

Playing the Horsepower Game

Your saving grace may be that most graffiti artists, er, “black out” guys, rarely properly prepare the chassis

by Colin Comer

Are 'Vettes immune?

Q After watching much of the Arizona auction action, it seems like Corvettes are holding their values better than average muscle cars. Do you agree, and what would you consider to be the best year or years to appreciate in the future?—*B.T., Akron, OH*

A *Corvette values, just like every collector car (or tangible asset, for that matter), are certainly not immune to this unprecedented financial crisis. However, as you witnessed live and on Speed, indeed prices on certain Corvettes are doing quite well, to the surprise of many. What it all boils down to is that there are some forced sales right now of cars that have not been available for a long time.*

Quality and provenance sell, especially with Corvettes, since so few really good examples of rare models exist. Obviously, models that have always been popular will hold their values the best and appreciate ahead of the fringe cars in the future.

Stick to thoroughly documented, legitimate high-horsepower C1, C2, and C3 cars. Buy the best examples you can find, and in good colors. Pay particular attention to Bloomington Gold Survivor and Benchmark Certified cars; that is one segment that is just waking up and represents the future of the hobby. Regardless of the price range, buy the best quality and history you can afford. There are lots of opportunities out there right now for getting the Corvette of your dreams—and on sale!

They painted my bottom

Q I have a '69 L71 coupe that has all its original drivetrain and body. It has very nice paint and a very nice original interior.



Corvettes held their own in Arizona

The previous owner wanted to “clean up” the bottom, so he had it treated to a classic “black out,” which included spraying over all the natural areas and the brake and fuel lines. Is it worth having the bottom stripped and redone to be more correct?—*J.M., Austin, TX*

A *Yes. As daunting as it may look at first, chassis restoration is more elbow grease than anything else, and a properly detailed chassis makes an otherwise “good” car into a “great” car. Your saving grace may be that most graffiti artists, er, “black out” guys, rarely properly prepare the chassis, so sometimes even a careful high-pressure steam cleaning removes 80% of the vandalism.*

Lacquer thinner, aircraft paint stripper, and other tools will take care of the rest. It also means this is a great time to drop the suspension and rebuild/detail each component and replace all of the brake and fuel lines with new ones, install proper shocks, correct exhaust components, and the like. If you don't want to try it yourself, find a competent

Corvette restoration shop that is familiar with the proper finishes and techniques for the various surfaces and components. Then, break out the under-car mirrors at the next Dog 'n Suds cruise night.

More power, please

Q I have a 1975 Corvette convertible. It has 19,000 miles on it and I've owned it since 1978. I bought it because I didn't think they'd make any more open Corvettes, but GM double-crossed me in 1986. It's steel blue, which is the rarest color, but its performance is pitiful, with just 165 horsepower, even though I have a 4-speed. How much can I modify this before it hurts the value? I know it's not worth much, but I'd like to have a bit more fun with it before my kids take my keys away.—*L.R., Phoenix, AZ*

A *I feel your pain. The 1970s were dark years for performance, to be sure. All is not lost, however, as you have many options to wake up your C3. The cheapest upgrade would be a*

moderate “super tune” session. Plenty of specialists can properly rebuild and calibrate your stock Quadrajets carburetor for better performance, all while being emissions compliant.

Also, the factory distributor advance curve is lethargic. Either a performance replacement or a recurving of your original unit, along with a high-output coil and good wires and plugs, will work wonders in combination with the carb upgrade. Once it is all together, a proper tune on a chassis dyno will confirm everything is working properly. We usually see gains of 30 hp or so just tweaking the factory setup.

After that, a high-flow catalytic converter and decent exhaust do lots for performance, and a good aftermarket aluminum intake manifold can be disguised to look almost stock—and it will be hidden under all that emissions spaghetti anyway.

The next level would be a performance camshaft and lifters. Again, keep in mind emissions requirements in your area and consult a knowledgeable shop. If you still hunger for more, yank the motor and have it rebuilt to performance specs with more compression, ported or aftermarket heads, and proper matching of components, which should net a good, solid 300–350 hp and be reliable as the day is long, while still looking bone stock externally.

Or, if you want to leave your 19k mile engine sealed up just as it left the General, investigate any number of the crate engines available. All should plug right in with your original components bolted to them. And your original motor will make a great coffee table until the next owner is ready to reinstall it when he puts the car in a bubble. ■