



THIRD WAY

Going down neither the restoration nor restomod paths, the owner of this '68 coupe elected to make some common-sense mechanical upgrades in the interest of creating a better-driving Shark.

BY HAROLD PACE PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

We love painstakingly restored Corvettes, yet we also dig killer restomods. Obviously, rare models like Fuelies and L88s should be preserved for future generations, while basket-case standard-production models are ripe for late-model running-gear swaps. But most older Corvettes fall somewhere in between—not worthy of a Bloomington Gold restoration, but too original to elaborately customize. Instead, these C1, C2 and C3 Corvettes are ripe for minor brake, suspension and engine upgrades that make them better drivers.

Such changes were made to the '68 convertible on these pages. Its matching-number status has been preserved, but it now drives much better than a standard C3 has any right to. And the changes, though not inexpensive, cost much less than a full-blown restoration or a radical conversion. As is often the case, the owner preferred to upgrade a vintage Corvette instead of buying a newer one—he had his reasons.

Back in 1976, when he was 19 years old, Don Goodrich owned a '68 Corvette—a yellow 327 convertible. “I kept it three years, and sold it for about \$2,000,” recalls Goodrich. He has pined for it ever since. Recently, he

decided to try Corvette ownership again. “I had the idea of buying neat cars, keeping them for about six months, then selling them for a few extra bucks and then trying something else,” he explains. “I sold my wife on that idea. I was reliving my childhood.” After an extensive Web search, he found a clean '68 convertible at a dealership in California. He had his brother, who lives near the seller, take a look at the car and deliver the check. Then it was shipped home to Texas.

His purchase had been repainted in its original Rally Red, and had a nicely redone black interior. The original 300-hp 327 engine and Muncie M21 4-speed gearbox were healthy and fit, but underneath the shiny paint lurked chassis, wiring and suspension systems that needed serious rebuilding after 42 years on the road. “As soon as I got it off the trailer and started it, the water pump failed,” Goodrich recalls. “I was glad I had not tried to drive it back from California.”

This experience was enough to persuade him to get the Vette some professional help. He took the Chevrolet to Carr Campbell at Carr's Corvettes and Customs (CCC) in Plano, Texas for some freshening.

Although Campbell has built Bloomington Gold-winning restorations and fire-breathing restomods, he was tasked with doing something quite different with this Corvette. Goodrich wanted to retain his car's numbers-matching status, but at the same time wanted more pep and less temperament from the drivetrain. To that end, CCC kept its mods to the mostly bolt-on variety.

The biggest job CCC faced was to upgrade the intake and fueling systems. The standard 300-bhp 327 was topped with a Rochester Quadrajet carb bolted to a low-rise cast-iron manifold. Goodrich decided to bypass the usual hi-rise/Holley combo in favor of modern aftermarket fuel injection. “The carburetor I got was shot and it wasn't the original one anyway, so I wasn't married to it,” he reasons. He chose a tuned-port system from First. Along with early '90s IROC Camaro-spec hardware and electronics, the setup includes larger runners to provide more power. CCC finished the system with a special silver-colored ceramic coating, and accented it with hand-painted red trim.

“The fuel injection doesn't add a lot of power, but it does give better throttle response

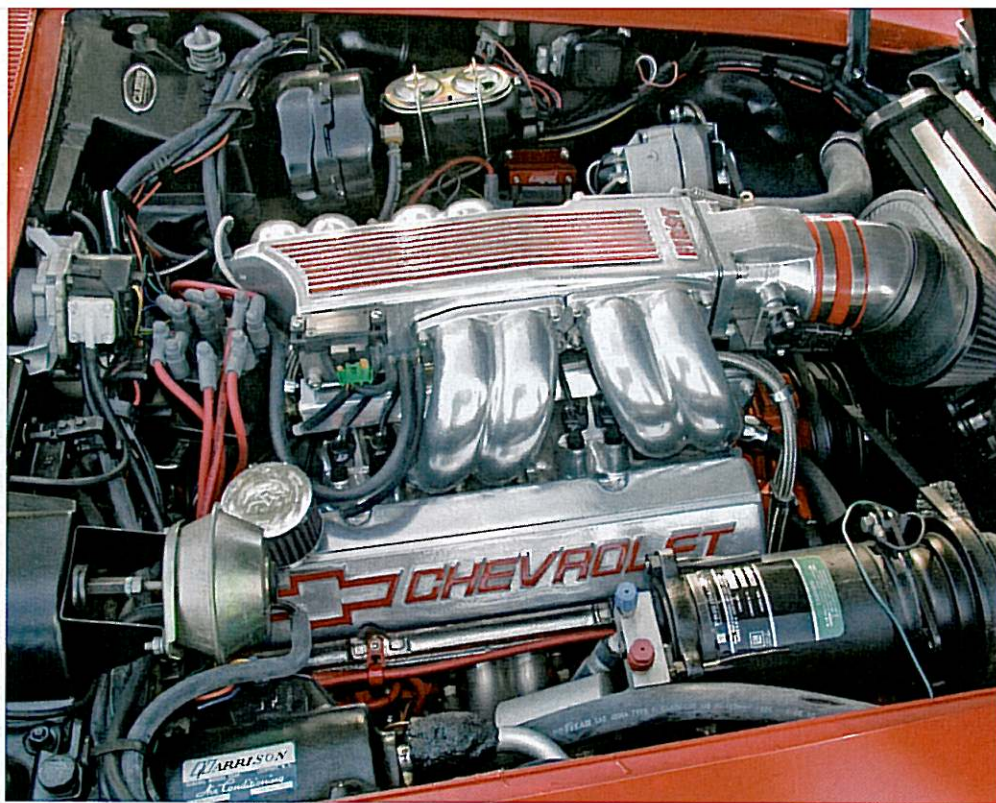


and maybe a little better mileage,” says Goodrich. “At around \$2,000, it sounded reasonable, but little did I know it would take another \$7,000 to get it properly installed.”

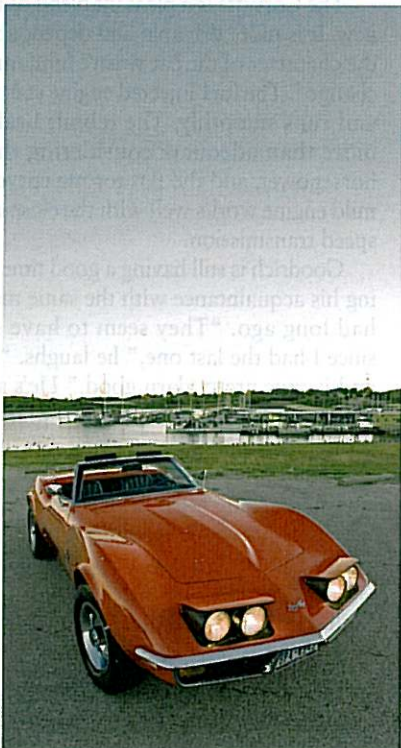
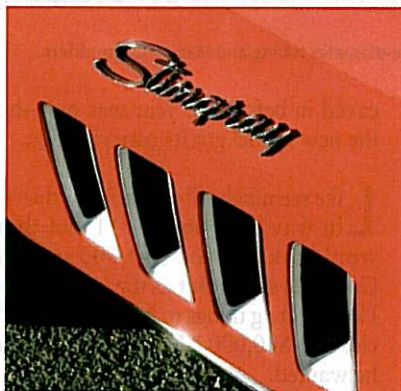
Campbell says the system required a lot of tuning and fabricating to get it to work right, with most of the problems stemming from the unit being delivered set up for a hotter engine, which caused it to run way rich on the basically stock 327. The system also required a new electric fuel pump, and Campbell added braided fuel lines with a custom-designed return-line regulator system.

To make sure the engine didn't run hot on Texas summer days, a DeWitt's Perfect Fit aluminum radiator was added, along with an electronic fan assembly. In addition, the alternator was upgraded to a new 65-amp unit.

To dress up the engine compartment, the motor was detailed to show condition with all-new vacuum lines, harnesses, clips, grommets and fasteners. Goodrich opted for GM Performance Parts tall Bow Tie valve covers, which CCC ceramic-powder-coated in silver, and MSD spiral-core wires. The custom-made headers were also ceramic-powder-coated in silver, while the custom 2.5-inch



Above: Below the tuned-port fuel injection and shiny new valve covers lays the original 327 small-block V8. Below, left to right: The engine is stripped down and ready to be updated at Carr's Corvettes and Customs; the dash got the modernization treatment, as well. Bottom: Mostly stock interior features iPod-ready radio.





From the outside, the only tip-off that this '68 has been upgraded is its aftermarket exhaust system, featuring large-diameter tubing and MagnaFlow mufflers.

exhaust system features MagnaFlow mufflers and polished tips.

The next step in the freshening process was to rebuild the suspension. The front coil springs were replaced with units built to CCC's spec. The rear transverse spring was replaced with a Hyperco Soft Ride composite unit with polyurethane spring mount bushings. The suspension bushings were replaced with new stock parts. Larger sway bars sporting stiff polyurethane bushings and end links were fitted front and rear. The standard shocks were tossed in favor of KYB gas dampers.

The brakes came in for a complete rebuild, starting with a conversion to power actuation. Manual brakes were common in the '60s, but the stiff pedal can come as a shock to drivers acclimated to modern power-brake systems. The factory calipers were fitted with stainless-steel sleeves, the rotors replaced and ceramic pads added for improved stopping power. GM Rally steel wheels contribute to the original looks and mount B. F. Goodrich 225/60R15 tires all around. On the inside, a new Ididit factory-look tilt steering column supports a custom black leather three-spoke steering wheel.

One of the potential problem areas in any older car is the wiring system. Since the '68 was intended for regular use, all the factory wiring harnesses were replaced with Lectric

Limited reproduction harnesses. These included the harnesses for the engine, front lamps, air-conditioning, dash, console and rear lamps. The factory radio was converted to digital operation, and features a CD player and an iPod connector, as well as upgraded speakers. The gauges were also restored to as-new appearance, while the tachometer was converted to electronic operation.

Goodrich wanted his new prize to be a comfortable cruiser, so the air-conditioning system was completely restored with new seals, duct seals and gaskets. The system was converted to R-134a refrigerant and a POA (pilot-operated absolute) valve update kit was installed, which eliminated the problem of sticking internal pistons. Even the A/C control switch on the console was replaced with a new part.

Despite all of these upgrades, the Corvette still looks stock from the outside. The only change to the bodywork was the addition of a period-look reproduction stainless-steel luggage rack to the back deck. "My son hates it," admits Goodrich with a smile.

Sharp-eyed C3 experts will notice the "Stingray" fender emblems that first adorned late 1968 models. They were added in response to complaints from buyers who liked the "Sting Ray" moniker that had been applied to the C2 models. When the '68 model came out, Chevy had dropped the name but

caved in before the year was out—however, the new model got its own spelling.

Like seemingly all car projects, this '68 came in way over budget. "I had thought it would take maybe \$10,000 to fix it up," Goodrich says. "But as the project continued, I kept adding things to be upgraded until it got closer to \$40,000." He did, however, get what he wanted.

The Corvette is a pleasant blend of old and new. It is more drivable and dependable, but the character of the car wasn't fundamentally changed. The fuel-injected engine starts easily and runs smoothly. The rebuilt brakes are more than adequate considering the car's horsepower, and the flat torque curve of the mild engine works well with the close-ratio 4-speed transmission.

Goodrich is still having a good time renewing his acquaintance with the same model he had long ago. "They seem to have shrunk since I had the last one," he laughs. "It's fun and it runs pretty darn good." He's sticking to his six-month ownership plan—even though his chances of making a profit have been diminished by the upgrades—and is considering a trade for a four-seat hot rod that will carry his whole family, but he has a fight on his hands. "My son is old enough for his learner's permit," Goodrich confides, "and if I sell it now, he'll kill me." ○