course the 1998 pace car.  
Richard Campbell

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Not surprisingly, my first look at a stingray was at a race, in the summer of 1961. John, Allen and I jumped into Allen's 3 cylinder Saab and headed for Continental Divide Raceways near Castle Rock for two nights of camping and a national championship SCCA sports car race. The big dogs were there. Both Scarabs, headlined by Augie Papst. Jim Hall had his new Chaparral. Hap Sharp was there with a brand new T-61 Maserati. A new-comer named Dan Gurney was driving the first King Cobra as Carrol Shelby's team was just entering the modified classes. Bobby Donner was driving a new Porsche RS-61. Lots of Ferraris and Max Balchowski's Ol' Yeller. The flyer also mentioned someone named Dr. Dick Thompson in something called a Sting Ray. Didn't know anything about it and didn't really care. Until I saw it. It was unlike anything I'd ever seen. The official list clearly said "...driving a Corvette Sting Ray" but there was nothing on the car to even tie it to Chevrolet. Next to the hordes of Ferrari Testa Rosas, Maseratis, Porsches and Scarabs, it looked large. And tall. Rumor in the pits was that Dick Thompson, a dentist from back east who was just back from driving in German races, had the national championship in C-Modified wrapped up and would beat Augie Papst's beautiful Scarab. I looked at the car with fresh eyes. It didn't have the low, wind-cheating front end of the other cars but it sure was pretty. Jim Hall drove away from everyone with his west-Texas wonder, but the Sting Ray and the Scarab had a wonderful battle, sometimes passing each other two or three times per lap with the Scarab claiming a hard-fought second place by a car length at the end. I fell asleep that Sunday night with visions of the silver Sting Ray dancing in my head. It went fast, sounded great with the marvelous Corvette V-8, but mostly, it sure was a spectacular-looking car! No, I wasn't all that surprised when the new Sting Rays were unveiled in '63.



Bob

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# "Vacation Hell"

**Day 1.** It all started out on a bright sunny Sunday morning. With just enough coffee to get the sleep out of our eyes, but not so much as to make us pit stop too often.

It was a great fun filled uneventful cruise that ended in Wichita KS. Except for losing Don & Judy on our way to dinner due to Dennis' unreliable GPS and a 30 cent side trip through a Kansas toll road.

**Day 2.** We awoke to the news of the devastation due to the tornado in Joplin, MO. This was our intended route. With rain and reported hail surrounding us we headed east. Dennis & Patty, with I Pod on board, kept a watchful eye on the weather. In order to stay behind the storms we drove east, then south, then east, then south, eventually ending in Bartlesville OK.

We ate an early lunch there to kill some time and to let the storm move out that was hitting Joplin again that morning. We arrived in the little hamlet of Fairland, OK. when the well known "Shit Hit The Fan" or more accurately the water hit our intake, and our engine went "Snap, Crackle, Pop." Two blocks ahead of us the towns only Cop was diverting west bound traffic around a three foot river in the road. Not being able to be in two places at once he couldn't stop us from going through a river crossing the road that was only two feet high.

Stranded in the middle of the road, all the guys got out of their cars and pushed us out of the water, getting soaked to the bone doing it, to a empty lot about a half block away. After about a half hour of us coaxing them to go on ahead, they decided, with much apprehension to continue on to Bowling Green.

Our afternoon was spent making phone calls to Rik N., tow truck companies, Chevy dealerships, etc. Seven hours later and countless phone calls a tow truck shows up, only to die right next to us, and we waited another hour for a second tow truck. By this time with over 10" of rain in a 24 hour period, most of the roads out of Fairland were washed out. We finally made it to Miami, OK about 8 or 9 o'clock that night. We dropped the car off at the Chevy dealer there and the tow truck driver drove us to the Buffalo Run Motel & Casino where we were fortunate to get the last room they had. We ate a late dinner, and went to bed, not knowing what the next day would bring.

**Day 3.** We awoke to blue skies and the confirmation by the dealership that the motor was blown. Again, after countless phone calls to Rik, we decided we would rather have him repair the car than the dealership in Miami, OK. Numerous phone calls to our very resourceful daughter procured a 17' U haul truck with a car trailer that she located in Grove, Ok about 25 miles from where we were. After a few dollars later and some coaxing with the dealership, their courtesy car drove me to pick up the truck and trailer.

With the help of all the guys at the dealership we loaded the car and were headed for home by 2:00PM. Rik had located a motor in Oklahoma City, but with the threat of a tornado there we decided to just get the hell out of town.

We drove through continuous rain and the threat of hail and more tornados as we headed for home. We were just west of Wichita when over a radio station we heard that there were blue skies ahead and we should have smooth sailing the rest of the way home. Ya Right!

50 miles west of Wichita, over the Hutchison, KS radio station they make the announcement of an approaching huge storm, ping pong size hail and possible tornados. We were heading right into it. As luck would have it we came upon an over pass and I drove the truck and trailer down under it and waited out the storm.

**Day 4.** With a few hours sleep in the cab of the truck, and rain until we hit the Colorado border. We arrived at the Corvette Center about 11:30AM. As always there is good and bad in all things. The bad is we had to get a new motor for our car, the good thing is we think our comprehensive insurance might cover the cost. Another good thing that we found out later is that our favorite eating place near Bowling Green was closed. Jannett didn't feel quite so disappointed about not being with the group when she found this out.

As this is being written our car is being repaired and we should be "On the Road Again" in the near future.

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# A Teaser Of The Bowling Green Trip



We'll have a full article in next month's issue of the trip. Just know for now that it was a mighty fine time – OK, except maybe for Lucky & Jannett.

# *The Show That Went to the Dogs!*



Last Saturday we held the combined Corvette Show with the Mustang Club and Mopar Club at, where else, the dog track! It was a very good time with some 25 Vettes from as far away as Denver showing up for our part. After all the wind, smoke and heat previously, the day was just about made to order for a car show. Overall, there were close to 100 cars in the track's infield and the atmosphere was filled with happy people and cool cars. Dan Samento came in from Canon City to provide music to keep it rocking along. Our club did rather well with the following winners:

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| C1 – Brian Dougherty, 1 <sup>st</sup> place    | C6 - Dennis Clark, 1 <sup>st</sup> place       |
| C3 – Dick Valdez, 1 <sup>st</sup> place        | Matt Valdez, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place             |
| Bill & Sally Kenny, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place      | Z06 - Rick & Jill Brake, 1 <sup>st</sup> place |
| C5 - Bill & Sally Kenny, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place |  |
| Richard Campbell, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place        |  |
| Burt & Sharon Jaco, 4 <sup>th</sup> place      |  |
| Bob & Vicki Adams, 5 <sup>th</sup> place       |  |

Many thanks to everyone who worked on the planning and who showed up early on Saturday to do whatever needed to be done to make this not only happen, but who made it truly enjoyable and fun!

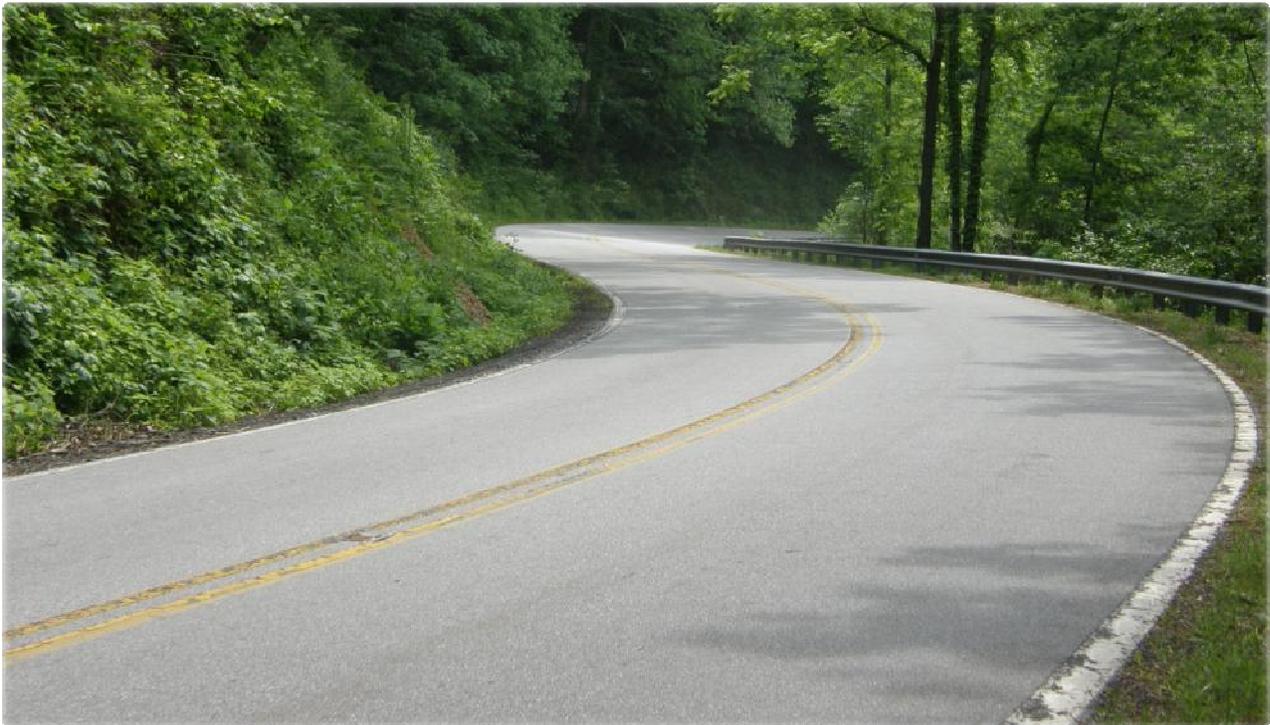


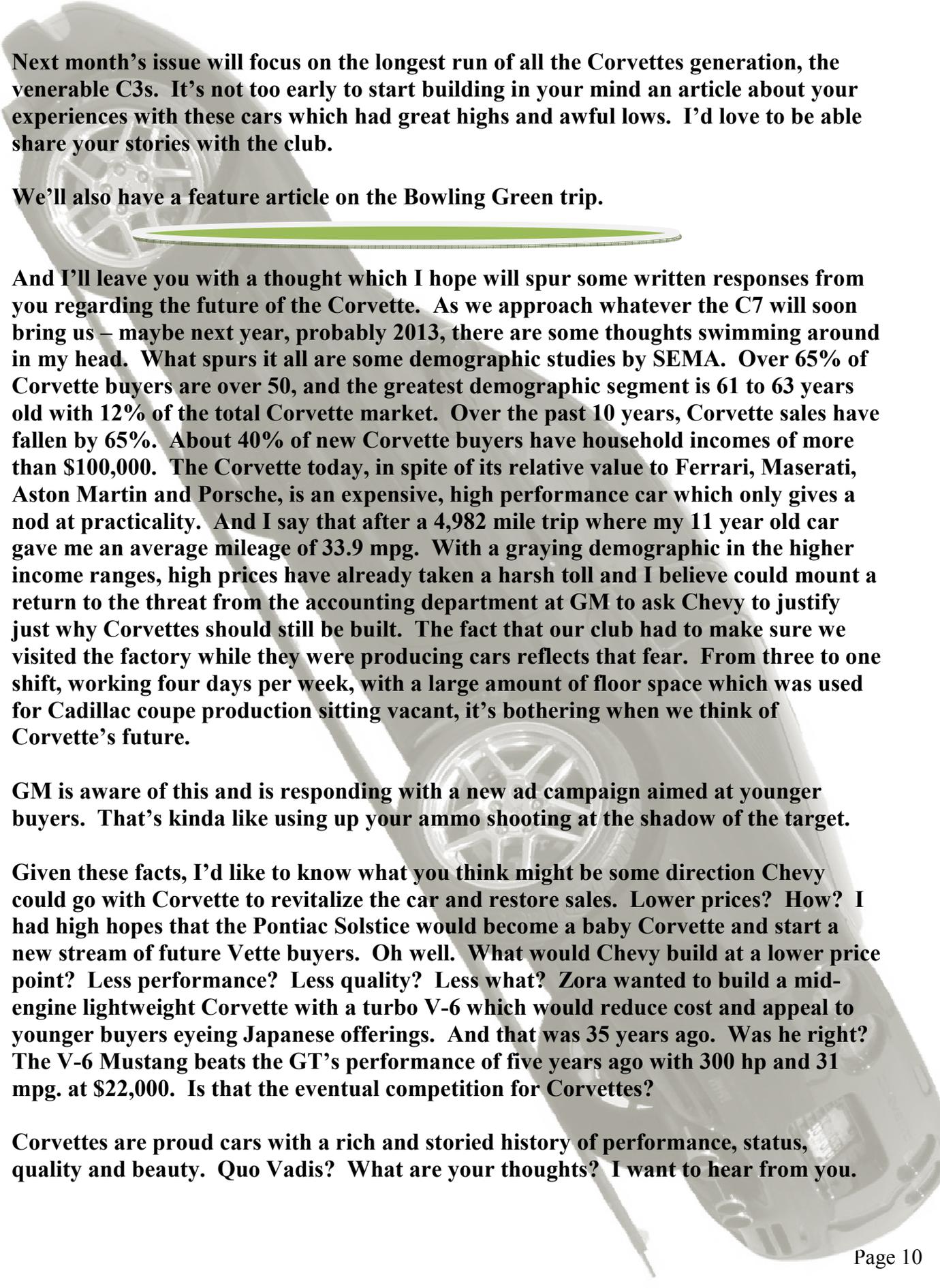
**This Friday, June 10<sup>th</sup> – Sonic Night.** A slight change from last month's meeting where we were going to eat at the Sonic. We will still meet at 5:30 PM at the N. Eliz. St. Sonic, but will then leave NLT 5:45 for Pepe's on Santa Fe on the Mesa for dinner and their weekly Friday evening car show. Bring your lawn chairs.

**Tuesday, June 28<sup>th</sup> – Next Club Meeting.** 7:00 PM at the main library. After the meeting we will gather locally for food, drinks &/or desert but definitely a good time!

**Monday, July 4<sup>th</sup> – Inter-club bowling** night at Sunset Lanes. Join us and the Mustang and Mopar clubs for some fun at the alley!

And I'll give you a hint of what the Tail of the Dragon (318 turns in 11 miles, drive it as hard as you can) was like. Driving Heaven! Anyone know where this is?





Next month's issue will focus on the longest run of all the Corvettes generation, the venerable C3s. It's not too early to start building in your mind an article about your experiences with these cars which had great highs and awful lows. I'd love to be able share your stories with the club.

We'll also have a feature article on the Bowling Green trip.

And I'll leave you with a thought which I hope will spur some written responses from you regarding the future of the Corvette. As we approach whatever the C7 will soon bring us – maybe next year, probably 2013, there are some thoughts swimming around in my head. What spurs it all are some demographic studies by SEMA. Over 65% of Corvette buyers are over 50, and the greatest demographic segment is 61 to 63 years old with 12% of the total Corvette market. Over the past 10 years, Corvette sales have fallen by 65%. About 40% of new Corvette buyers have household incomes of more than \$100,000. The Corvette today, in spite of its relative value to Ferrari, Maserati, Aston Martin and Porsche, is an expensive, high performance car which only gives a nod at practicality. And I say that after a 4,982 mile trip where my 11 year old car gave me an average mileage of 33.9 mpg. With a graying demographic in the higher income ranges, high prices have already taken a harsh toll and I believe could mount a return to the threat from the accounting department at GM to ask Chevy to justify just why Corvettes should still be built. The fact that our club had to make sure we visited the factory while they were producing cars reflects that fear. From three to one shift, working four days per week, with a large amount of floor space which was used for Cadillac coupe production sitting vacant, it's bothering when we think of Corvette's future.

GM is aware of this and is responding with a new ad campaign aimed at younger buyers. That's kinda like using up your ammo shooting at the shadow of the target.

Given these facts, I'd like to know what you think might be some direction Chevy could go with Corvette to revitalize the car and restore sales. Lower prices? How? I had high hopes that the Pontiac Solstice would become a baby Corvette and start a new stream of future Vette buyers. Oh well. What would Chevy build at a lower price point? Less performance? Less quality? Less what? Zora wanted to build a mid-engine lightweight Corvette with a turbo V-6 which would reduce cost and appeal to younger buyers eyeing Japanese offerings. And that was 35 years ago. Was he right? The V-6 Mustang beats the GT's performance of five years ago with 300 hp and 31 mpg. at \$22,000. Is that the eventual competition for Corvettes?

Corvettes are proud cars with a rich and storied history of performance, status, quality and beauty. Quo Vadis? What are your thoughts? I want to hear from you.