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THE VETTE GAZETTE

September 2013

In all of my searches I come across something that often makes me say wow and this is defiantly one of those things, I find it very interesting on how GM setup this program and what the car was capable of in the end enjoy!!

The C5 Corvette Kit



You couldn't buy one of these Corvettes from your local Chevrolet dealer. You had to be approved by GM to buy one of these C5 Corvettes. Then after you were approved you had to go to the parts counter to place your order for the car. When your Corvette was finally delivered most of the car arrived in boxes. Oh, you had to drive to Flint Michigan to pick up the rolling chassis.

These were obviously no ordinary Corvettes. These were Corvette race cars. From 1999 to 2001 you could buy your Corvette race car directly from Chevrolet, or more correctly from the Service and Parts Operations division of GM.

You didn't really buy a complete Corvette. You bought a rolling chassis complete with a drivetrain, a bunch of body panels and any number of small parts. The body panels arrived in cardboard boxes. Actually in 1999 they arrived a few weeks later since there were some logistical problems.

When the C5 was introduced a lot of folks in GM thought the way to sell more Corvettes were to race them. They believed the old phrase "Win on Sunday – Sell on Monday."

GM Motorsports thought it would be a really neat idea to make Corvette racing even easier than it had been in the past. Prior to 1999 you had to go to your local Chevrolet dealer and buy a brand new Corvette. You would then take the car apart and turn all the parts into a race car.

GM Motorsports, led by Ken Brown, came up with the idea of selling racers only the parts they needed. Since race teams were taking brand new Corvettes apart anyways why not just sell them the parts they needed. Race teams didn't need a stinking interior.

Once it was decided to go ahead with the program GM had to make sure that the cars actually went to racers and not collectors. It wouldn't do any good if these cars ended up at Bloomington Gold. GM didn't do this program to help you win an NCRS award. Nope, the idea was that you would buy one of these kits, assemble it, and then beat the crap out of it on the racetrack. This was a performance program.

[The Fixed Roof Coupe](#)

All of these Corvette kit cars were Fixed Roof Coupes (FRC). At one time this was supposed to be the Bubba or a low priced Corvette. When the product planners realized that the FRC would sell for about the same price as the Camaro the Bubba program was halted. The only problem was the FRC was still going into production. What the hell do we do with this car now?

The problem was that there was this Corvette (the FRC) going into production with no real sales program. GM had everything in place except the target market. Ok, let's make the FRC a race car.



I remember attending a meeting where they explained to a small group of us that the FRC was the ideal Corvette race car because it had the stiffest body shell of the three different versions. No mention was made of the crappy aero numbers they had just seen in the wind tunnel. The FRC simply wasn't a great aero package. The air simply didn't come off of the roof properly. The hatch back coupe was much better at handling the airflow over the top of the car. Now we had a FRC being sold as a race car when the street car, or coupe, had much better aero characteristic. Oppppppsssss.

You'll notice that Pratt and Miller never used the FRC in any of their racing programs. They knew from the start that the FRC was aero trouble. The cars destined for the SCCA World Challenge just avoided this whole aero issue. "Here's your FRC – go have fun."

The kit car program seemed to be a perfect way to showcase the FRC and create demand for this orphan body style. A little later GM would try limiting the ZO6 option to the FRC. This actually helped sell more FRCs than the kit car program sold. Keep in mind though that this was a coordinated effort. All of the SCCA World Challenge Corvettes were Fixed Roof Coupes, and if you wanted the ZO6 performance package you had to order it as a FRC. This was all coming together. GM had a plan. Yep.

In early 1999 though it was still a matter of "How do we get people to buy this damn FRC Corvette." GM was searching for a way to recover the development costs of the FRC. Extolling the virtue of having a real trunk wasn't going to get the job done. GM ended up trying to convince the public that the FRC was the real performance car of the three body styles. It worked. At least it helped. You'll notice though that the FRC was gone with the introduction of the C6.

What You Actually Got

One of the most interesting items was what you got with your Corvette kit and what was left out. The idea was to leave out all the parts you didn't need and only include those parts that were necessary. Things got a little confused when some items like the front cowl panel was left out of the kit. When the racers went to buy one at the local dealership they were told it wasn't available. There was a part number – but no part. When you have a half assembled Corvette in your shop you really didn't want to hear that.



The Bowling Green plant pulled a few of these cowl panels off the line to meet the needs of the twenty new Corvette owners. As these cars went together in 1999 a few more of these problems developed and were quickly solved by making some very special very very small parts run. Can you imagine asking for twenty of anything in the GM system?

Another interesting problem in 1999 was that no one had really given much thought as to how the body panels would be shipped to the race shops. I imagine someone said "We can just put the body panels in some cardboard boxes and ship them UPS." "Ok, next point on the agenda. Moving right along here."

Well it wasn't quite that easy. One of the fun experiences was trying to assemble your Corvette while you kept one eye out for the UPS delivery truck. Keep in mind that no one had done this before. GM was trying something that had never been done before. It hasn't been done since either but that's a whole 'other issue.

During the Corvette Challenge (1988 to 1989) era you always got a fully assembled car. Even with Porsche you got a fully assembled race car. 1999 was the first time a major

manufacturer had ever sold racecar kits. Ok, there was a time back in 1976 when Dodge tried it but the cars were pretty complete. Nothing like this GM SPO effort. I suspect that the Corvette folks weren't even aware of the old Dodge program. They certainly weren't about to drive across town and find out how it had worked out for Dodge.



All of the chassis were assembled in the Bowling Green plant but pulled off the assembly line prior to what is known as serialization. In other words these twenty cars did not have the standard 17-digit VIN. Neither were they counted into the 1999 model year production numbers. All of the cars were given a serial number from GM Motorsports. They ran from 0000001 to 0000020.

When you purchased your car you not only got a bunch of parts you got access to a whole bunch of GM engineering talent. The information was made available to all the teams without any favoritism. This was a total team effort on the part of GM Motorsports. They even took Danny Kellermeyer's C5R kit car to the wind tunnel. The results of the wind tunnel test were made available to every car owner.

They then went so far as to bring Gib Hufstader out of retirement to act as a liaison between the teams and GM Motorsports. You could find Gib wandering around the pits at the World Challenge events offering support and trying to answer a multitude of questions.

The engine package for these kit cars was slightly different with the utilization of some ASA parts. Actually the kit car program got the ASA camshaft and valve springs before the ASA teams got them. The ECM was also an ASA part as was the engine wiring harness.

You didn't get a brake master cylinder or any of the necessary brake lines in 1999. Essentially though the front and rear cradles were complete. This changed in 2000 when you

got the ABS controller as a part of the package. As the years rolled on the packages got more complete. Each year Chevrolet learned a little more about how to get things packaged correctly.

Are They Collectible?

There's no question that these are the rarest Corvette model produced during the C5 production run. Does rare make them valuable? So far the answer is "Not really." Remember a 3-speed manual in a '63 is extremely rare but no one wants one. Don't confuse rare and valuable.

There are a couple of issues with these cars that haven't been sorted out. First they're race cars. Corvette people generally don't collect race cars. At least not the way Porsche and Ferrari people collect them.

How Many Kits Were Sold?

1999 - 20

2000 - 10

2001 - 12

Porsche people actually create clones of the most famous racecars and put them on display. Corvette folks on the other hand take perfectly good racecars and turn them back into street cars. That's because Corvettes are normally judged on the basis of how well they mimic what left the Corvette factory. It's all about how the car left the plant. All signs of patina and real use have to be removed. That sort of kills the idea of displaying old Corvette race cars.



If we use the standard NCRS and Bloomington Gold judging criteria you would have to show these Corvette kit cars as a rolling chassis accompanied by a bunch of boxes containing all the extra parts. After all that was the way these Corvettes left the Bowling Green Corvette assembly plant. Seriously though I'm not even sure if we have rules about judging these cars.

In the end these cars will become highly collectible. Whether they can be judged or not is an interesting question. Personally I see no reason to ever subject a race car to show car judging. That's just wrong. That's also just me.

Next, the people who currently own these kit cars have to finish racing them. Which probably won't happen any time too soon. Danny Kellermeyer is still winning championships with his 1999 kit car. On certain courses his old 1999 kit cars are faster than his brand new C6 Corvette racer.

It would be a shame to take cars this good and simply park them on the lawn someplace. I suspect the C5 kit cars will become great vintage racers before they become show cars. After all wasn't that the whole point when GM Racing put this program together? Drive the cars on the track and win some races. This program wasn't about putting cars on display in some parking lot. These are race cars.

Meeting Agenda

Sept 24th, 7:00 P.M.

Rawlings Library



~ Camaraderie & Cars - Just Havin' Fun ~

**Meeting in Bret Kelly Room*

Welcome **Jill Brake**

Birthdays & Anniversaries

New Cars &/or Toys

Secretary's Report – **Bev Landdeck**, Action Item

Treasurer's Report – **Al Cozzetto**, Action Item

NCCC Governor's Report – **Bob Adams**

Newsletter Report & Vette Trivia – **Ryan Picco**

Old Business:

Events Since Last Meeting – Sonic Night, Street Clean up

New Business:

- Elections, Committee report
- Christmas party? Date, Cost (DVD, Calendar, Band?)

- Member Dues/Oct1st
- Harchelroad Trip 10/11-10/13
- Autocross
- Other
- **No Sonic in October**

Reminders: Street-Clean-up Sept 28th, Bowling Oct 7th

Future Fun Club Events:

Grow the club – All events open to all Vettes, everyone recruit and be notorious!

Next Meeting – ***October 22nd***, 7:00 P.M. at Library

Save the Wave!
