

Breathing New Life Into An American Icon

by Tara Cale
August 9 2023 3:30 PM





MACOUPIN COUNTY - Dick Ferrando started working on cars at a Macoupin County body shop when he was just 16 years old. He bought his first Corvette in 1962 in Bunker Hill. Rescued from a junkyard where it was discarded by its third owner, the 1958 model was badly damaged. Dick paid \$150 for the car. At the time, Dick was an engineering tech/design draftsman for the State of Illinois, so restoring the Corvette was something that could not take priority. In fact, it took Dick three years to repair the car, but the process ignited a flame in him that just grew brighter over time, and he started repairing other

Corvettes as time allowed. When restoring Corvettes started making more money for him than his full-time job, he decided to repair Corvettes on a full-time basis. D&A Corvette in Mt. Clare opened in 1974.

From 1974 to 1980 D&A Corvette was a typical Corvette repair shop. But a declining moment came in the late '70s when Illinois tinkered with vehicle title laws, ruining the market for rebuilding damaged vehicles. Instead of giving up, Ferrando refocused on solely restoring and remanufacturing Corvettes, to order.

The Corvette certainly has charisma. And according to Dick Ferrando, “The most important factor in determining a Corvette’s value is its originality.” He should know. Next year D&A Corvette will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Classic Corvettes roll off the production line at D&A Corvette the same way General Motors originally built the cars - part by part. Whether the car is furnished by D&A, or the customer, salvaged cars are taken down to a fiberglass shell and chassis, all the parts are rebuilt, and the entire car is reassembled.

Engines are completely rebuilt to factory specs, interiors are of the finest vinyls and hand leathers. All gauges, radios and clocks are rebuilt to even better than original specifications. The remanufacturing of a Corvette is time and labor intense and involves between 1500-1800 hours per car, but purchasing a D&A Corvette is like purchasing a car brand new car Only cooler.

Now, known both nationally and even internationally - restoration projects come in from all over the world - D&A Corvette has many repeat customers for which they have completed multiple restorations, with as many as 19 cars restored for a single customer. Yeah... they’re that good! You see, Dick and his crew have a knack for breathing new life into these road legends that for some reason were forgotten, discarded or left to deteriorate.

Though there are many accolades that can be attributed to D&A Corvettes (just Google Dick Ferrando and you will see what I am talking about), probably the most well-known and publicized restoration for D&A was that of a 1955 barn find that had been stored and neglected for 48 years. According to the story on the Super Chevy website.

Retired GM Engineer Jim Wallace didn’t know a 1955 Corvette was hiding from him just eight miles from his home. Jim and his wife Cindy attended a Morel Mushroom Dinner, where they were seated randomly with eight other people. Two of those people turned out to be George and Julie Cromer, and as they continued to talk during the evening, Jim and George discovered they were both retired from GM as engineers. Furthermore, they both shared an interest in Corvettes, with George dropping a bombshell when he mentioned that he owned one of the just 700 Corvettes built in the 1955 model year, having purchased the Pennant Blue roadster in 1959 from a Detroit dealer and parked it nine years later in his garage, where it had been ever since.

Jim naturally asked if he could see the car and had to travel unbelievably just eight miles down the road to get a look at this piece of long-neglected automotive history. Dust and dirt had built up on the car and the interior had been decimated by decades of chewing rodents but Jim was able to decipher that most of the original parts were there, including

the 265 V8 engine, and even the original BF Goodrich Silvertown whitewall spare tire and steel wheel. Jim concluded that the 61-year-old Corvette was definitely in good enough condition to restore. After getting permission from the Cromers' children, who said they had no interest in the heirloom car, Jim soon found himself the owner of this 1955 Corvette, which was subsequently taken to D&A Corvette for its transformation.



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The Corvette, first introduced in 1953, was originally a relatively modest, lightweight 6-cylinder convertible, with subsequent introductions of V8 engines, competitive chassis innovations, and rear mid-engined layouts which positioned the Corvette in the supercar class.

The first three Corvette generations (1953-1983) employed body-on-frame construction, and since the C4 generation, introduced in 1983 as an early 1984 model, Corvettes have used GM's unibody Y-body platform. All Corvettes used front (mid-) engine configuration for seven generations, through 2019, and then transitioned in 2020 to a rear mid-engined layout with the current C8 generation.

This year marks the 70th anniversary for the Corvette, widely known as “American’s Sports Car.” Automotive News wrote that after being featured in the early 1960s

television show Route 66, "the Corvette became synonymous with freedom and adventure," ultimately becoming both "the most successful concept car in history and the most popular sports car in history."

Originally manufactured in Flint Michigan, and later St. Louis, today, 188 corvettes are made daily - 94 corvettes during each of two shifts, Monday-Friday, at the Corvette factory in Bowling Green, Kentucky (since 1981), also home to the Corvette Museum. The Corvette is now the only two-seat sports car produced by a major United States auto manufacturer and serves as Chevrolet's halo car.

An interesting tidbit many don't know is that Corvettes are not made for delivery to any dealership showroom. Every single Corvette produced. now is made specifically by special order for an individual. If you see a new Corvette at a dealership, it is because the person that ordered it never took delivery.

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D&A Corvette will pay as much as \$25,000 for battered remains of rare Corvette models, but after restoration, can sell that car for up to three times that amount. They are one of the very few Corvette remanufacturers in the nation... right here in your own backyard... Benld, IL. Who knew?

Dick and his crew know the value of these iconic sports cars. Due to the time consuming process and their attention to detail they can only turn around about 12 cars per year. But their uncompromising desire and personality are expressed in each car restored. These Corvettes are not only restored relics, but also true works of art.

Dick concluded our interview by stating, "I don't take a paycheck home. Of course my crew has to be paid, but I do this because

I love it!"

D&A Corvette is located on IL Route 4 just south of Gillespie (2340 Staunton Road). Call 217-839-3207 for more information, visit www.da-corvette.com or find them on Facebook.

This story originally ran in the August issue of The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine
<http://www.thebuzzmonthly.com>.