

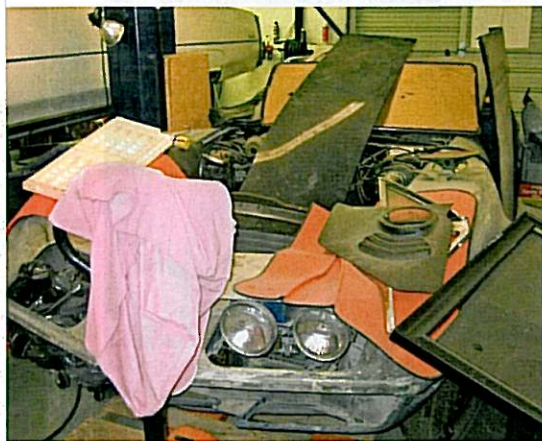
# Bling Ray

After decades of neglect, this C3 was treated to a complete redo—and a number of late-model upgrades.

BY HAROLD PACE PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR







Above, top to bottom: The '72 sat in storage for years just collecting dust; the interior was stripped during restoration; prepping the bodywork was an arduous process. Below: The transformation is complete.



**R**ay Durst isn't really a "Corvette guy." His main automotive passion is X-frame Chevies, those long and lovely road sharks built from 1958 to 1964. He has had an impressive number of them, including rare 409s, but has now pared his collection down to six X-frame restomods with hot mouse and rat motors lurking under their hoods. But one Corvette is also part of that collection. It has held onto that spot for over two decades, but the car was recently upgraded to show condition—a process that turned out to be full of surprises.

When Durst bought his Targa Blue '72 Corvette convertible, it was almost a new car, with only 12,000 miles and two previous owners. He racked up close to 100,000 happy miles, then, in 1991, he parked and partially disassembled the car for a restoration that was never completed. After it was moved from his home garage to a storage facility, the car fell into disrepair—suffering from years of neglect.

In 2007, Durst was ready to get the Corvette back on the road. He delivered the C3 to Carr's Corvettes and Customs in Plano, Texas, run by Carr Campbell. Durst's original plan was merely to have the car painted and reassembled, but that soon changed.

"We were going to use new or refurbished

The original Targa Blue hue was retained but radically reworked by changing the size of the metallic grains for more sparkle and adding a healthy dose of pearl effect. By the time the paint had been applied and clear-coated, the original color of the blue seats and interior panels really didn't have the "wow factor" needed. The original '72 Corvette upholstery patterns were retained, but custom Al Knoch doeskin leather replaced the blue vinyl. The dash was upgraded with a Dakota Digital speedo, tach and gauge set, while an all-new custom Lectric Limited wiring harness hooked everything up. The final interior touch was a custom-made mahogany steering wheel.

The chassis was in for a face-lift, as well. After being stripped to bare metal, the frame was powder-coated in semi-gloss black while the suspension and other components were coated in a combination of cast gray, black and satin clear. New sway bars were fitted, along with a composite rear spring and upgraded front coils. The brakes were upgraded to Stainless Steel Brake Company (SSBC) Force 10 Extreme 4-piston aluminum calipers gripping Baer slotted and cross-drilled rotors. An SSBC billet master cylinder pumps into stainless-steel brake lines and braided hoses. A set of C6 Z06-style chrome wheels (8.5 x 18-inch front, 9.5 x

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parts as needed," recalls Campbell, "but one day Ray realized what the car could be and he came in and declared, 'I don't want anything on this car that is not new, not a single nut or bolt,' and he meant it!" Carr's lead restoration technician, Cory McDonald, took the point on the project, starting with the body, which was straight but rough after 16 years in storage. "We disassembled the car down to the body shell and frame," recalls Campbell, "then soda-blasted the body to bare fiberglass." The fiberglass was contaminated with oil that had penetrated it while in storage. Through an arduous process, the fiberglass was cleaned of the offending petroleum. "We had to keep doing it over and over," says Campbell. "It took forever." Finally, the body was clean enough to be re-gelcoated and sanded smooth.

18-inch rear) were shod with 245/45ZR18 tires in front and 255/45ZR18s in back.

**A**s long as they had gone this far, it would have been a shame to saddle this restomod with a stock powertrain, so Carr started with a ZZ4 350-cid short-block crate engine topped with Racing Head Services (RHS) Pro Action 180-cc aluminum heads. A Comp Cams hydraulic roller cam tickles Magnum Pro Roller rocker arms. The Edelbrock Performer EPS intake is topped with a Barry Grant Speed Demon 650-cfm carb, and the fuel is fired by an MSD Pro Billet distributor. It all adds up to 450 horsepower at 5,500 rpm and 470 lbs-ft of torque at 4,500 rpm, comfortably more than the hottest 350 available in '72—the 255-horse LT1.

An S&P serpentine belt-drive system runs a Sanden air-conditioning compressor and a





GM Type II power-steering pump. All a/c and power-steering lines are braided stainless-steel items from Gotta Show, with nickel AN fittings. Sanderson ceramic-coated headers dump into custom 2.5-inch aluminized pipes with a cross-over tube. Magna-Flow mufflers are capped with stock Corvette exhaust tips and bezels. Durst opted for a Keisler 5-speed TKO-600 transmission and a 3:36 Positraction rear end.

Considering the amount of money already invested, it would have been silly to not go all the way with the small details. Armed with that “no old parts” order, McDonald replaced every nut, bolt, grommet, bushing, fastener and rubber part with a shiny new example; the car was finished to an as-new condition.

So who was the most surprised? Was it Campbell for the work order switch from

minor resto to major upgrade? Was it Ray Durst for seeing his neglected project transformed into an award-winning show car? Not even close. The biggest surprise was reserved for Sherri Durst, who had no idea that any of this was going on in the first place. Ray had managed to keep the entire project a secret from his wife.

In 2009, the newly completed Corvette was entered in the Dallas Autorama car show and displayed in the Carr’s Corvettes and Customs’ booth, along with other customer rides. Durst entered one of his custom Chevis and took his unsuspecting wife to the show.

After they had set up the Chevy, Durst suggested they visit Carr’s booth to look at some Corvettes. Sherri was talking to Carr’s wife Jennifer and daughter Connelly when she spotted the Corvette, shimmering in its

pearlescent iridescence and attracting gawkers like bees to honey. Sherri remarked, “This car looks kind of like one that we have.” At that moment, she spotted the information poster propped up against the car and put it all together. “She started screaming,” laughs Durst. “It was like being called up on stage at *The Price Is Right*,” adds Campbell. “The hall was full of people and she went crazy; she drowned out the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders! It was perfect. I just wish we had had a camera ready!”

“However,” adds Durst, “when I told her how much it cost she was not so thrilled. But now it’s OK again.” Some surprises are better than others, and this C3, aptly named “Bling Ray,” has shocked everyone connected with it. ○