



A TIME OF TRANSITION - THE C3

We live in a “transition zone”. The mountains to the west of us meet the high plains to the east of us and where we live is a geological area known as a transition zone. We live in a “transition period”. Actually, everyone and everything who has ever lived has lived in a transition period between the past and the future. However, the pace of change is even now bringing down the way we have been doing things, changing and challenging the values and bedrock of what we stand for and where we take our stands. Kids nowadays are nothing like what we once were. A starving kid in Africa can still know what’s happening in the “Arab Spring”, and we are always in “new territory” with the stock market. Politicians just can’t get it right trying to appeal to the older and younger voters anymore. And do we want to talk about the stress level of just getting by?

I think it was Robert Blake who penned, "Twas always thus, and thus always to be." No, we've never seen days like these, but our parents said the same thing. Fifty years ago the '60s changed everything. And speaking of the '60s, out in Detroit, even before the fabulous Sting Rays knocked the socks off the automotive world in '63, Bill Mitchell had his design team looking forward to the successor of the C2s. Plans were for the Sting Rays to last until '65, possibly carrying on into '66, so it was time to start work on the successor. Things just wouldn't stay the same.

Little did they know what the future would bring them! They thought they were just changing a Corvette model, but the powerful hands of change were even then starting to create a new world no one knew was coming. And that world was where the C3 would have to find a way to survive and just get through.

Duntov wanted to take the car where he thought young Americans wanted to go – a lightweight, nimble, sophisticated pure sports car with real-world qualities. Like higher mileage to compete with what was then incoming artillery from Japan, lower prices to compete with the imports and great visual appeal. His engineering-driven mind saw a mid-engine Vette something like what Lotus was then leading the sports car world with. And for power? The Wankel rotary engine was really interesting, but maybe a V-6 would keep the performance level Corvettes were then known for. Duntov's CERV II was a great development platform for this thought process, with its light weight, mid-engine V-8 and all-wheel drive.



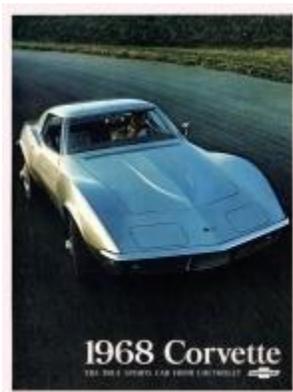
And with that came the beginning of the great split between Duntov and upper management. Already, management had put off the new Vette until '67 due to financial "belt-tightening". Mandates were coming downstream that the new Vette would have to use existing parts and components in the Chevy line, as the Sting Ray had with the new Mark IV 427 engine, which stifled creativity. At this point, Corvairs existed and there was some thought about using that chassis, but it just wasn't strong enough for Corvette performance, much less the rise of Ralph Nader and invasive government mileage and safety regulations coming down the pike. With these pressures, Larry Shinoda became the go-to guy. His string of Mako Shark show cars had the stunning visual appeal everyone wanted, and was based on the C2 chassis and running gear. The C3 was rising out of the primordial soup.



By '65, California was leading the nation in requiring positive crankcase ventilation (PCV) systems and smog pumps and Washington was right behind with nationwide legislation mandated for '68, which included front, rear and side-impact standards. The Corvair had become a national poster-child for safety problems and Chevy had made it to the top of the charts in insurance company's list of dangerous manufactures. That had a sharp edge to it with increased insurance costs and reduced sales, which drove the

accountants to even more power within GM's top floors, including the President and Chairman of the Board, Frederick Donner. The accountants were often in conflict with engineers, the car guys. Change at the top was a-brewing. And for many of the old guard, it just wasn't fun anymore. There were wholesale retirements and almost constant corporate reorganizations as they reacted in fear of a future of dropping sales and profits. There were even some heated arguments over the continuation of Corvette, but top management, particularly from Pete Estes, Chevy's new GM, and the continued loyalty of Bill Mitchell and Ed Cole, held off the bean-counters. A guy named Pete Brock, who was a rising star, left to go to California to help a guy named Carroll Shelby put together a really fun project called the Cobra, which was already having a devastating impact on Duntov's racing program.

Because of the distractions and corporate lack of focus, it wasn't until '67 that the St. Louis plant began to retool for the new Vette. But there were still substantial problems with the car. Zora Arkus-Duntov took a prolonged absence due to illness in the spring of '67 and he returned just three weeks before the much-ballyhooed press introduction of the C3. The preview Corvette was a dark blue (heat-absorbing) car with the Mk. IV 427 big block. In his absence, engineering had forgotten about engine cooling, which was woefully inadequate for that engine in that hot car. Duntov's engineering skills came to the fore and in a week he had lengthened the chin spoiler so he could add two large scoops into the bottom bodywork. His racing experience gave him the guidance, and the press never noticed. But it was a patch, not a fix, and the big-blocks were known for overheating throughout their short run in the C3s. So, after a thoroughly miserable gestation period filled with corporate missteps and outright blunders, engineering problems caused by a revolving door of new bosses and reorganizations, pressured by changing times with regulations and terrible safety issues throughout GM and all underlined by accountants shouting "the sky is falling!", the new '65 Corvette debuted as a '68.



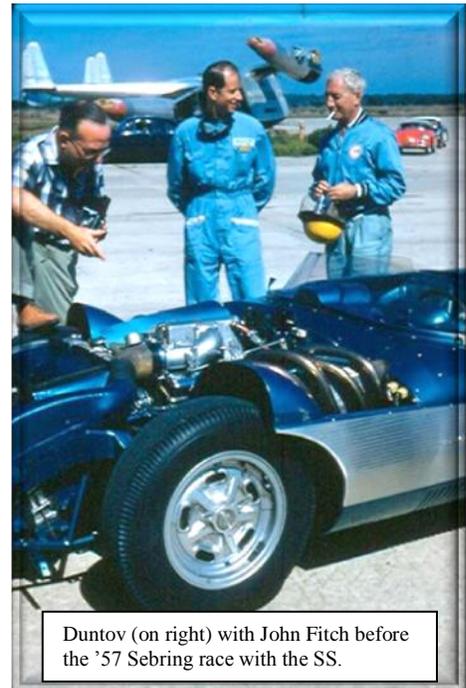
How was it? Let me quote a *Car & Driver* road test by no other than the senior editor, Steve Smith in the December '67 issue. He had driven to Watkins Glen for some track time. *"The car was unfit for a road test. No amount of envious gawking by the spectators could make up for the disappointment we felt at the car's shocking lack of quality control. With less than 2,000 miles on it, the Corvette was falling apart."* Just prior to that article, Donner had reorganized Chevy's structure and actually disbanded Corvette Engineering. Duntov was punted to "special assignments" while the rest of the staff was reassigned to various groups. After that article by *Car & Driver*, Corvette Engineering was re-assembled. A

move we can celebrate today. John DeLorean, another engineer and avid performance guy, came into power and started quality control measures which quickly fixed the embarrassments. One of his measures was to make every Corvette go through a high-pressure water test with an inspector inside looking for leaks. Something we saw still repeated at our visit to the factory! Every car was individually road-tested for rattles, squeaks and performance.

OK, so I've focused a lot on the environment in which the C3 came to be, but to be honest, it's a story which I find fascinating. It's a look behind the corporate curtains at the wizard

himself. And the wizard's name was *Legion*. There really was no one behind the wheel. Rather than driving the evolution of what was already an iconic symbol of America, the process was driven by many competing and unrelated forces, none of whom got together to help make this a better car. That the C3 ran from '68 until '82 was maybe not so much of a surprise – given that the corporate ability to come up with another new Vette was gravely wounded – but that the C3's put up the best sales numbers ever year after year is the big surprise. And that during a period when safety concerns saw the Vette become a bit of a porker on the scales. And under the hood power went from in excess of 500 hp to under 180 hp. My last motorcycle had more power than that! In early '74, 13 nations got together and created even more pressure on the shape of the Corvette. OPEC drove the cost of gas from \$2.11 per barrel to \$14.08 in three years. Today, a \$12.00 increase in the price of a barrel of gas doesn't even make us blink – we've seen worse. But that was an increase of 563%! We haven't seen the likes of that, thank God.

Convertibles withered away on the vine and coupes were the only model left standing. Weight and price increased, and for the first time, automatic transmissions became the norm. GM, under Ed Cole's management, went looking for a way to keep the Corvette viable. They found buyers who wanted cars that looked good in front of the country club and restaurant, and the air-conditioning and stereo were more important than limited-slip differentials and down-force at speed. The Corvette became that car. One of the great compromises that Duntov lived with throughout his time with Corvette was the conflicting needs of a high-performance sports car capable of 140 mph, and safety. He said, "If an owner does drive at 140 mph, he should be able to do it safely." Zora was a master at finding a meeting-point in those conflicting needs. What he was never able to engineer was a meeting point to the conflicting image of Corvette as a high-performance car and a pretty boulevard cruiser for the wealthy and privileged. On new-year's day in 1975, he retired and was replaced by his protégé, Dave McClellan, who would guide the birth of the C4. Ed Cole, who had replaced Donner as President and Chairman of GM, retired a few months after Duntov, and Bill Mitchell left in early 1978. All the original Corvette guys were gone.



Duntov (on right) with John Fitch before the '57 Sebring race with the SS.



But Corvette didn't die. The C3 saw formidable success on the race tracks of the world, finally putting a stop to the reign of the all-mighty Cobra and returning national championships to Corvette, as well as several international wins such as Sebring and Le Mans. While sales of the C3 dribbled away during the end of its run, it always managed to attract enough buyers to stay alive and see

increasing fuel economy, vastly improved safety features, become the poster-child for how

to put together a complicated car very well and herald in a whole new world of high-performance, restoring Corvette to an image thought lost during the mid-'70s. A truly amazing model!

And last, I've got to admit that I thought the C3s the least attractive of all the Vettes. My brother-in-law bought one, I think a '78, and we had it in our garage for a while. It had a multi-thousand dollar custom paint job, but I saw that the Vette was actually longer than our long-wheelbase van! It was heavy, had 180 horsepower and was so cramped in the cockpit that I hardly noticed the heat and noise from the transmission. All true, but now that I have a car I think is the most beautiful of all the Vettes, I look at the C3s and thank them for their graceful, flowing lines that made mine possible. All the while, through all the distractions and threats the Corvette guys saw possibilities of what could be and dreamed of the way it could happen. Isn't it great that the C3s happened and held its head above all the fray?



Why Are We Wrapped in Fiberglass?

Have you ever wondered “Why Fiberglass?” Why wasn't the Corvette born with, say, aluminum skin? Or plastic resin. Or even conventional steel?

It might surprise you to learn that the reason is that on June 25, 1950, eight divisions and an armored brigade, 90,000 North Korean soldiers invaded Detroit in a surprise attack. Steel is essential in many things we build, especially autos. We still can't build production cars without it. But back then, steel was even more essential. As the US geared up for war with North Korea, President Truman re-imposed wage and price controls in '51. Truman's Wage Stabilization Board, which was still in place since WWII, authorized new wage increases, and the steel companies realized that they were not going to be able to increase prices to pay for the higher wages. They simply refused to increase the wages. The new kids on the block, the United Steel Workers, threatened a general strike. Now the country couldn't go to war without steel, so Truman seized the steel companies but made no changes in management or workers in '52. The mills sued, the courts ruled the seizure illegal and 600,000 steel workers walked out. A higher court ruled the seizures legal, the workers returned. The Supreme Court ruled the seizures illegal. The workers went back out. In sympathy, the Great Lakes shipping industry put all their ships in port. The government needed steel, which was then source, so they halted all steel delivery for consumer goods.

That set the stage for Detroit to start thinking about other materials they might make cars out of. Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) had been around for 20 years and it had been developed to a point of practicality, so it was available. GM had actually produced plastic dashboard trim and steering wheels in conjunction with Owens-Corning in 1940. It was O-C who marketed their product with the name Fiberglass. Shift from Detroit to Southern California, a pleasant change. Boat builders had discovered the advantages in cost, ease of manufacturing and weight with fiberglass as compared to steel and began developing means of laying the glass up on molds. Glaspar was probably the most successful of those builders. The owner of Glaspar had a Jeep body molded of fiberglass for his wife and that caught the automotive world's attention, although steel was still plentiful then. Life magazine published a lengthy article titled "Plastic Bodies for Autos" in '52 and Detroit was then actively looking for alternatives to steel. A young engineer named Ed Cole who was working in the Cadillac division discovered how replacement fenders could be made out of fiberglass and liked the inexpensive set-up required for production. Senior management took note of this young engineer. They began making show cars and prototypes of fiberglass, saving considerable time, labor and expense. So, when the Corvette show car was commissioned for the Autorama in '52, it was a natural for them to produce that car of the fiberglass they had come to like. When the command to get into production as soon as possible, in a world where steel was rare and precious, guess what? As the plate in the National Museum says, "WYAIFG"!



~ A New Eagle F1 ~

Goodyear has just released a new F1 tire suitable for the Corvette known as the Eagle F1 Asymmetric 2. Claims are less cost than comparable Michelins, better braking and cornering, less noise and longer tread life. Ah, don't we wish... The reason this is the asym 2 is because it replaces the asym 1, which had many of the same claims but has been withdrawn because of treadwear issues and fraying. Also turned out that the asym 1 was quiet for the first couple hundred miles, then came the semi symphony all the Eagles have been known and loved for. There aren't any meaningful user reviews I could find since they are too new but initial performance claims have been backed up – although I did note that at their press introduction in Europe they just couldn't find a Michelin in the right size to compare with, so settled for Continental and Bridgestones, which are getting a bit long of tooth these days. The treadwear rating has gone from 240 to 300 so there may be something to the claims. How about this? If any of you decide to give this American brand another try, let me know and I'll pass on your experiences. You can price them at Goodyear & Tire Rack, among others.



We've been a really busy club with almost more events and opportunities to gather to keep track of! But then we never signed up in a Corvette club to be couch potatoes, did we? Of the recent events I want to thank Judy & Don for inviting us to their marriage last week. They are on honeymoon now, but what a neat thing for our members to celebrate. If you didn't have the opportunity to attend the wedding, give 'em a big hug and congrats next time you see them! Also, thanks to Bill Kenny for ram-riding another clothing drive for the Wounded Warriors of Fort Carson. Once again we were warmly welcomed and greatly appreciated. What we're doing truly makes a difference to those who have made a difference. We've been asked to be part of their Chili Cook-Off in October - more on that to follow.

Aug 19th - 21st - Harchelroad Event, Imperial, NB. If you aren't locked in now, it's next year for you.

Aug 28th - Sky Sox Car Show & Game. If you haven't already RSVP'd with Dennis Clark, email him at dcgrove@q.com and make arrangements right away!!!

Sep 5th - Bowling with the Mustang & Mopar clubs at Sunset Bowl, 7:00 PM. This is just for fun, no need to even be a bowler to have a very good time with other car enthusiasts!

Sep 9th - Sonic Night at Pueblo Blvd & Northern - 6:00 PM

Sep 24th & 25th - La Junta Track Event. Low speed autocross, high speed track event, perhaps driving school? Contact Rik Noring at the Corvette Center for info.

Sep 27th - Club Meeting at the Main Library at 7:00 PM.

A Small Thank-You To Some Giant Hearts.

Being part of this club over the years has at many times felt like being part of a family. This was once again brought to my thoughts by the many well wishers coming forth during the past several months. From the good wishes and prayers that many of you extended even before my surgery to the absolutely uplifting visits, calls, cards and gifts from so many of you shortly after. You can never know how much each and every thought and gesture meant to me while undergoing this life changing ordeal. Thanks to those expressions of concern I found each time a little more strength to endure and recover. I hope that I will still get to see so many of those friendly faces and hear their uplifting words as I continue this fight. It has already been a long road and I recently discovered that there will be 16 weeks of chemotherapy starting Aug. 2nd. I hope that I may still make a few of the local events so that I can keep in touch with this great family during that time.

Thank-you to ALL, Todd Frederick

Corvette Racing

Just thought you might enjoy a quick update on Corvette Racing's exploits through this season. I suspect that you likely know that Corvette won the GT class at the revered 24 Hours of Le Mans. They had a very good shot at finishing 1 - 2, but the lead Corvette was taken out by a bone-head move by a member of the Royal Saudi family as he was being lapped. Bummer, but still everyone else was fighting for 2nd place.



Back to Lime Rock for the Northeast Grand Prix, where poor qualifying put both cars back in the pack. As they were working their way forward, a wreck ahead of them put both of them in the pits for lengthy repairs, re-joining the race in 12th & 14th positions. They finished in 9th & 10th, victims of racing luck, but collected points. The two BMWs finished 1st & 2nd and strengthened their class lead.

Then on to Mosport in Canada. The #4 car won the race going away over the resurgent Ferrari 458 and ever-present BMWs. The #3 car was threatening to move into 2nd place near the end when a punctured tire pushed it back to 6th. Corvette Racing closed on BMWs lead.



Last weekend at Mid-Ohio Corvettes were running 1 - 2 with a half hour left after Tommy Milner put on yet another display of amazing driving and passing skills and the sky split open and the track became a river. One of the Porsches who had never won a race had the perfect rain set-up and won, leaving Corvette to finish 2nd. Milner's Vette got shunted by a back runner and knocked back to 6th. Still, the gap with the BMW team narrowed again. It's going to be a horse race between these two teams for the rest of the year.

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by Kevin Koch



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