



CONCOURS CORVETTE

IN THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION, A 1963 COUPE IS RE-RESTORED

❖ BY BOB STEVENS / PHOTOS ANDY BOLIG ❖

As with most works of art, Corvette restoration is in degrees ... both in quality and authenticity. There are restored cars that are perfect, and, more commonly, there are those that are near perfect. Well, Barry DiAntonio had a nearly perfect 1963 Corvette split-window coupe, a black beauty with gleaming paint, a sparkling red interior, and a highly detailed engine compartment hosting the optional 340hp 327 V-8. Scoring a lofty 93 points, it was clearly in the "almost perfect" range. But Barry wanted something a little closer to perfection.

So, the beautifully restored and almost perfect '63 Corvette split-window coupe was totally disassembled and re-restored, with an even finer eye to detail ... excruciating detail. As they say, it's all in the details. And with Corvette restoration,

it's clearly the details that make it or break it when it comes to serious point judging. The optional L76 engine, a 327ci V-8 pegged at a whopping 340 hp at 6,000 rpm, also developed a very healthy 344 lbs-ft of torque at 4,000 rpm. Top end was

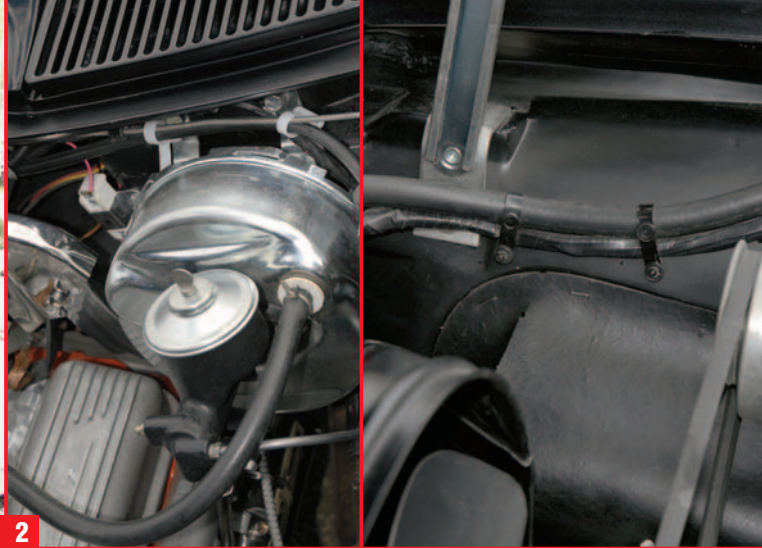
pegged at 130 mph, though some owners reported noticeable front end lift at speeds exceeding the century mark. The car also proved quite thirsty, drinking fuel through a big four-barrel carb at an average rate of 11.5 mpg in a road test of a '63 coupe



ABOVE LEFT: Nothing enhances a shining black exterior finish as dramatically as a bright red interior. This finely trimmed cockpit boasts the striking red treatment, which was code 490C for red vinyl trim. It's virtually perfect, right down to the original seatbelts

and shifter. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Sanitary engine bay is thoroughly detailed and hosts the optional solid-lifter 340hp 327ci V-8, code L76, which cost \$108 and saw 6,978 installations in 1963. The only Corvette engine that was more powerful that year was the fuel-injected

327-cube motor rated a bit higher at 360 hp. Both the 340 and 360hp mills had a five-quart oil reservoir (six quarts with filter), while the 250 and 300hp engines ran a quart shy with a four-quart pan (plus one in the filter).



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1 It certainly doesn't look like a fully restored high-point Corvette in this shot of the black beauty as it undergoes an encore restoration. Just improving a car's grade by a few points can require hundreds of hours of work, many

new parts, and thousands of dollars. This job was handled by the professional father-and-son team of John and Tim Ames at J & M Enterprizes. **2** Power brakes were first offered on a Corvette in 1963, and this is one of only

3,336 of the 21,513 Corvettes made that year to carry the S43 option. The entire system, including the master cylinder, reservoir and booster, is immaculate. **3** All the plastic straps used to hold the wiring harness were redone

with the 340hp engine and four-speed manual transmission, though at a steady 60 mph it would deliver up to 18 mpg. Acceleration times were impressive, with the 340-horse coupe eclipsing the quarter-mile rip in 13.9 seconds at 109 mph.

The featured car left the factory for Potamkin Chevrolet in Philadelphia, but was soon sold to A. Anderson Chevrolet in Baltimore, Maryland, which retailed it on May 23, 1963, to its first titled owner, an employee of University Hospital in Baltimore. Some four years later, on August 4, 1967, the car sold again, then another new owner took over in March 1971, followed by yet another new owner in February 1974. Excluding dealers, the car at this point was on its fourth owner, but there were more to come. In 1977 the car sold to a dealer in Baltimore, who peddled it to a dealer in Virginia, who then moved it on to a dealer in Delaware, where it was bought by a gentleman from Millsboro, Delaware. He enjoyed the car for a dozen years, and then subjected it to a full restoration in 1989. It was a bitter experience, concluding with a court appearance to retrieve his car from the

resto shop. In 2003, it would change hands once again, moving on to its fifth owner, again excluding the five dealers who bought and re-sold the car during its first 14 years.

Barry and Patricia DiAntonio, of Dover, Delaware, fell in love with each other a number of years back, and about four years ago they fell in love again, but this time with a piece of rolling sculpture ... a black 1963 Corvette split-window coupe. Again, it was love at first sight and they bought it without hesitation. And they have now expressed their love for the stylish Sting Ray by giving it not a second, but a third lease on life courtesy of a second restoration, and a much more critical refurbishment. The beautiful Sting Ray with the aging look received a body-off restoration of the first order by J & M Enterprizes in Brooksville, Florida (www.JMEnterprizesinc.com). As it turned out, the car's point total in judged competition rose from 93 to 98.9, a tremendous improvement.

The car has won three National Corvette Restorers

Society Top Flight Awards and at press time was scheduled to go for a Duntov Award, the highest honor the NCRS offers, at the club's national meet in Boston in July 2007. Barry then plans to go for the Triple Crown with Bloomington Gold Certification and a top win at Chevy Vettefest. In addition to awards from the Corvette hobby, the car has won dozens of first-place, best-in-class, people's choice and Best of Show awards.

It's not hard to understand the car's magnetic attraction, in view of its handsome looks and strong performance. Everyone loved the all-new Sting Ray of 1963, especially the automotive press. *Hop Up* called the 340hp

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to like-new original. Per the NCRS restoration manual, the hose and harness go inside of the prop rod on the early cars whereas later on, it was rerouted to the outside of the prop rod. **4** The old gas cap (right) was swapped out for

a correct new cap (left). The SMC logo and no rivet in the hole designate the early cap. J & M took great pains to ensure the correctness of the cap on this coupe. **5** Even the backside of each of the two front parking lights had

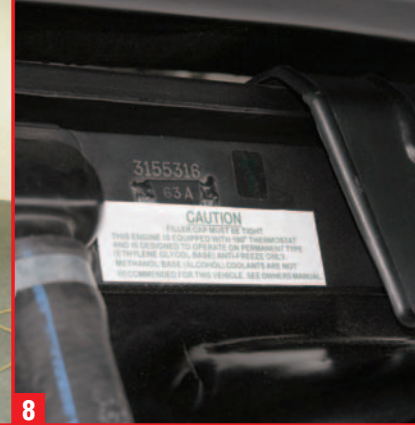
to be pristine to pass inspection. Early '63 parking lens screws protruded through the housing and had a problem with corrosion. Later park lights had an embossment to cover the screw.



It may be restored and detailed to concours condition, but the '63 coupe is driven on nice days and at speed with its sleek design dancing down a ribbon of asphalt like an athlete in full flight.



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6 To ensure that every detail was correct, the Sting Ray's second restoration took it right down to the bare frame, which was completely refinished and re-detailed. 7 Mounted on its own dolly, the sexy Sting Ray body was totally checked for even the slightest imperfections, all of which were corrected. It was then completely refinished, ending with a gleaming coat of Tuxedo Black paint. The car was originally painted black at the factory in St. Louis, Missouri. 8 All decals are correct reproductions, including the coolant warning label. According to Tom DeWitt, "... Harrison Radiator "re-dated" the 3155316 radiators all the time. Harrison Radiator estimated the month's production volume and stamp

dated the top plates accordingly. If actual production was lower than the estimates, plates with old dates were left over. Harrison then stamped the current month date on a small piece of aluminum and welded the tag over the wrong date. I have personally seen dozens of aluminum radiators re-dated this way during the production periods of 1962 through 1972, and the service period after that too." 9 The mirror's brilliant reflection is mirrored in the deep black finish. The base of the external rear-view mirror on early Corvettes had a long base, like a Chevelle, later mirrors had a mirror with a shorter base which was used up through the rest of midyear production.

coupe it tested both "zippy and potent" with the potential to be a star on the dragstrip after some super tuning. *Car and Driver* told its readers that "Compared with previous Corvettes, the all-new Sting Ray is improved in almost every imaginable respect: performance, handling, ride, comfort, habitability, and trunk space." *Car Life* simply reported "this is the best Corvette yet!" and then awarded

Chevy's sports car the "Car Life Award for Engineering Excellence" for its overall performance and handling, and especially its new independent rear suspension.

Virtually all of the dozen or so magazine writers who tested the new Sting Ray complained about the split down the rear window on the coupe model. *Motor Trend* observed: "The rear window on the coupe is designed more for looks

than practicality." The magazine obviously agreed with Corvette Chief Engineer Zora Arkus-Duntov, who wanted the split removed, and got his wish when Chevrolet General Manager Ed Cole ordered it removed for 1964, over the objections of styling boss William Mitchell. But Cole allowed the split for one year, creating an instant and enduring legend in the famed split-window coupe of 1963. ■



Barry DiAntonio and his wife Pat pose proudly with their '63 split-window coupe. They bought the restored sports car with 41,363 miles on it some four years ago, then had it completely restored again to an even higher level. The Sting Ray now has 41,834 miles on it, meaning that it's traveled just 500 miles since it's been in their care. They admit to "driving it only on nice days on the weekend." The numbers-matching, code-matching car has won three NCRS Top Flight awards.