

# Safari Story, Part One

By Paul Pollock

Publisher, [The Corvette Story](#)

My car enthusiast story is typical of many; got hooked as a teenager when I fell for the Ford Mustang. My parents were put off by it, insisting that it was impractical and just not a good car. Later on I got to like anything that was a two seater. The parents really disapproved of those (again a practicality issue) but my rebellious nature only caused me to be more attracted to them.

Since then the resume lists a 1970 Datsun 240Z, a 1972 Saab Sonnet, numerous Triumph and MGB roadsters, a Porsche Speedster replica, a Porsche 914, some homebuilt kit cars, a 1987 Mazda RX-7 Turbo and still in my garage, a 1990 Mazda Miata. I've left out some forgettable automobiles. And some that I remember but would like to forget.

All this time, a Corvette was at the top of my "someday" list. The first one I drove, when I was 19 years old, was my uncles 1971 Ontario Orange convertible. It was a four speed and when I drove it I felt like I owned the world. Since then I never turned down the opportunity to drive a Corvette and I was lucky to have had the experience many times in all the generations and configurations. Sometimes it was when I or a friend was considering a purchase, other times when owner / friends would generously hand over the keys.

In 1988 I learned that Mazda would be unleashing the Miata upon the world, and a decision was made. Since it looked and felt like my beloved MGBs, only with modern technology and non of the, shall we say "quirkiness" of the MGBs, its purchase became a priority. Newly married, my wife and I bought a red 1990 base Miata. We've held onto it and as of 2018, it has 389,000 miles on the clock.

Around the year 2000 I started work on the web project that became "The Corvette Story". I took as many Corvette photos as I could. Digital cameras had become affordable and their ability to take any quantity of photographs at almost zero cost was something even I was smart enough to take advantage of. I also purchased (or scanned in if it could only be borrowed) every Corvette press release or brochure I could find. As this is being written, my images folder contains over 200,000 items.

"The Corvette Story" first appeared in June, 2005. All years of Corvettes were covered along with special focus on the ZR-1, terminology, wallpaper, performance and links pages, etc. Since I've always considered "The Corvette Story" to be a work in progress, other features have been added, a process that will continue.

There is a saying: "If you ever want to become really knowledgeable about a subject, teach it". I learned a lot about Corvettes in the course of producing "The Corvette Story". I soon began to refer to myself as "The smartest man in the world about Corvettes who never owned one". There is no way to back up such a lame claim, but since I never met anyone that could refute it, I stuck with it.

There was a problem with the statement. Although I was happy about the "smart" aspect, I did not like the "never owned" part. Around that time, with viewership at almost 200,000 monthly page views for The Corvette Story, advertising revenue was adding up. It occurred

to me that a good use for these \$\$\$ would be a Corvette purchase even if it meant that my "smartest but never owned" claim would have to be forfeited.

## The Search Begins

So which one to buy? I had a war chest of around \$25,000. The basic requirement is that it had to be a convertible with a stick shift. This meant that I could have any number of C5 (1997 - 2005) choices, and, with some maneuvering, maybe a C6. Advantages for the C5/C6 included the wonderful handling from the modern suspensions, reliability, good fuel economy and the fact that they would transport you long distances without Spanish Inquisition style torture.

But the C5 / C6 solution had a downside: although used, they still had a lot of depreciation left in them. This meant that the earlier classics deserved serious consideration.



A 1959 / 1960 would have been ideal. They can legitimately claim to be the best looking Corvette, as well as one of the best looking cars ever available. But the price made them out of reach.



The C2 (in convertible form, of course!) was also very tempting. They offered a classic look that has proved itself to be timeless. The independent rear suspension was a clear advantage. At the time I was doing my Corvette shopping (early 2011) the starting price for

a C2 in running condition was around \$35,000. At that price you wouldn't get any of the desirable options and varying amounts of TLC would be required.

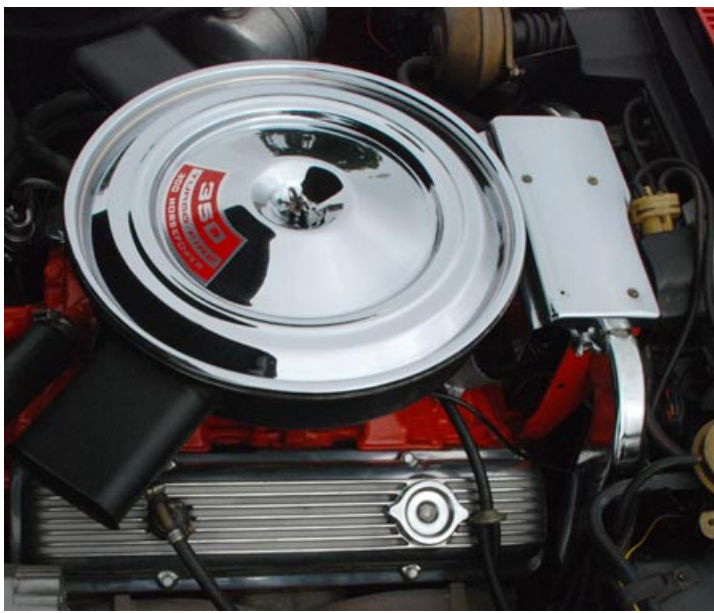
It looked like my best bet would be a C3 (1968 thru 1982). The most desirable (both in my opinion and that of the collector car marketplace) would be models with front and rear chrome bumpers, specifically 1968 thru 1972.

So the search began. As I wrote in [Classic Corvette Purchasing Tips](#), "It's not the destination, it's the journey!", the "search for a Corvette as it is almost as much fun as owning one".

My search consisted of the usual and obvious sources: eBay (the saved searches feature works great), Hemmings, Auto Trader Classics and, of course, the Corvette Story [Corvettes For Sale](#) site. I also put up wanted postings at [corvetteforum.com](#) and [corvetteactioncenter.com](#). I was looking for a four speed convertible, hoping for a good quality driver. All candidates had to be local; there were too many bad stories of buying cars long distance, so I just could not consider them. Fortunately there are enough Corvettes in the Southern California area to choose from.



There were two inspection items that, to me, were critical. As a way of looking for possible frame damage, I'd pop the fuel filler door and check (above) that the gas cap was centered in the body opening, a tip passed along by an experienced Corvette dealer. Keep in mind however that a savvy repair job could include positioning of the fuel tank so that the defect does not appear.



Above: It was also important that the ignition shielding was intact. The purpose behind the shielding was to prevent static on the radio. It would have to be removed during regular tune-up maintenance (around every 6,000 miles) and was a hassle to do. My reasoning was that if an owner didn't care enough to keep this detail consistent, there were likely to be other problem areas.

My selection was narrowed down to 1968 to '72 four speed convertibles. Other items in the category of nice to have, but not necessary or likely considering my budget:

- Good documentation, as far back as possible, maybe even to the original owner
- LT-1 engine (1970 - 1972 only)
- Numbers matching
- Very correct
- NCRS or Bloomington Gold awards
- Survivor status

Being realistic, I knew that getting all, or even some of these criteria met was unlikely, given my budget. But a guy can dream, can't he?

Colors: Black was out. They look amazing, but are also too difficult to photograph. I thought about white, but it would be a hard sell. Blue interiors were also cause for rejection. No particular reason other than my first car had a blue interior and it brought back bad memories. I also wasn't keen on those that had matching exterior / interior colors. Red is always great and a good investment. Yellow, Ontario Orange, Cortez Silver and Mulsanne Blue Corvettes got bonus points.

# Some That Got Away



I saw this candidate at the Plastic Fantastic Corvette show in San Diego. It was a 1970 Mulsanne Blue with the very desirable LT-1 engine, a solid lifter version of the small block that revved higher (to 6,500 RPM) and made more horsepower. It was a driver and in rough condition here and there with numerous scratches, etc. The speedometer had been stuck at 60,000 miles since before the current owner purchased it six years ago and there was no previous documentation. It was in good enough condition for me to consider it and it did have that wonderful LT-1 engine. There was no for sale sign but I asked the owner if it was available. He said that since he had a daughter going to college, he was thinking of selling it. He had another Corvette so it wouldn't be like he was giving up 'vette ownership.

We discussed the car in some detail and when we parted I gave him my contact info and he agreed to get in touch should he decide to sell. I never did hear from him; probably just as well as the price may have been just out of my reach.



This 1968 convertible was advertised by a Los Angeles dealer as needing a paint job and some TLC for only \$16,500, including a hardtop. Upon visiting, I discovered it needed a paint job and a lot more than some TLC. This was your basic unloved and neglected Corvette, always a sad thing to see. It was later put on eBay and bid to \$11,500, which, if you ask me, the owner could have accepted without regrets.



This candidate, also a 1968, had a very strong motor, much faster than others I had tested. Although the correct engine was not installed, it did come with the car. But the price (\$26,000) was high considering the rough condition of the body and interior.

June 8, 2011



While it is true that the shopping for a classic Corvette is great fun, the intention is to someday own a Corvette, meaning that by definition, the fun has to end. For me, the good times ended on June 8, 2011 at approximately 12:30 PM.

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## 1968 Corvette Convertible - \$21500 (Santa Monica)

Date: 2011-06-02, 6:49PM PDT

Reply to: [sale-cv37-7413497-A@craigslist.org](mailto:sale-cv37-7413497-A@craigslist.org) [Errors when replying to ads?]

327 Engine. 4 speed manual shift. Have put \$15,000 into restorations in the last 6 months. Runs like a dream. Perfect for summer. A head-turner for sure!

- Location: Santa Monica
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests



I found the winning candidate in a Craigs List ad (previous page). There was not much to go on, a claimed \$15,000 recently spent, four speed Safari Yellow 1968 with a small block engine. And a very competitive price of \$21,500.



The owner responded to my email inquiry with a phone call. It appeared to be a stripped down Corvette, no A/C, no power brakes and manual steering. The last item caused me to pause and think. The steering would be tough, sort of like a work out in the gym but without a shower nearby. The owner said he had got a lot of calls (believable at that price point) and that he would start showing it Wednesday at 11:30 and would sell to the first person who could pay for it. I knew that appearing to be eager is not a good buying strategy but I did not want to risk a good deal going to somebody else who was smart enough to be there first.



- The Safari Yellow was a color I had always liked. To me, yellow is always a good choice for a performance car as it had a lot of the characteristics of red but is not as common. The Safari Yellow flavor, one year only for 1968 (3,133 produced) was very pale separating it from the more common yellows that were typically more aggressive with their high contrast content.
- The engine had been replaced sometime in the life of the car. Although still a small block, it may be a 350 cubic inch instead of 327 cubic inches which was installed at the factory.



- Headers had been installed. This was most likely because there was an exhaust manifold problem of some type and the easiest / cheapest solution was an aftermarket header installation. The problem here is that they do not last long and would need replacement in the future.
- Below: The EMI shield was installed and intact except for the area near the spark plugs - which would not be possible with the performance header installation. The LT-1 style valve covers were a nice, although incorrect, touch. The correct valve covers for 1968 were stamped steel, chromed in the case of the 327 cu in / 350 hp; with stamped steel and painted the engine color or cast aluminum for the other engines.



- The car had a repaint which was a good quality job, with the chrome and other critical parts removed as part of the process. There were about three small gouges here and there along with some scratches in the tonneau. Still the paint presented itself well and was similar to the work from the St. Louis MO factory. The painter did not attempt to remove the waviness or correct other defects that were found on all 1968 Corvettes, which I thought of as a good thing.
- I took some time to take a close look at the body by crouching down so my eyes were level to the body midpoint. 1968 Corvettes had particularly bad build quality with waviness in the surface and fiberglass strands visible. There did not seem to be any sign of accident repair which would be readily apparent given the lack of surface smoothness.
- The chrome on the bumpers was OK, pretty good in the front with signs of pitting only with close inspection. The right rear bumper had more pitting with the left rear in worse shape with obvious pitting. Not a real drawback as rechroming is not a huge effort.
- Lifting the fuel door revealed a gas cap in the center of the opening, another sign that this Corvette had not suffered major accident damage.
- The clock did not work, a common malady of Corvettes of this vintage.

- The interior had been redone; the owner later showed me a \$2,000 receipt for the work.
- The center console had the correct amount of "patina". There were the right amount of scratches and nicks such that it didn't have the repo part look but was still in great shape.
- Below: Inside rear view mirror was in bad need of replacement. Not only was it severely tarnished, the mounting was loose and it had to be constantly adjusted.



Above: The windshield had some delaminating. The various ID markings were present and it could be the same glass as installed in 1968 although I've been told it is possible to buy correctly marked reproduction windshields.



Overall, this particular 1968 Corvette looked like it had spent a fair amount of its 43 years in storage. The odometer had been stuck at 69,828 miles since the current owner inherited it from his father about seven months earlier. Above: The windshield header was mostly free of the marks that come with opening and closing the top. An even better sign was the surround area for the ignition key (below) which was similarly free of scratches - another indication of a low mileage car.



## The Test Drive

I drove it briefly through the streets of Santa Monica. This is a crowded part of town which was unfortunate because there is no opportunity to safely test the potential of a performance automobile. Still, all looked very good. It pulled well and was typical of Corvette base engines of the time. Shifting and clutch action was very good. The steering worked well, with the only drawback being the lack of power assist. A pleasant surprise was the overall solidness that the car exhibited. It was completely silent while traversing rough spots in the pavement. I later learned that it had Dynamat sound deadening installed, a \$260 line item as part of the \$2,000 interior job.

I was very satisfied with the inspection and test drive, so the owner and I met in a conference room at the owner's workplace. I looked over the title and other paperwork which consisted of receipts for

recent work, which I would later total up to about \$8,300. I mentioned the asking price of \$21,500 and asked if he would accept \$21,000. He said that he had intended to fix some of the problem areas such as the non working clock and missing floor mats. I replied that I was fine taking the car as it was. He looked up at the ceiling a bit, kind of let the concept bounce around between his ears and said "OK".



And so it was done. I was a Corvette owner. No longer could I call my self "the smartest man in the world about Corvettes who had never owned one" and it felt very good.

The drive home was a bit nerve wracking as it involved traffic on the 405 freeway between Santa Monica and Northridge. All signs continued to look good with great oil pressure and water temperature around 160° despite the hot day.

Coming up in Safari Story, Part Two: Owning a 1968 Corvette.