

Paul Plotnick

And The Tale of the Rat Engine

Paul Plotnick has always loved cars, especially Corvettes. He took auto shop in high school and remembers building race cars for U.S. 30 with a couple of guys from his class. He bought his Corvette in 1984 – a used '78 that was in bad shape. “The guy I bought it from never changed the oil or the anti-freeze,” says Paul. “There were a couple of holes punched in the front end, the hood was cracked, the tires were bald, and it was out of alignment. The wheels were American Racing mag wheels that were in bad shape. I tried to sell them, but when no one was interested, a scrap yard bought them. I fixed the body holes and changed the radiator because the antifreeze was brown.

“The car is now modified with a GM Crate engine, and the paint is a custom paint – Cadillac white diamond paint. Someone looking at it may think it is a stock car, but it isn't. The seats are leather and cloth, and the interior color is brown, which was a big color in the late 70s. '78 was the first time Corvettes had that bubble-like rear window, which is one of the reasons I bought the car. I still own the same car today. I had no intention of showing it and bought it just to drive.”



Paul's "rat" engine sparkles at Chevy Vette Fest

In the late 1980s and early '90s Paul showed his car on Friday nights at Fluky's, a hot dog stand in Niles, where he met Dan Burden and several other Corvette lovers who became lifelong friends. “One day Dan showed me a trophy he had won, which made me think that I would like to win a trophy too. I

learned a lot from other people when I showed the car. Since then I've won gold or a first place in some 20 shows.

“I always wanted a chrome engine, so after I cleaned up the engine I bought several chrome pieces. About three years ago I started to get a slight oil leak. I was going to either rebuild the engine or put in a new one, so I went out and bought a GM Crate engine that I chromed. I

picked up 105 horsepower by doing that and added dual exhausts without a cross-over. That and the headers added to the horsepower. The car has 80,000 miles on the odometer.”

Paul says he enters cleanliness shows: the cleaner the car, the better the appearance. He started judging for Phil Kranz and later judged for Skip's in Lake County. “You qualify to be a judge by knowing what your car is and looking at other people's cars.

The important thing is to be consistent. If you judge a certain class and take off two points for a defect, then you have to take off two points for the same defect in every other car. It's about being fair and knowing you are dealing with a vehicle that is someone's pride and joy. You are not there to insult the owner, and I've learned that judging actually improves the hobby. If you tell people what is wrong with their car, they will improve it for the next show.”

Paul also judges at Vette Fest, including cars in different categories. “You want to look at the car and see if it is consistent with what the person is trying to present. As a judge I look for cleanliness: the car has to be as clean on the bottom as it is on the top.

“There are spectator shows where people vote for their favorite cars, perhaps because they like the color or maybe they



Paul and his furry mascots at the 2008 Vette Fest, Spring 2008

know the owner. At Vette Fest cars are judged only against themselves. An owner starts with a total of 1,000 points, from which a judge takes points off for defects. In the custom class you win gold if you end up with 950 to 1,000 points.”

Of course, everyone wonders about the furry toy rats Paul shows with his car. “A man by the name of Roth drew Rat Finks – cartoons of cars with big 'rat' engines. That's why you see the rats displayed on my car – I have a rat engine. Children like them, and women always ask about them. Most men understand the association between the rats and the engine. I've heard, 'Well, your engine isn't that big. It's only a mouse.' So the guys understand it.

“To clean a Corvette, I prefer McGuire products, such as their wax, and I use Mother's Polish on my stock wheels. When I get to a show I dust the car with a duster before I spray the final details. You don't want to rub dust and dirt into the paint because both can scratch. In the garage I cover the car with a flannel car cover. You have to be careful because some of those covers may scratch the paint.”

Paul's best advice is to “enjoy your car and drive it.” He knows people who push their car off a trailer at a show, and then push it back on the trailer after the show. “The real fun of having a Corvette is driving it,” he says. “I'm in mine all the time when ever I get a chance.” ●