

"Don't Change Those Numbers..."

...Save the REAL Cars

—Joe Trybulec

As our hobby becomes more sophisticated and we compile more information from the source, we are learning that many cars exist with confusing numbers and that these cars did, in fact, leave the factory with parts from other cars or dated parts that are later than the production date stamped on the car. The following is an excerpt from an interview I did several years ago with a retired official who worked at the St. Louis Corvette plant from September, 1953, until his retirement in 1970.

"Show Jobs"

OFFICIAL — We would build 10 - 12 pre-production show jobs and these cars were sent to dealers so they could see what they were going to get. These cars were sent out for promotion and then brought back to the plant, and then they were sold.

However, if Engineering said that we couldn't sell a 'show job' because it had parts that did not meet next year's standards, Engineering would have to go out and okay a part to come in that was up to specifications. If they couldn't come up with the exact part with part numbers, the car was NOT to be sold, but scrapped instead.

And, it was my job to scrap those cars!

I'll never forget the day... I was short on men and they sent me two 'colored boys.' I had a beautiful car that had to be scrapped and I walked these guys over to it and said "I want you to get some wrenches and start taking that car apart and throw it into a big pile over there." One said, "Are you telling us the truth?" I replied "Yes." He kept blinking his eyes, as if he thought I was lying to him, and I said "That's what I want you to do." He said, "Man, you must be crazy!" I said, "No, I'm not crazy. Take that car apart, take every piece off of it, put it in a pile, then come back over and I'll tell you which one to take apart next." This was about 1965!

JOE — Were records kept of these cars?

OFFICIAL — Oh, sure! The engineers kept records of what went into every car, and if it didn't have what it was supposed to have, it was to be scrapped.

Now, sometimes those parts were re-used. We would pull an engine out that was perfectly all right... and put it in some other Corvette!

JOE — What was a normal reason for a car to be scrapped?

OFFICIAL — A manufacturer couldn't make the schedule of a newly-designed part. You see, a show job had a date that it had to be completed... on that day. If there was a later frame change or a bracket change that held the motor, or anything like that, and the engineer said that the part was not up to snuff on the show job... it was scrapped.

More on the 15 x 5K Welded Wheels...

(Written in a letter from Skip Sharpe)

Here is some more information on the 15 x 5K welded wheels. I ordered five welded wheels from that source you told me about in your last issue, and when I received them, lo and behold, there were two different types. Three of them (call them Type "A") were exactly like the one shown in our magazine Vol. 1, #4, Pg. 8, in that from the back, they have "cutouts" on the center section flanges. If you look closely at the picture on page 8, you can see them. The valve stem holes are 5/8" and the hub opening is 2-7/8". These wheels are fairly rough and I'll have to have them beaded to see if I can find some logos and dates. They do, however, have the extra raised portion on the front of the center section and the hubcap dimples. The other two wheels (call them Type "C") look the same from the front (extra raised & dimples) with the exception of a smaller valve stem hole (7/16") and a smaller hub opening (2-3/4").

From the back, the flanges are smooth (no cutouts). These wheels are in much better shape and I found 15 x 5 and Kelsey-Hays logo and dates. One is dated (are you ready?) 4-63 and the other is dated 2-66!

A friend of mine in my hometown in eastern Washington State has an original 80K early '60 (October 1959), and yes, I gave him a membership application. As luck would have it, he has his tires off the wheels for re-painting. I went home to visit my folks, so I dropped by to take a look at his wheels (Call them Type "B"). They are welded, have the extra raised portion, 2-7/8" hub, 5/8" valve, but... the flanges are smooth! His dates are all 9 (6?) '59 with appropriate logos. This makes three distinct welded types!

I'm assuming that the wheel shown on page 8 is the same one shown dates 9-57 (Roy, Jr's car?). If that's the case, then somewhere between '57 and '60, Type "B" was substituted for Type "A". I have no idea where the Type "C" wheel was used. I don't think the Stingers used this wheel, but maybe they did.

Say, maybe we need to do a write-in survey of our readers who have what they consider to be original welded wheels to see if it can be determined which type belongs on what year. Or, should we open that can of worms?

—Skip Sharpe
Portland, Oregon

P.S. While I was home, I also checked my brother-in-law's bone stock '60 Chevy Biscayne wagon. It has a 283 4-barrel (cast iron intake, but different # from the 'Vette). The most interesting feature of the car was the thermostat housing. It's a first design aluminum #3837223. Out of the goodness of my heart, I generously replaced it for him with a much flashier, shiny, chrome cal-custom unit.