

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

STORY LARRY LARK IMAGES ANDY BOLIG



ENJOYING THE SAME OLD CORVETTE FOR 41 YEARS



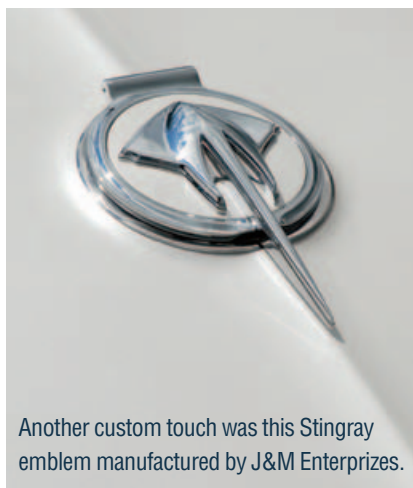
RESTO-MOD! WHAT IS THIS NEW TERM WHICH I BEGAN TO HEAR SO MUCH ABOUT?

Well, the term turned out to be justification for me to finally restore my many-times-modified 1967 Corvette that I have owned for 41 years. Although I had fun with the modifications, at the time, I knew I was thoroughly trashing the value of the car.

Over a period of a year, I tracked down a handful of what appeared to be the leaders in the business and I had settled on three restoration companies. All of these companies primarily did restoration on Corvettes only. I made a decision and my car was completed and I picked it up on July 18, 2013. The restoration took nine months and one week from when it was delivered.

For some reason, I never wanted to part with this particular Corvette, even when I owned other very neat rides nicer than this car at the time. I have owned this car since I was 21 or 22 years old and bought it in Denver, Colorado. Driving along one day in Arvada, Colorado, I noticed sitting in a driveway with a "for sale" sign, this gorgeous blue 427 Corvette. I was smitten.

The car was six years old and my best recollection was I paid \$2,800 of



Another custom touch was this Stingray emblem manufactured by J&M Enterprizes.

hard-earned money for the Corvette. I remember, like it was yesterday, proudly driving home my dream car and then being told by my mother I would mostly likely have to just park it because I would not be able to afford the insurance or gas for it. She also felt I might want to have my head examined for making such a dumb purchase on a car that only held two people especially when I already had a beautiful car that held five!

By the time I purchased the car, there had been a number of modifications done to it, the most visible being the "flared" wheel wells. The car was powered by a 390hp 427 engine and was fairly standard for the era, meaning it had no power steering and no A/C. The car was originally

Elkhart Blue with a teal vinyl interior, an unusual color combination. It had side pipes and that was all that was important to me.

The car was relegated to the sidelines of action after a great year of fun street racing. In 1972, my beautiful '67 Vette was replaced with a brand new four-cylinder Vega Kammback station wagon. I always felt like wearing a bag over my head when I drove that Vega and the Corvette was destined for a stint in storage exile.

My first major component change came in the spring of 1978 when the old 427 decided to deposit its guts all over Peoria Street during a great night of "field research". The engine replacement was definitely a budget-driven change out. It ended up with a used 454 cube, two-bolt, truck-coded engine. It actually ran pretty good but not as hard as the original 427, so I had the Chevrolet dealer change out the rear ring and pinion from 3:36 to 4:11. In addition, 11 years ran its course on the Elkhart blue paint. It pretty much lost its luster and was looking pretty tired. Nothing that a good quality \$129.95 Earl Scheib color change paint job couldn't cure. Suddenly I had a shiny, silver '67 Corvette with a bit of

LEFT The interior is a nice combination of factory appearing items and innovative touches to personalize it. **RIGHT** The upgraded radio, A/C and push-button start system with key-fob activation are some touches that might be overlooked to the casual glance.





orange peel.

In December of 1978, I moved from Denver to Green Cove Springs, Florida (approximately 35 miles south of Jacksonville). A friend had located an ex-military airfield that was open to leasing the old air strips to conduct truck driver training. In September of 1979, I went back to Denver during a break in the training schedule of the school to prepare and transport the Corvette and a 16-foot ski boat.

The plan was simple: install a bumper hitch and drive 'em both to Florida, all 1,775 miles. The first tank disappeared by the time I got to Limon, Colorado, which was only about 110 miles! The car was getting around a very unthrifty five miles to a gallon. Big-block Corvettes were not intended to tow boats and run 4:11 gear ratios at 70 mph across the country! As I recall, the tachometer was showing around 4,400 rpm just to keep up with the posted speed limit on I-70 of 70 mph. I slowed the cruise speed to around 65 mph and picked up another one or two mpg. I started feeling like I was on a milk run with the frequency of the gas station stops; open wallet, pour cash in the tank, over and over. Gas was around a dollar a gallon by that time.

All was going well until I started

going south from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to Mobile, Alabama. I happened to be trying to go through Mobile on Thursday, September 13, 1979, one day after Level 4 Hurricane Frederic had just beat the hell out of the city. The hurricane destroyed large parts of Mobile and rendered the entire area a 90 percent electricity failure. At that time, the message of no electricity caused by a hurricane did not equate into NO GASOLINE AVAILABLE.

Rolling along Highway 98 down to Mobile, on a brutally hot sunny day, I finally ran out of gas just north of Mobile. I helplessly coasted onto the shoulder of the road. There we were on a very hot day, out of gas, and going nowhere. I paid a guy \$25 to pull the 'Vette and boat to the parking lot of a nearby school. There I spent two really hot, steamy, uncomfortable nights in the Corvette. Love driving Corvettes, but they're no Howard Johnson's!

Sunday morning came and I saw people walking toward the gas station with gas cans so I assumed they restored electricity and off I went. Ended up paying the station attendant another \$25 for a very old, leaking, five-gallon steel gas can. I think I actually got about four gallons into the 'Vette, saved a little gas to prime the carburetor and she fired up.

I had noticed during the three-day sauna that an oily substance was streaming out from under the rear of the car. Apparently the bouncing action of the boat trailer did considerable damage to the differential casing. It looked like a hard-boiled egg that had just been cracked. The damage just screamed "big expense" and Mobile, Alabama, at that time was not the place to try to get it fixed.

I drove the car down to the long-lined station and bought only five gallons of rationed gas and headed for Pensacola, Florida. It took me at least two hours to get through a chaotic Mobile. I used at least half of my gas in stop-and-go traffic and was fortunate enough to be included into a long gas line on the eastern outskirts of Mobile just off Interstate 10. After a 45-minute wait, I bought another five gallons and I was off to Pensacola 60 miles away.

I was wondering when the trip would come to a final end with the total failure of the differential, hopefully not while crossing the long bridge over Escambia Bay. The final 350 miles to Jacksonville had no issues, the differential did not fail and I got to Jacksonville, Florida, late on Sunday night.

The entire differential system was replaced, including the differential casing, posi-trac unit, u-joints and the



ABOVE Larry enjoys MUCH better fuel mileage from his 525-hp LS3 engine. **TOP CENTER** The chassis has been swapped for a Street Shop unit, giving much better handling, performance and braking than the original while requiring no modification to the underside of the body.

driver side stabilizer bar and bracket that had been greatly distorted by the weight of the bouncing boat, which also changed the camber on the rear driver side tire. It was worn down to the core on the inside sidewall.

When I got back to Jacksonville, I sunk myself into the task of making a new business a go. Life became really long hours with really short budgets. The Corvette was parked outside of the house I had purchased in 1981. I did my best to keep the 'Vette covered during that time of non-use, but the stint outside in hot, humid, Florida did take its toll.

In 1983, *Return of the Jedi*, the third movie in the *Star Wars* trilogy had hit the movie theatres. The Earl Sheib paint job never did look good but it was really gagging after five years and still showed the gasoline damage on the rear deck from the leaky gas can in Mobile four years earlier. At that point I had all the justification for a neat white, rainbow flake lacquer paint job based on a theme of *Star Wars*.

Midas muffler fabricated side pipes to replace the rusted-out, leaking originals.

The original side pipe covers had also deteriorated to the point of removal. Money was still at a premium for me in those days, so I bought a pair of fiberglass side pipe covers from Ecklers for cheap and painted them black.

The Corvette found its rightful place in my new three-car garage but was seldom driven; I just did not have the time to mess with cars. I did find the time and money to remove those Midas pipes and fiberglass muffler covers. I exchanged them for chromed Hooker headers with the chromed side extensions. They had no heat shields on the side extensions and I was forever warning people, when exiting the car, to not burn their legs. One day I forgot to provide that warning to my girlfriend's father and he put a pretty good burn on the calf of his leg.

In 1990, I received a mailer from General Motors that they were going to start selling off performance engines which had not been offered to the public. Previously these special performance engines were only available installed in a car. GM had a

small inventory of new 20-year-old 1970 LS6 454/450 hp engines for sale for \$2,700. I immediately got on the phone and bought one.

I transferred the car to a friend's auto repair garage and he was kind enough to let the car take up a bay for a year. I wanted to do the work myself and address a number of other sins the car had developed over the years. In 1992 the car was all back together. I also learned I was not an auto restoration expert. Nonetheless, the car got an awesome rat motor, numerous cosmetic improvements, carpet, dash pads, some jazzing up in the engine bay and a new set of reproduction side pipes and covers and 12-inch wide Cragar Super Stock wheels on the rear and eight inch on the front. Even though the car had a nice exterior and a certain flash to it, I drove it less and less.

I think it was at that time the Corvette became an old classic car that I wanted to keep but would seldom drive. The car would spend its years sometimes in my garage and



the other times in one of the storage buildings at the truck driving school.

That brings us to the first time I heard that word resto-mod. I chose J & M Enterprizes (with a z) of Brooksville, Florida. The project got underway in September 2012 and Tim Ames kept me up to date with every step of the project with emailed pictures and posted pictures on the Internet.

The car is no longer a big-block car, but it has more horsepower than any of the big blocks with maybe the exception of an L88. I wanted to go with an LS9 in the beginning but I changed my mind when I saw the \$21,000 price tag for that mill. I happily settled for the 2012 LS3 and the transmission is five-speed TKO600 Tremec. The chassis is a custom "Street Shop" C4, designed and built in Athens, Alabama, with adjustable coilovers and power rack and pinion steering. Power is transferred to a 3:55 ratio Dana 44 limited slip differential. The chassis is beautiful with a great deal of billet adornment.

The brakes are electric-power assist, the Vintage Auto Air will run you out even on the hottest of Florida

days and it has a Flaming River keyless entry system and fob-controlled push-button starting system. The fob also controls the power door locks. The gauge cluster is true to original style with the exception the gauges are now "white faced". Electric windows are a pleasant addition and the interior is two-tone teal and white and the seats are custom-made leather by Al Knoch. The car features very neat, blue interior lighting with backlit light sources under both seats, under the dash and in the rear compartment.

The paint is a 2012 Ford color, white platinum metallic tri-coat, the body received a new Sermersheim front clip, hood and some rear tail pieces, both quarter panels are J & M Enterprizes custom products, designed to keep the original non flared wheel contour but still be able to accommodate the big American Racing TTSL 12 inch wide 20-inch wheels with Kumho tires. The front wheels and tires are 18 inch. The chassis was custom fitted with blue lighting that illuminates the wheels with the flick of a switch. I will flicker them at night to respond to all the "nice car" thumbs-up signs. All body work and paint was done by J & M Enterprizes.

Exterior parking lamps and rear taillights have clear lenses with colored LED lighting from within. The sound system in the car is designed by J & M Enterprizes and utilizes JL Audio components and pumps out a heart pounding 700 watts of sweet sound. All of the glass is new and contains a 30 percent tint all the way around. Most all of the stainless steel is new. The engine art was done by Jaymz Studios, located in New Port Richey, Florida. I think one of the most compelling aspects of the car is the side pipe covers have been chromed and it really shows over the stock brushed aluminum looks.

One of these days I may take it to the track for a couple passes. One of the benefits of owning the National Truck Driver's School is it does come with its own personal 1¼-mile track, which can be used for testing high performance cars, like my "White Out" Corvette. The car weighs 2,900 pounds, has fairly big rubber, 525 hp, 3:5 gears; it will be interesting to see how it does. I have no plans to race, show or sell this car. I have only owned the car for a mere 41 years, so I think it can still wring out a few more decades of enjoyment. ■