



## 53-55 STEERING WHEEL

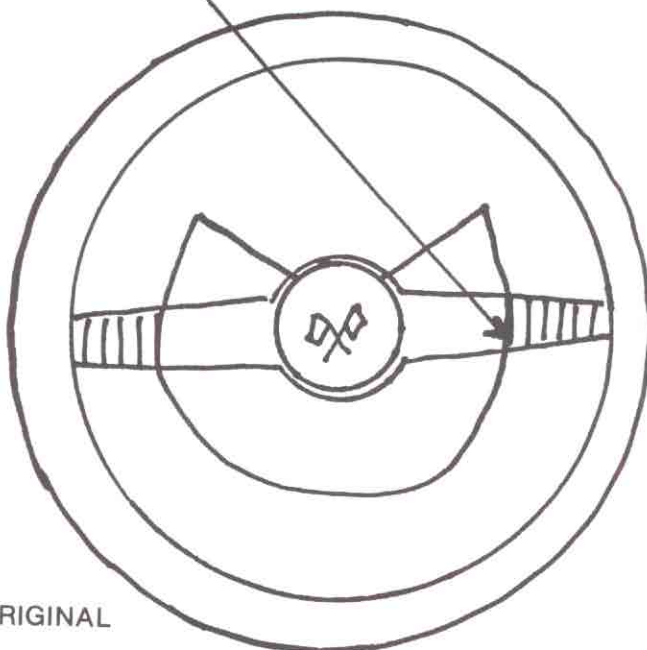
By Roy Braatz

I met a guy last summer that had just bought a restored 55 Corvette from the midwest in the 30K range. When I drove up I must admit we were both eager to meet each other and compare cars. He was so proud that he had bought a 55 and in its first showing the car took a first flight award. I asked if he planned to drive the car or just show it. He replied, "Show only!" As the owner of a driven car, I can still appreciate trailered cars. The reason being is that his car will probably be around longer than mine. The chances of my car getting into an accident are greater than his.

With that said, let me tell you the problem with this car and others like it that I've seen. First, I asked the owner to sit in his car so that I could get a picture. I found it amusing watching him get in and out of his car. He reminded me of a cowboy getting on and off of his horse. He stepped into the car and then raised his right leg up and over the seat. After this, sliding down into the seat, he was forced to sit in the car with his legs wide apart. He noticed me smiling and chuckling to myself and asked what was so funny. I asked, "Is that how you get in and out of your car; what if the top's up?" He replied, "Sure, but it's harder when the top is up." He went on to explain how the cars were built incorrectly. Before explaining the cause of his difficulties, I had him sit in my car. As he was doing so, I

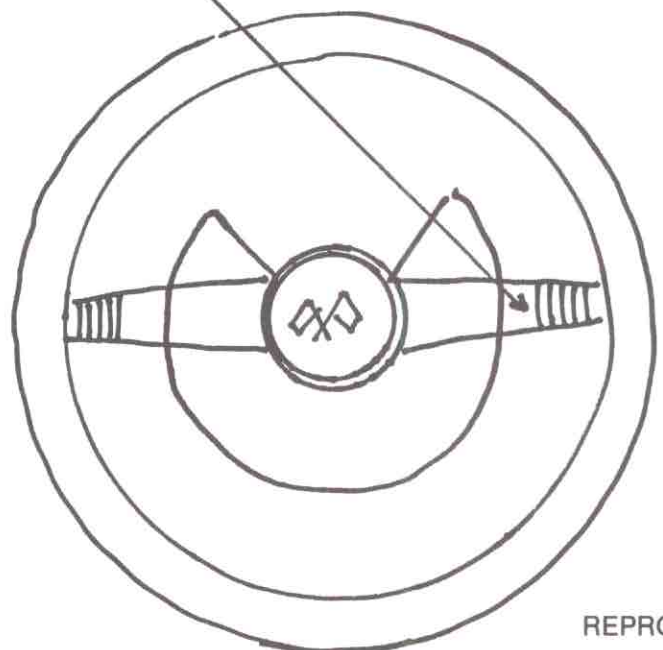
asked him to just sit in the seat and swing his legs under the steering wheel. To his amazement is legs cleared between my seat and steering wheel. His immediate response was the ease of entry into my car verses his car. Why? First, his seat cushions were reproductions. I had compared originals with reproductions and found that the reproduction is one inch higher in construction. I've also found modified 56 and up frames in the same early cars. The reason being is that if the seat cushions were rusted out so was the seat frame assembly. Most people know that 53-55 vettes were prone to filling up with water. That's where the cars got the nick-name THE BATHTUBS. Good and usable 53-55 seat cushions and frames are rare. Although 56 and later frame assemblies are modified to accept 53-55 seat cushions, the two sliding rails used for forward and backward adjustment are not. This increases the seat height an additional one inch because the stock rails are one inch lower than are the later 56 and up rails. The combination of reproduction seat cushions and modified frame

HORN RING MEETS AT  
COLOR CHANGE OR GROOVES



ORIGINAL

HORN RING IS HALF INCH SHORT  
OF COLOR CHANGE OR GROOVES



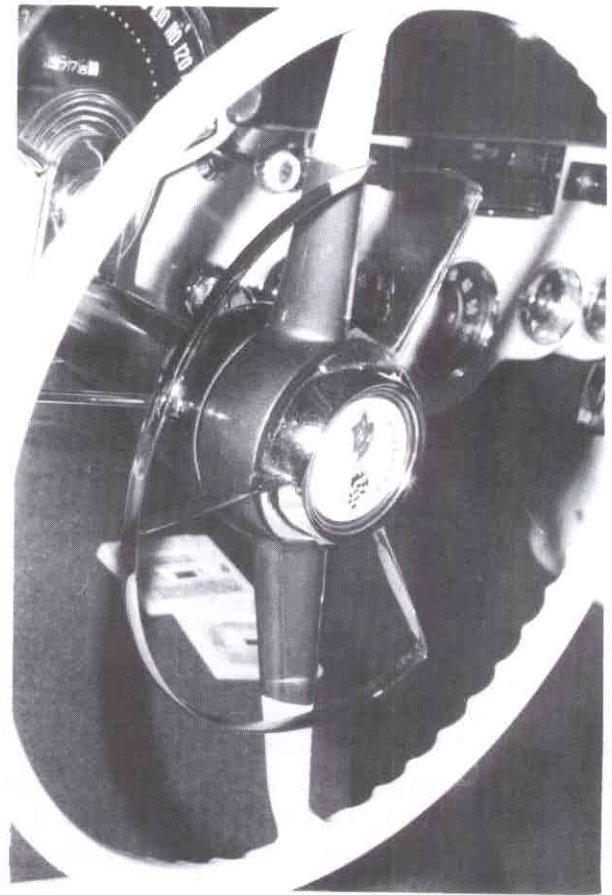
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assembly raises the seat height two inches from its stock height.

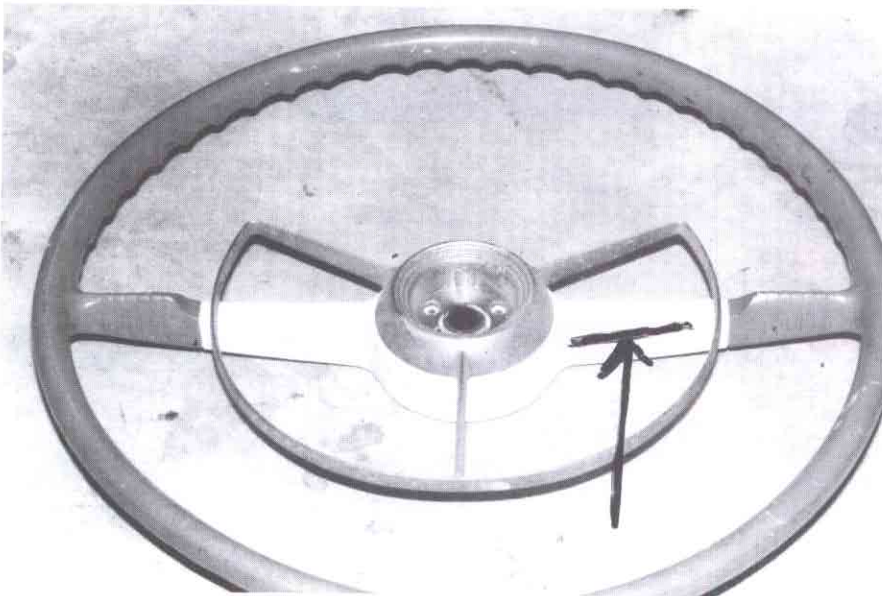
The owner of this car also had a reproduction steering wheel, which measures eighteen inches in diameter verses the stock steering wheel that only measures seventeen inches. To begin with, I wouldn't use the word reproduction. Modified is a better term because the wheels come off of early 50's cars and are modified to look like a Corvettes.

Now, it is necessary to understand that the distance between the steering wheel and seat cushion on a correct car is four to five inches, which is a little tight, but manageable. But in a car with one or more of these problems the distance can possibly be reduced to one or two inches, forcing the owner to become an urban cowboy.

I felt bad for the owner as I explained these problems. In turn, he felt equally bad about spending hundreds of dollars more to correct an already expensive car. I hope that this article will help you to distinguish between an original wheel and a modified wheel.



**ORIGINAL**  
NOTICE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN  
THE HORN RING & THE  
COLORS OF THE WHEEL



**CAR WHEEL**  
AREA THAT IS BUILT UP  
TO LOOK LIKE A Corvette

