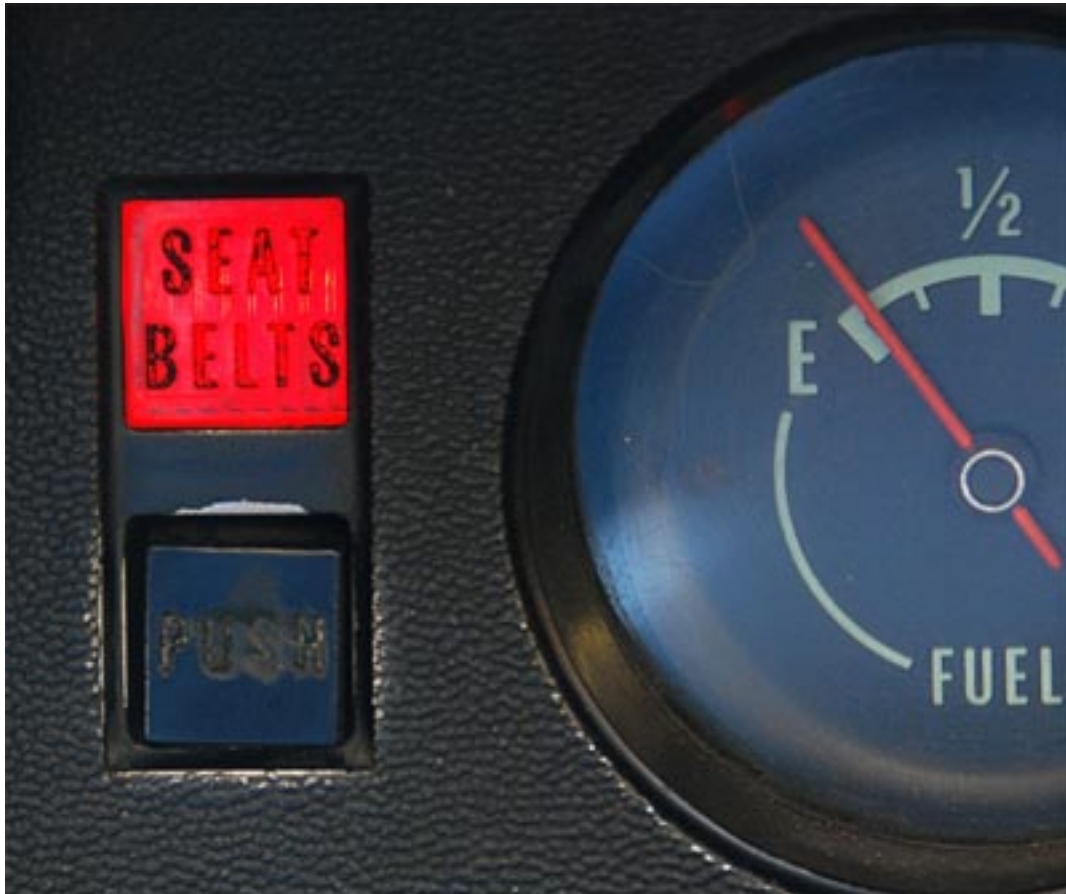


# Safari Story, Part Three

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To the left of the fuel gauge there is a "SEAT BELT" warning light. It comes on every time the ignition goes from off to on and there is a reset button below it to extinguish it. This is the early days of government safety regulation which comes off as ludicrous years later. I've thought about removing the bulb which would relieve me of the tiresome task of resetting it every time I start it. I haven't done it and probably won't. As much of a pain it is to hit the button all the time, without it I feel Safari would be less of a '68 vette, and we don't want that to happen!

## MPG Blues

Since I had the odometer fixed I had kept track of all the fuel fillups using a program I developed for the iPhone and the news was not good. I was averaging only 11 mpg and I really did not often drive it hard. I understood that I didn't buy a Toyota Prius, but still, by all accounts I should have been doing better. I had the carburetor rebuilt at the end of February 2012 which improved things by about 1 mpg; when I went to San Diego - about 200 miles of freeway driving - I got around 12.8 mpg.

All this time I had noticed that the speedometer seemed to be reading low. While driving with minimal traffic on the freeway at about the same speed as the other cars, the speedometer would read about 60 mph. It occurred to me that if the speedometer (and therefore the odometer) was low, my mpg reading might be similarly off.

## iPhone to the Rescue!

I then learned that there are speedometer and odometer applications for the iPhone. They work with the GPS that is part of every recent model iPhone. I downloaded Speedometer and Odometer, both free apps. I had the chance to try Speedometer in my 2009 Honda Civic with stock wheels / tires (changing the wheel / tire size will throw off your speedometer accuracy) and it was amazingly accurate. The only comment was that there was some lag in the reading, a understandable consequence of using the GPS methodology.

I then tried the Speedometer app in the Corvette and was amazed to learn that while driving 70 mph, the speedometer indicated 58 mph!

The Odometer app reported a similar result. A trip of 113.88 miles was only 94 miles according to the odometer on Safari.

Some quick math revealed that adding 21% to either the speedometer or odometer reading would give me an accurate reading. This meant that instead of 12 mpg, I was actually getting around 14.5 mpg, about what I would expect from a small block equipped 1968 Corvette.

I am thinking about having the speedometer recalibrated. The problem there is to keep everything consistent, I would have to update the entries I have so far in the mpg tracking database. We'll see.

## Spare Tire Report



While looking into the questionable mpg statistics, I decided to check the tire circumference as a change there from the stock tire might explain the problem. The modern radial tires that had been installed by the previous owner (ALKEN Sincera Touring, P215/70 R15) measured 84.375 inches. I then removed the spare, mostly out of curiosity as I had not checked it out in the year+ that I've owned the car. What I found (above photos) was most likely the original tire from 44 years ago! It had been used and was mostly worn out which really didn't matter since a tire that old is of no real use today. It was labeled "Atlas HP F70-15 - 4 PLIES 2 FIBERGLASS 2 VICRON" - just like the good old days. The circumference measured 83.25 inches, just over an inch less than the modern tire that I was currently using. Most of that difference can be explained by the lack of tread, so I couldn't put the speedometer / odometer error blame there.

## November 2012: Front End Work

The summer of 2012 saw Safari get put to good use. I drove it around 2,500 miles and started to think of it as my daily driver. Poets and songwriters would call it "the good life", encouraged by above average Southern California temperatures. I did notice a change in the handling however. The steering had become vague but worse, there was a wandering tendency as the tires started to follow the grooves in the pavement, forcing minute steering corrections. The change had been gradual but as the summer came to a close, it became more noticeable. Front wheel tire wear was very uneven.

Enter Paul Wustrack, Master Mechanic (specializing in American Muscle cars) and all around great guy. Safari went on the lift and it was clear the front end was tired. Paul had the car for about a week.



After some Internet searching we settled on the "Stage III" 1968 Corvette Front End Suspension Rebuild Kit from Corvette Stainless Steel Brakes inc. which included

- 4 Tie Rod Ends

- 2 Tie Rod Sleeves w/Clamps
- 4 Ball Joints w/Rivets
- 8 A-Arm Bushings
- 2 Stabilizer Bar Link Kits
- 1 Idler Arm
- Upper & Lower A-Arm Bumpers
- A-Arm Dust Covers w/Fasteners

We also went for the \$60 Polyurethane Bushings upgrade.



There was no doubt that the front end had not been worked on in the 44 years since Safari left the St. Louis MO factory. Left: The bushings were shot which likely contributed to the wandering tendencies. This work is never easy and Paul was forced to become aggressive when removing the bushings. Center: new ball joints were installed. Below: the transmission mount was also shot and was replaced.



Existing shock absorbers were tired and replaced as part of a long list of "while we're at it" items. New KYB gas shocks were installed.





After the front end work a four wheel alignment was necessary. Service Tire Company in Van Nuys CA did a great job. Steering, which had been pulling to the right along with the other front end troubles, was now straight. About \$2,000 was spent which included fixing a lot of other problems expected in a 44 year old car. The results were significant. Safari no longer followed the grooves in the highway and the steering lost a lot of it's vagueness.



The steering still had too much play in it, so a steering coupler was ordered from Zip-Corvette (part number SC-377, \$99.95 including shipping) As with many the other parts, the coupler looked like it had never been replaced since it was installed in 1968.

The next big step was tires. The ones supplied by the previous owner had worn very unevenly, with the wear bands on the right front showing and the left front about to appear - with under 10,000 miles. The problem, no doubt, was the bad need of a front end rebuild that was taken care of November 2012. A set of four Coker BFG Silvertown P 215 /70R15 Redlines were ordered from summitracing.com at a cost of \$960.95 including shipping.

The new tires was the third major step towards improving the way Safari drove. The first was the front end rebuild by Paul Wustrack. This reduced the tendency for the tires to follow the grooves in the freeway. The second was the new steering coupler which took a lot of the play out of the steering. The third item was the new tires which also improved steering feel and effort. This is not to say the FALKEN Sincera Touring tires installed by the previous owner were bad tires; they basically never had a chance with the front end needing a rebuild.

## A Functional Embarrassment

After about two years of ownership, Safari still had one unfinished business item: the steering wheel. The previous owner did not like the original steering wheel (below left) that was supplied in all 1968 Corvettes, which was understandable. It was too large and caused some comfort issues as the drivers hand would bump up against the thick upper part of the door panel. It also included an offset that caused it to be too close to the driver. GM basically admitted that it was a mistake by issuing a one inch smaller diameter steering wheel which also had a lower offset for 1969. Many 1968 owners - both when the car was new and today - have switched to the later model steering wheel.



The previous owner recognized the problem but came up with a bad solution: the "Grant GT" steering wheel (above right). It was basically a functional and visual disaster. While it did resolve the problem of the drivers hand hitting the door panel and its minimal offset caused it not to be too close to the driver, it carried some serious negative baggage. The small size coupled with the lack of power steering resulted in low speed (especially parking) maneuvers that were a real physical effort. It also obscured the upper half of the gauges. As usage accumulated, the low quality stitching started to fall apart. And it screamed "CHEAP" to the point of embarrassment.

The solution for many 1968 Corvette owners was to install the steering wheel that came with the 1969 and later (up to 1975) Corvettes. While not technically correct, it could be argued that it was "period correct" since it was installed by many owners on their new 68s.



Left: the upgraded steering wheel is installed. Right: SOOOO much better!

## Car Show Season

Plastic Fantastic, 2013



Made a return visit to San Diego (the first being the NCRS national convention in 2012) and entered the Plastic Fantastic hosted by the North County Corvette Club. This is always a great show, made special by the awesome Seaport Village location. The setting has provided a great backdrop for many of the photographs you see in "[The Corvette Story](#)" web site.





*The Plastic Fantastic show also provided the opportunity for an official portrait of sorts for Safari.*



May-11-2013; had a great time at the Shepherd of the Hills in Porter Ranch CA. Nice local car show benefitting a worthy cause, helping to build water wells in Sierra Leone, Africa.

July-21-2013: Ventura Motor Sports Gathering had an excellent selection of cars.





# Monterey Historics, 2013

What an Honor!



Corvette was the featured marque for the 2013 Monterey Motorsports Reunion. The NCRS put on a special Corvette Corral featuring a Corvette from every year - 1953 through 2013. Safari was selected to represent 1968! It was a great time and special thanks to Mike Ingham for his organizational work.





Odd as it may seem, until August 10, 2013 I had never waxed Safari. The previous owner had sold it with a good quality wax job so there really was no need for another for a couple of years. The detailing regiment consisted of hand washing when needed and many treatments of quick detailer using Mothers, Meguiar's and other products. Since it was never driven in the rain, this was sufficient.



There are many rewards for owning a vintage Corvette, some of them unexpected. I was at the Supercar Sunday event in Woodland Hills CA when this little tyke ran up to Safari and kept pointing at it. He didn't say anything but he indicated a lot of excitement to his parents. I let him have a seat and he just smiled and pointed to this and that. A future 'vette enthusiast? Let's hope so!



February 28, 2016, hanging with fellow Corvette peepes at the Petersen Museum. The drive there with LA freeways and in town traffic wasn't so great but a good time was had when we arrived.





Had a great honor in May 2015; was invited to the Greystone Mansion Concours in Beverly Hills. A classy event, made that much better as it included tours of the mansion. There were a lot of high dollar cars in attendance. Above Right: Was interviewed by Dave Kunz | abc7.com.



Around 2017, some problems with the exhaust system became apparent. There were occasional rattles and other issues. I was never happy with the aftermarket

header exhaust flanges as they were the lowest part of the car and therefore vulnerable to speed bumps etc., a common malady for low slung cars.

The system previously installed wasn't bad but it did carry some negative baggage. The mufflers themselves were clumsily installed and were hitting the body; some sections of the body had been cut away due to clearance issues. Also missing were hangers just before the frame opening.



Dale worked his magic and I was very pleased with the results. The flanges were cleaned up so speed bumps and other threats were mitigated. Proper hangers were installed and the mufflers themselves got better placement. The exhaust tips themselves were changed to a more correct type with an angle cut, although I really wasn't going for a "concours" result.