



The Corvette for 1965 arrived as a mildly warmed-over design of the 1963-'64 model, but appearances can be deceiving because there was a lot of new technology under the skin of the third-year Sting Ray.

YELLOW

Mellow

RAGTOP WITH FACTORY AIR AND 350 SNORTING HORSES

BY BOB STEVENS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY BOLIG

Chevrolet would set a record for the '65 model year with total car sales of 2,382,511, capturing a whopping 26.93 percent of the domestic new car market and strengthening its grip on first-place, besting arch-rival Ford by more than 318,000 units. Doing its part was the Corvette. Chevy's two-seater sports car managed a record-high 23,564 sales in 1965, topping the year-earlier record of 22,229 by 1,335 units. All '65 Corvettes were built at the St. Louis, Missouri, assembly plant. Convertible output almost doubled coupe production in '65 – 15,378 vs. 8,186 – and the fixed-roof edition sold for a couple of hundred dollars more – \$4,321 for the coupe and \$4,106 for the ragtop.

The Corvette was essentially unchanged, with the only exterior modifications being a slightly revised grille, new functional front fender vents (three to a side), and new rocker panel moldings. This year, the major changes were all concealed under that beautifully sculpted and sensuous Sting Ray body.

The biggest news was the adoption of disc brakes, not just on the front wheels as was customary at the time in the few places where disc brakes were even offered, but on all four wheels. Attesting to its performance, four-wheel disc brakes have remained a standard Corvette feature to this day, some 40

LEFT: Rare white vinyl interior really complements the yellow paint scheme. It was one of two interior colors recommended with yellow, the other being black. Seats were redesigned for 1965, and so were the gauges, which now had flat, black faces.

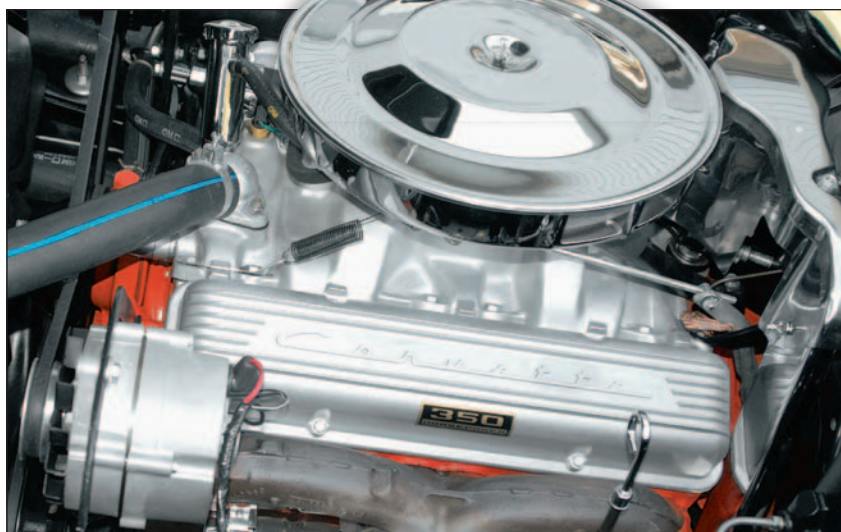
RIGHT: A thundering small-block, this 327 V-8 unleashes 350 wild horses, and does so in a hurry. This optional mill listed for \$107.60 and was quite popular, being ordered by 4,716 Corvette buyers in 1965.

years after their introduction. Chevy engineers actually started work on the disc brake setup in 1955, collaborating with Girling of England, and then working jointly with Kelsey-Hayes before giving the project to GM's Delco-Moraine for production. The self-adjusting brakes were 11.75 inches in diameter and afforded a total swept area of 461.2 square inches.

In testing, the new brakes wore like iron, surviving 20 repeated panic stops from 100 mph, something a drum brake system might handle once or twice. It was indicated that the brakes would last 40,000 to 50,000 miles before needing service. "They're really sensational ... the ultimate in braking ability," wrote Jim Wright, technical editor for *Motor Trend*, who further suggested that the new brakes were so effective that the power brake option was no longer needed. Yet there were still 316 buyers who opted for the drum brake system, RPO (regular production option) J61, which provided a \$64.50 credit for deletion of disc brakes.

Also new for 1965 was Corvette's first big-block, a 396ci V-8 rated at 425hp. RPO L78 cost \$292.70 and 2,157 were planted under a Corvette hood in 1965. It would be the only year for the 396 in a Corvette, as the 427 would arrive in 1966. But the rat mill wasn't the only new engine for 1965, as there was a new mouse motor joining the line.

"We've added a new 327-cubic-inch V-8 for Corvette. This new one is the best-behaved 350-hp V-8 you ever met. Loaded with all kinds of good things a high-performance engine should have, but tamed to a civilized purr," is how Chevrolet described it. But actually it was a high-horse small-block without the temperament of a solid-lifter, radical-cam engine. Using a standard-grind cam and hydraulic lifters, this new mill was quieter, smoother and easier to start, yet still developed 350hp at 5,500 rpm, plus 360 lb-ft of torque at 3,600 rpm.



It propelled the Corvette from 0-to-60 mph in just 6.2 seconds, and all the way to 100 from a dead start in 16.9 seconds. It would eclipse the quarter-mile in 14.9 seconds hitting 94 mph, and top speed was a redline-busting 130 mph, according to *Car and Driver*. Coded L79, the 350-horse 327 listed for \$107.60 and was ordered by 4,716 buyers. It's this engine, with its lofty 11:1 compression ratio and 10 to 18 mpg fuel economy, that powers our feature car, a '65 convertible owned by Rick Lyon of Spring, Texas.

Lyon, a project manager in offshore

BELLOW: The sexy Sting Ray body shape was continued basically unchanged, save for the new front fender side louvers, which became a trio of vertical slats that were functional. The rear mounted radio antenna became a power-operated unit in '65, a first for Corvette.

marine construction, acquired the car in Santa Fe, Texas, in February 2001. It had 85,000 miles on it, sold new in Austin, and had been a Texas car all its life. At first, Lyon passed on the car. But then, he recalls, "After looking in Noland Adam's Corvette book and discovering that this car was one of only 165 with the 350-horse engine and factory A/C, I went back and gave the guy what he wanted, placing the car on a flatbed truck and sticking it in a storage unit."

The Corvette had a 454ci V-8 in it, but the original engine had amazingly stayed

with the car through several owners, so it was rebuilt and reunited with the car during the restoration process. For that, Lyon hauled the car to Jerry Clark at Jerry's Vette Service in Spring Hill, Florida. John and Tim Ames, Brooksville, Florida, performed the body and paint work. Shortly after the car was finished, Lyon took it to an NCRS meet in nearby Howey-In-The-Hills, where it earned a Top Flight award.

The car's 350-horse engine is coupled to a four-speed and a 3.55 Positraction rear end. Other options include: air conditioning, auxiliary hardtop, tinted glass, telescopic steering column, teakwood steering wheel, AM-FM radio, comfort and convenience



ABOVE LEFT: Seat belts — the female ends — were stored on clips attached to the center console; the male ends were stowed inside retractable units between the seats and the doors. Government standards required that all passenger cars be equipped with front seat belts starting in the 1965 model year.

ABOVE RIGHT: Helping fill up the already tight engine bay is the compressor for the optional factory-installed air conditioning system. A/C was expensive at \$421.80 and only 2,423, or about 10 percent of the 23,564 Corvettes assembled during the '65 model year, were so equipped.

RIGHT: Instruction tag advises owner how to adjust his antenna for optimum reception. This is how it was delivered by the dealer. The panel surrounding the radio and speaker bezel was painted in '65, rather than covered in vinyl.



group, off-road exhaust, power steering, aluminum knock-off wheels, and goldline tires. The black and white interior is vinyl. It had a sticker price of \$5,841.

Rick and his wife, Pat, plan on driving the '65 once it's achieved Bloomington Gold certification. Rick is also preparing for the restoration of his "other" Corvette, a low-mileage 1967 coupe with the fabled 435-horse tri-power motor.

The 1965 model year unveiled a lot of Corvette firsts (first big-block, first disc brakes, first side-mounted exhaust, first

teakwood steering wheel, first telescoping steering column and first gold-line tires), but it would also be the last year for the first-generation Rochester fuel-injection system that debuted in 1957. Plagued by early problems in terms of performance and maintenance, the original fuelie was destined for the junk heap, even though the imperfections had been worked out of the system by 1965. Only 771 Corvette buyers in '65 paid the \$538 for option L84, the 375hp fuel-injected version of the 327ci small-block Chevy

V-8. Fuel injection would take a 16-year hiatus from the Corvette family, finally returning in 1982 in the form of Cross-Fire Injection.

Meanwhile, the 1965 Corvette would hit the books as a milestone car, one that *Car and Driver* compared favorably with a Ferrari 250/GT and an Aston Martin DB-5, two exotic sports cars priced at \$13,000 and \$12,850, respectively, or more than double the price of a loaded '65 Corvette. That's pretty fast company. The Corvette had finally achieved world-class status! ■

BELOW: Finished in a gleaming coat of brilliant Goldwood Yellow, code XX, this '65 Sting Ray convertible takes on a friendly look. Yellow was the second rarest color in '65; only 1,275 were squirted the soft, mellow hue at the factory, which sprayed only 1,191 Corvettes Tuxedo Black, the rarest color that model year. Optional knock-off wheels were painted dark gray between the fins; in this installation they're wrapped by optional goldline tires. Gone were the hood depressions featured on the 1963 and '64 models. The grille was modified with the addition of black horizontal bars within a bright outer trim, a one-year setup.

