

8 FOUND!

by Noland Adams

THIS summer I got a call from a West Coast friend who's in Michigan on business. This guy is not familiar with Corvettes, so I was surprised when he called me with an old-Corvette-in-a-barn story. I've known and trusted him for over 15 years, or I might have dismissed the story right there.

The owner of the car is a retired GM executive who bought the car from someone in Styling (now the Design Dept.) many years ago. The Corvette is stored in a large building sitting bumper-to-bumper along with many old cars (Packards were mentioned). There are also many boxes and miscellaneous items stored on and around the cars, so much that the doors or hood cannot be opened, and the car cannot be moved outside. The owner thinks it's a '53, but doesn't know for sure. And, it's been sitting there for thirty years, it hasn't moved since 1962.

Now these fairy tales are usually just so much bunk. If this hadn't been my friend who was describing this to me, I would have dismissed it rather quickly.

Since my friend had no idea where to look, I described the location of the serial plate. Could the driver's door be opened? After a discussion with the owner, it was decided the owner would work on the stuff in the way and get the door and hood open. My friend would drive over on the weekend, and check for the plate.

Next weekend, call #2 comes in from Michigan. The door is open, but there is no serial plate. So I ask about documentation: how about registration papers, anything that might have the serial number on it?

Well, they do have the registration papers. But now they have the hood open, and, of all the strange things, the engine number matches the registration number. So I ask them to read me the numbers. The number is "L - A - Y" and I give an internal whoop, it's a '53 for sure. The rest is "300601". I look for my list of '53 engine numbers, and find that LAY300601 is by far the earliest known '53 engine. Could this be #1 or #2?

To those of you who are not familiar with this engine-serial number problem, allow me to explain. In 1953 and 1954 vehicles were registered by their engine numbers in most states. The serial numbers were secondary, and never appeared on the paperwork. If you changed the engine, you had to change the registration number or it no longer matched the car.

Beginning with the 1955 model year, the serial number was used, and the confusion stopped.

Back to our '53 identification problem. With no other choice, I suggested that the gas tank cover be pulled, and that they look down on the frame to locate the serial number stamped there. Okay, they will do this work during the week and call me back.

Well, this took several weeks, and I had a deadline for straight talk. I included the '53 engine numbers in my running numbers article, and dropped in a hint of this car with the speculation that it was #1, using the list of known cars:

- # 1 Location unknown, maybe this car?
- # 2 Location unknown.
- # 3 Restored, and in good hands.
- # 4 I've seen it, in Michigan or Florida.
- # 5 I've seen it, on the East Coast.
- # 6 on the East Coast.

So you can see why I felt it could be number 1 or 2. When I finally got the next call, it was bad news: no number on the frame at all. But I assured them that it should be there, so they will look further and call back.

Two more weeks, and they do call back with news — it's number 8! Yes, the numbers are very clear, 008. Suddenly, the owner thinks he wants to sell the car. This is the oldest Corvette with its original engine that's ever been offered for sale. Of course, the price would be high. But then the owner decided he couldn't stand to part with the car. That's a bit hard for me to understand, as he probably hasn't seen it in years. Anyway, as we leave the story, the owner can't make up his mind what to do!

After all this story of #8 came out, I heard of another old Corvette in Northern California. This one is supposed to be '53 #7, and this information came out independently of the #8 story. Anyway, #7 is supposed to have a non-running experimental engine in it. Well, I'm not running away from this one — I'll try to check it out. But you'll excuse me if I don't get too excited — yet.

In closing, it is surprising how many old Corvettes are coming out of storage to begin the restoration process. So, keep on looking!

Later, Noland