

In Pursuit of An Objective With the passing of twenty years the Chevrolet Corvette has become universally recognized as a collector's car, and is increasingly subjected to preservation and restoration by devoted fans and auto historians. It has taken its place in the auto collections next to the cars that bear the historic names of Packard, Mercer, Duesenberg, Bugatti, and Pierce-Arrow. With its increasing recognition as a car with a great past and a greater future has come the recognition that the early development of a comprehensive registry of the early production of the cars can provide a valuable contemporary historical perspective of the marque, and can benefit those dedicated to the study and preservation of the car in several practical ways:

1. The accumulation of prior ownership historical data on individual cars.
2. Assistance in the authentication of production details as the cars were made.
3. Provide a continuing tracer on cars to discourage theft.
4. Provide data concerning production volume -- rarity of existing cars -- to assist in appraisal of value for insurance purposes and as a guide to the buyer or seller of the car.
5. Provide past and early Corvette data for the greater enjoyment and broadened knowledge of owners and aficionados of the car everywhere.

With these and other similar objectives in mind, IREC has made a beginning, and this constitutes the first of a series of reports based on data now being accumulated from hundreds of individually contacted owners throughout the North American continent and wherever they may be found around the world. To those who have taken the time to make their data available, our thanks for their cooperation and enthusiastic response. For the unreported owners, our invitation to join in the study of our automotive marque by writing IREC at P.O. Box 666 in Corvallis, Oregon 97330 to request an Inquiry Sheet and become part of the contemporary history of the first editions of "America's only true production sports car."

A Progress Report When a 1953-1955 Corvette is reliably reported to still exist, through information provided by Corvette clubs, responsible individual reporters, or from other acceptable sources, it is noted in the basic Registry. This is even true of cars identified by serial number with ownership information incomplete or indefinite, and cars identified by owners where the serial number is not yet known or verified. From this basic entry that contact is made by the forwarding of an Inquiry Sheet for greater detail about the car, together with information to introduce the function and purpose of IREC. When the Inquiry Letter is returned, the information is tabulated and becomes part of the permanent file of the ownership for that car. Additional data on specific cars is obtained by follow-up correspondence in those cases where special information might be of value. How is IREC doing in accumulating the data on the 4640 cars made between 18 and 20 years ago? Here is our current progress report:

	1953		1954		1955		1953-1955	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Car Fully Accounted For	114	38.0	665	18.3	139	19.9	918	19.8
S/N & Name W/O Addr; Addr W/O Name; Unable to Contact	34	11.3	42	1.2	7	1.0	83	1.8
S/N Verified, No Name/Addr.	7	4.3	0	0	0	0	7	0.2
S/N Unknown or Questionable	2	0.7	94	2.7	15	2.1	111	2.4
S/N & City, No Name/Addr.	1	0.3	0	0	0	0	1	---
S/N Possibly Accounted For	0	0	4	0.1	0	0.3	6	0.1
Verified S/N Destroyed	1	0.3	2	---	2	0	3	---
Total	159	53.0	807	22.2	163	23.3	1129	24.3

These figures represent the basis entries currently shown in the IREC listing as of September 1, 1973. The second column figures represent the per cent of total original production for each of the years and for all three years combined. We have used as a base a production of 300 for 1953, 3640 for 1954, 700 for 1955, or a three year total of 4640 cars.

That nearly one-quarter of the original production has entered the IREC data in one form or another is an indication of the "staying power" of the early Corvettes. Last year one of the foremost automotive magazines featured an article concerning the attrition rate of cars following their initial production. An example of the manner in which registrations indicate the declining existence of a given car was cited in the case of the 1956 Plymouth. The writer concluded that by 1970 less than 10% of the original production could be expected to remain, and the survival rate of 1% could be extrapolated by 1978. Further, using a sample group of 15 cars manufactured between 1953 and 1959 the level of 1% survival averaged 18.5 years after production, and was down to 0.1% after 23.2 years. The writer also recognized, however, that the survival rate would be affected by interest in the preservation of an old car and the accuracy of such attrition projections would be countered somewhat by collector interest.

The figures which have emerged from the preliminary IREC analysis would indicate that the 1953-55 group of Corvettes could well set some sort of record for their persistence both before and after the influence of "collector interest" was felt. For nearly one-fourth of the original production to be accounted for, between eighteen and twenty years after their production origin, and after a period of less than three years being devoted to the accumulation of such information, is nothing short or remarkable. From the point of view of IREC, at this still early date, it would seem that 50% of the total production of 4640 might still be accounted for eventually. Only time and continuing enthusiastic response of the early Corvette owners will provide the answer to such speculation, but a long stride has been made in the direction of confirming the suspicions that many of us share. And with the growing interest in the preservation and restoration of the marque, we can expect that the rate of attrition has tapered off markedly, and the condition and quality of the cars which remain will tend to rise steadily. What this means in the area of economics as well as aesthetics is not lost on many of today's owners, nor is it lost on the awareness of those who seek future ownership of the car.

The effort of IREC has only just begun. The validity of the information made available to early Corvette owners will be strengthened as time goes by and a greater participation is achieved. For that reason, this series of reports may be considered only *preliminary* at this early date. Already, however, some fascinating information is emerging from the mass of data accumulated. This first report will concern itself with two points about which considerable interest has been expressed: 1) an engine report, and 2) a mileage analysis. Subsequent reports will deal with other topics such as condition, term of ownership, color selection, etc. We also hope to share with you the story of some of the cars with an unusual past history, and the interesting stories told by some of the

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current owners in the acquisition and restoration of their cars. From these reports we hope a greater understanding and appreciation of the 1953-55 Corvettes will emerge for the greater enjoyment of all who find fascination with the story of "America's only true production sports car."

First Fruits The Engine Compartment

A common question raised among early Corvette owners concerns the sequence of numbers appearing on the engine blocks and whether they parallel the serial numbers assigned to the cars. IREC research indicates there is an inconsistent parallel as revealed in the following representative sample:

-----1953-----		-----1954-----		-----1955-----	
Serial No.	Eng. Block No.	Serial No.	Eng. Block No.	Serial No.	Eng. Block No.
E53F001026	LAY10039	E54S001231	0273233F54YG	VE55S001008	0092860F55FG
E53F001065	LAY494733	E54S001306	0299141F54YG	VE55S001050	0118322F55FG
E53F001089	LAY425223	E54S001328	0670747F54YG	VE55S001055	0118328F55FG
E53F001091	LAY341018	E54S001602	0342427F54YG	VE55S001278	0246153F55FG
E53F001093	LAY505454	E54S001609	0374576F54YG	VE55S001319	0188985F55FG
E53F001145	LAY549382	E54S002267	0515430F54YG	VE55S001325	0246544F55FG
E53F001173	LAY537522	E54S002268	0515811F54YG	VE55S001347	0262986F55FG
E53F001214	LAY517164	E54S004165	0643677F54YG	VE55S001366	0262796F55FG
E53F001276	LAY567023	E54S004167	0643822F54YG	VE55S001453	9288352F55FG
E53F001278	LAY567031	E54S004408	0958399F54YG	VE55S001494	0175010F55FG
E53F001284	LAY567014	E54S004409	0958378F54YG	VE55S001575	0363464F55FG
E53F001300	LAY566991	E54S004594	0647546F54YG	VE55S001596	0362212F55FG

It can be seen from this sampling that the engine block number generally rises as the serial number rises, but the sequence of the numbers is not precise. This would seem to indicate that the 6 cylinder engine blocks were delivered from the engine plant to the production area in groups, and then were drawn from stock as they were encountered in the holding area. At the end of the 1954 production run, it appears they were working their way back into some of the engines that had been delivered earlier, since there are a number of instances where block numbers used in the last 200 cars are similar to those appearing early in the 4000 series of serial numbers. The least consistent sequence is found in the 1955 series, although the pattern of ascending numbers is still evident.

A further study of the engine information reveals the ravages on originality exerted by the passing of the years. Engines wear out and are replaced rather than rebuilt. Race enthusiasts discard original blocks for something more productive on the track. Accidents cause the disposal of a doubtful engine and transmission arrangement in favor of a safer replacement engine. With the study of this engine data we can begin to grasp the relative prevalence or rarity of the stock and original motive equipment at this two decade passing of time. Of those reported on Inquiry Sheets as of September 1, 1973, this is the picture:

	1953 Corvette	1954 Corvette	1955 Corvette
Original Engine	64%	56%	41%
Replacement 6 Cyl.	16%	16%	2%
Replacement V-8	---	9%	41%
No Engine	10%	4%	6%
Unknown/Not Rept'd	10%	15%	10%

When evaluating the relative rarity of an original car, it helps to have a valid reference point for such basics as how many cars still around have the original engine configuration. If we accept the premise that as many as 50% of the original 1954 production still remains, and if we accept 56% as a representative figure for how many of those cars still have the original engines, then we might believe that the number of existing cars which meet the first test of originality -- that of the engine -- would not exceed 1,019 (3640 x .50 x .56). How many of those cars fall short of originality because of other alterations can only be left to the imagination at this time. Perhaps the number of qualifying cars is even smaller than anyone has previously imagined. Only time will help pin down the accuracy of that 50% assumption and verify the reliability of the 56% figure which now asserts itself.

Examination of the 1953 group might reveal another 50% potential in car originality adjusted downward by a 64% engine factor, for a result of 96 cars (300 x .50 x .64); and for the 1955s the same assumptions would indicate a total of 143 cars (700 x .50 x .41). How many such cars have you seen lately? It makes food for thought, doesn't it?

How Far Have They Gone? A Mileage Analysis:

What constitutes a *low mileage* early Corvette? What is a typical odometer reading for the 1953-1955 cars? This study produced a few surprises to ponder. Summed up simply, an unexpectedly large number of the cars are still "low mileage" cars, as reported by the responding owners of today. Here's the picture:

Mileage	1953 Production	1954 Production	1955 Production
Under 20,000 Miles	2.7%	1.5%	1.8%
20,000 - 39,999	8.1%	7.5%	8.8%
40,000 - 59,999	18.9%	15.9%	19.3%
60,000 - 79,999	13.6%	21.4%	10.5%
80,000 - 99,999	2.7%	16.4%	12.3%
100,000 - 149,999	5.4%	10.4%	15.8%
150,000 - 199,999	---	1.5%	1.8%
200,000 & Over	2.7%	1.0%	---
Questionable	8.1%	.5%	---
Unknown or Not Reported	37.8%	23.4%	29.8%

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By the very nature of its being a "specialty" car we would expect these Corvettes would be the lesser used of two or more cars in most families. But consider that a 1953 car with just 60,000 miles means an average of 3000 miles per year. That's low miles! The spread between the lowest and highest 1953 mileage is a mere 276,200 miles. One 1953 is reported in at 8,800 original miles, while the record holder is an impressive 285,000 miles. The 1954s range from 15,000 original miles to a high of 257,000 miles. Low mileage honors at this time go to a 1955 which claims actual mileage of 6,800, and the high end for that year is a modest 162,000 miles.

Obviously, IREC is not in a position to verify the mileage claims made by its participants. But, the additional data provided usually tends to corroborate the claims and we trust such information is as accurate as the owner can provide. The emerging picture is one of a disproportionate percentage among the early Corvettes which qualify as low mileage cars. If mileage of 10,000 annually is typical among all cars, then a 20 year old car might expect to have either 200,000 miles on the odometer, or to be so worn out that it has been exiled to the junk yard. Remember that some of the reported cars exceed that figure; some are so high in mileage that the true figure is unknown today; and remember that the majority of the cars produced in the 1953-55 era are not yet registered, and may never be, because they have indeed gone the way of tired automobiles, to their final resting place. Those that are left though, seem to be in good shape to face the next 20 years, and with the continuing effort by restorers to defend the marque from further attrition, we can expect to see an improving level of quality even though the quantity will continue to be fixed by the fortunes of vehicular fate. On that positive note, we conclude our story of "How Far They Have Gone" with the expectation that the survivors still have a long way to go as they wind their way into automotive history.

IREC Epilogue Comments regarding this IREC data are welcome. Participation by all previously unregistered 1953-54-55 Corvette owners is solicited. We extend our thanks to the many who have already become a part of this effort. We are particularly grateful for the cooperation and encouragement received from John Hutchins of the Classic Corvette Club in Alma, Michigan, Ed Thiebaut of the Vintage Corvette Club of America in Fresno, California, Jim Prather of the publication Vette Vues in Atlanta, Georgia, and the excellent work done by a number of "regional reporters" whose sharp eyes and unbridled enthusiasm have turned up many cars which would otherwise have languished unknown for some time to come. Their efforts will be recognized individually in a future issue of the IREC Report.

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IREC Registrar
P.O. Box 666
Corvallis, Oregon 97330

INTERNATIONAL REGISTRY
OF EARLY CORVETTES

CAR NO: _____
MODEL YEAR _____

Extra Parts: _____

Registry Date: _____

Condition: _____

Purchased by present owner:

From whom? _____

Where? _____ When? _____

Is car history known? _____

Mileage: _____

Color: Exterior Original _____ Now _____
Interior Original _____ Now _____

Owner's Name: _____

Address: _____

Engine: _____ Number: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Transmission _____

Phone: _____

Options: _____

(Use reverse side if necessary. Include photo if possible.

Request additional sheets for additional cars.)

Missing Parts: _____

Return to: Int'l Registry of Early Corvettes
P.O. Box 666, Corvallis, Oregon 97330
Phone (503) 753-6789