

For the Love Of 10 Corvettes

By Laddie Antiporek

Always a gearhead – that’s me. At age 14 my first car was a ‘55 Chevy that was partnership deal with my oldest brother. We intended to race at the drag strip, but I only drove it up and down our alley when I was cleaning the garage.

My second experience behind the wheel was in my other older brother’s ‘65 Dodge Coronet. I drove it for the first time late at night going over 100 mph on a sparsely driven street. Not bad for someone with a learner’s permit.

The first car I owned was a ‘58 Chevy Impala — a convertible at that — purchased for \$300. At today’s value (pre-market collapse) it would be well over \$50k. A ‘64 Impala SuperSport followed, a 327 with a 4-speed.

I was in my ‘64 when I had a life-changing experience. A brand new ‘68 Corvette was in front of me in traffic, and although I had been around Corvettes before, this was different. At a stop sign, the Corvette just drove right around the guy in front of me and left us both in the dust. At that point I decided I needed one of those: a fast car that would handle and move out at the push of the throttle. I started saving for a Corvette the next day.

My third and fourth cars were Buick Rivas, a ‘63 and ‘64. Both were fast with big-block motors but very heavy. As a redeeming feature, they were extremely wonderful road cars and actually got decent mileage out of the city. I was still saving for my first Vette.

After finally saving about \$3k, I pur-



Susan and Laddie in their 10th Corvette — a 2008 Atomic Metallic Orange beauty that raises eyebrows everywhere. “Now people point at it,” says Laddie.

chased my first Corvette, a ‘71, in ‘73. It was White with a Blue interior and a 4 speed. It was the first of 10, although I had no idea that the love affair would last so long.

The Vettes that followed were:

2nd Vette: 1975, Marina Blue (it was eventually stolen, which was OK because it was my most disappointing Vette)

3rd Vette: 1975 Orange, 4 speed, owner installed Chrome sidepipes

4th Vette: 1978 Red, 4 speed

5th Vette: 1975 Convertible, 4 speed

6th Vette: 1984 Black Coupe

7th Vette: 1974 Brown convertible

8th Vette: 1989 Black coupe

9th Vette: 1998 Silver Coupe

10th Vette: 2008 Atomic Metallic Orange

I owned the 4th and 9th Vettes the longest, both for over seven years. The Red ‘78 was my favorite until I bought my C-6, the first one that I purchased new. I

used to drive it up to Wisconsin where my Dad had moved, and I had a blast driving from I-94 to Janesville. Route 20, then 12, then Rt. M provide an interesting test for Corvettes. There are some nice long straights plus many interesting turns that I usually navigated at twice the posted speed. Ask me about which Vette is my favorite next winter, and I will probably have a different answer because I drive the C-6 more.

My life continues to be an interesting journey with Corvettes. I never planned to do what I did, but for the most part

I kept each Corvette for two or three years and then upgraded to a different one. On trade in, I usually got back as much, if not more, than what I paid for the car. I veered from this approach only twice, once with the ‘78 and then the ‘98. I kept both of these for over seven years and drove them the most. However, I never put over 100,000 miles on any of them.

One highlight of my life with Corvettes was attending the National Rally when the National Corvette Museum opened in Bowling Green. Corvettes converged on Bowling Green from across the country, coming in on eight different routes to participate in the opening. A buddy and I thought that it would be neat to drive in the rally from Tinley Park to Merrillville, Indiana with the Midwest group, so we asked our bosses if we could come in late to work that day.

On the morning of the rally we arrived early at the dealership and were asked to sign a release form to drive on the Indy 500 track. When we questioned whether it would be a parade lap, they said no; it would be just a small group of cars (eight to ten) that were supposed to “keep it under 55.” We immediately called our bosses and ask for a entire day off!

The convoy stopped in Merrillville for gas, a pit stop, and then proceeded down I-65. The Indiana State Police were more than cooperative, allowing the Corvettes to open up to at least at 100 mph down the highway. There were semi-truck drivers blowing their horns and groups of cars on the opposite side of the road who just stopped to watch the fun.

The 150 mile ride, which is usually two-and-a-half hours of boredom, was over in less than two hours. Once we arrived at the track, we indeed got our lap. I personally drove 90 mph looking through the viewer of my old 35mm camera. To this day I wish I had driven past the pit area and took another lap at over 100 mph. Opportunity lost.

Some other interesting facts about owning ten Vettes are that I spent the same amount for the first seven cars – a total of all seven – as I did for the next two as I did for the '08. I was extremely lucky to be able to roll the selling price from one Vette into the purchase of the next and not add a substantial amount of cash.

My luck changed a little with the greater cost of the '89, although it was offset if you take into consideration that for the first seven Vettes I put tires on one, brakes on another, and rebuilt the engine of the '78 when the camshaft went “flat,” which was the largest expenditure. It seems like regular oil changes and maintenance made the Vettes no more expensive to own than any other car in their respective time periods. Imagine. Seven cars and less than \$2k for maintenance.

I had two minor accidents with the Vettes, one in the Orange '75 and another in the Red '78. Then there was one mildly terrifying experience (like any terrifying experience would be MILD) in the Silver '98. It happened when I was traveling south on I-94 around Golf Road. After some heavy showers it was drizzling and all of a sudden the sky opened with another downpour. The next



Vette #9 - a 1998 Silver Coupe

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thing I knew, my right front wheel started to hydroplane. I let up on the throttle a little and the car went into a series of spins – at least four.

The car went from the left lane to the right shoulder and back across the road heading backwards towards the concrete center abutment. I snapped the steering wheel to the left and slammed on the brakes and the car stopped as though I had intended to put it exactly in that spot. You know, like one of those commercials where the car does a 180 into a parking spot. I thought for sure I would be taking the Vette home in a series of bushel baskets. I was very lucky that day and counted my blessings that neither I nor the car was damaged.

Something that has been unexpected is the attention that I'm getting with the Orange C-6. People have always commented about whichever Vette I owned, generally signaling with a “thumbs up” or a “nice car” at stop lights.

Now as I drive down the street and come across a group of young boys and girls, they not only turn to look at my car but they “point” at it. At first it was an uncomfortable feeling, but now I just

point back. I guess to an extent I am blasé, having driven Corvettes for the past 36 years, some of the early ones year-round.

In addition to these experiences, the many I have had in the Vettes were wonderful. I've always enjoyed working on them, changing oil, an occasional brake job, spark plug changes, and plug wire changes; above all keeping them looking good. Now that there is not much to do on the car, I guess I'll just have more time to enjoy it on the road.

What is in the future? Depending on the economy and the markets, I eventually would like to build my last Vette: a '79 with a built LS-1 motor, backed by a Tremec 6-speed trans, and a bullet-proof rear end. It will be a good all-around car for cruise nights as well as some weekend or week-long trips (might even sneak into a drag strip for a run or two).

So who knows? With 10 down, how many to go? It's been 36 years of Vettes and counting. A *very* enjoyable ride. |