

1972 Corvette

Stingray Convertible

by Mel Mann

West Peterson photos

As the Corvette was being unloaded from the transporter, fellow AACA South Florida Region member Guy Lewis advised me to “...drive that piece of junk into Biscayne Bay.” These words of encouragement were all that I needed to make this car into the best it could be.

After hearing about a pair of 1972 Corvette Stingrays for sale, in late 2005 I flew up to Connecticut and made a quick inspection. I was told they were stored for many years and not used. At first glance, they did not look so great, but nevertheless, I liked what I saw. I was satisfied enough to buy them both for a great price. In order to save a lot of money on shipping, before I left I got them running, so that they could be easily trucked down to Miami.

These were true “his and hers” cars, totally different in every way, including their opposite colors and body styles. Both were low-mileage examples from the final year of the chrome-bumpered Stingrays, and both shared the base 350cid/200hp V-8. What attracted me to both these cars was their original “survivor” condition ... both worn in, but not worn out.

“His” car was a coupe that was delivered from the factory in grey primer (an extremely rare option), and then painted black by the selling dealer. It was possible to order a car this way from GM in those years, and the paint code is stamped “special.” It is hard to believe, but Chevrolet did not build any black Corvettes from 1970 to 1976. This one was a real sports car: a basic four-speed coupe with hardly any options.

“Her” car was a highly optioned white convertible, loaded with many desirable goodies like factory air conditioning, power steering, brakes and windows, automatic transmission, AM/FM stereo, tilt/telescopic steering wheel, leather upholstery, and more. The car has great original documentation (window sticker and build sheet), showing that it was originally delivered by the Potamkin Chevrolet dealership on Market Street in Philadelphia.

I had to make a decision to sell one of the cars. While I was attracted to the rarity of the black coupe, I was also smitten with the white one because it was

a convertible. When I became active in the South Florida Region, our club founder Charles Sebastian preached to me, “Cars are only original once – anything can be restored, but original cars are to be treasured.” What sage advice it truly is, and it is a great lesson for all of us in the hobby. The white car, with just 42,000 miles on the odometer, was the car for me.

I spent the next 12 months going through this original Corvette cleaning and improving it, and making it safe to drive by fixing or replacing everything that required attention. Despite its age, its condition was remarkable. The frame was incredibly clean, and the original paint only required a light compounding and polish to return its original luster. I repainted some of the metal parts on the car (headlight covers, gas cap cover, side louvers, and wiper grille covers), because the color no longer matched. The vinyl convertible top is original and in perfect shape. The bumpers were re-plated, and I chose to replace some items inside, including carpeting, pillar post moldings, weatherstripping, speakers and refinished the gauge cluster. New rubber vacuum lines were installed so that the headlights and wiper riser door would operate properly.

Mechanically, the engine was fine and only required a rear main oil seal. After rebuilding the Quadrajets carburetor and giving it a full tune-up, it rumbles like the day it was delivered. After replacing the transmission’s fluid and pan gasket, installing a new vacuum modulator, the THM400 shifted like new. The water pump was rebuilt, along with new hoses, belts and filters. New “tower” clamps were installed and I replaced the horn relay with an NOS (new-old-stock) part. The air conditioner compressor was rebuilt, and it now blows

ice cold. It is relatively rare to find the air option in a ’72 Stingray convertible.

Most people are baffled to see a key lock in the rear end, as there is no trunk in this car. I have to explain that it is for the factory alarm system that is rarely seen.

The gas tank was removed and cleaned, and I found the tank sticker/build sheet still affixed to the top of it. The brakes were updated with stainless steel calipers and sleeved master cylinder, along with new lines, rotors and disc pads. New springs and shocks were







This amenity is often confused to be a trunk lock, but the Corvette, of course, does not have a trunk. For 1972, the once-optional horn-sounding alarm system became standard, and the key activated the system, while the switch in the sill of the driver's door set the alarm off when opened.

Under the hood is the venerable Chevrolet 350cid small-block V-8 with rated at 200hp. For 1972, power dropped due to reduced compression ratios in order to run on newly introduced low-leaded fuel. It was also the first year that GM engines were rated for NET horsepower, unlike the previously inflated gross horsepower figures.

installed and the posi-traction rear end was flushed and refilled. New tires were fitted, but the original 40-year-old spare was never used and remains intact. I repainted the rally wheels, and rechromed the trim rings. The exhaust was in great condition, only requiring a good cleaning and polishing of the squared tips.

By 2007, the car was ready for shows and enjoyment. After a spirited 75-mile trip, at its first showing at a Corvette meet in Key

Largo, it was judged best in its class by Dave McClellan, retired chief engineer of Corvette. The air cleaner cover is signed by Dave as his mark of approval.

In early 2008, it was selected to be shown at the Boca Raton Concours, and in 2009 it was a finalist in the AACA Memory Lane exhibit at the Miami International Auto Show.

Our region hosted the AACA Southeast Winter Meet in 2010



While appearance changes for the 1972 were minimal compared with its 1971 counterpart, the significance of the model was more associated with it being the last of having both front and rear chromed bumpers. This car is highly optioned with power steering, power windows, power brakes, automatic transmission, AM/FM stereo, tilt/telescopic steering, leather seats and more. With just 42,000 miles on the odometer, most of the aesthetics of the car are completely original. Only diligent cleaning and the repainting/replating of certain items have brought its condition back to AACA Senior award winning condition.



and 2011. The first year the Corvette was awarded its First Junior, and in 2011 its Senior award. Also in 2011, this car was nominated for the AACA national Corvette Award... ironic in that the

award was originally organized and sponsored by the South Florida Region in my honor. Later in 2011, it was awarded the "Golden Swan Award" (best of show runner-up) at the Lake Mirror Classic Concours. This award is presented by AACA members Jim and Rick Schmidt, of Ocala, Florida, whose collection of original unrestored cars is the finest in the nation. Since the meticulous detailing of this Corvette has been finished, it is frequently examined by NCRS judges and Corvette restorers from around the country as a benchmark for originality.

My wife, Adele, enjoys my Corvette fever and supports me and



our AACA region fully. The white '72 Corvette has become the favorite car in our collection by our sons, perhaps because it is the only Corvette with an automatic transmission in our garage!

Thankfully, I did not heed the advice of Lewis' original counsel, and this car did not become a fiberglass reef at the bottom of Biscayne Bay.