



Corvette! Chevrolet's plastic automobile had been my burning desire, actually LUST, ever since the very first three hundred hand-built examples had appeared as 1953 models. But Corvette was then simply far beyond the fiscal reach of this then-impooverished college student; and from 1955 as an equally-impooverished Air Force lieutenant on the pinch-penny military pay scales of that draft era.

Finances were better by 1959, but as luck would have it, I would find an affordable USED C1 ("first generation") 'vette on an Orlando car lot just a couple of days before deploying overseas with the first Mace missile squadron. But it was a "heater-delete" car ...an ordering option then popular in Florida, and I would definitely NEED a heater in Germany. There simply wasn't time to get a heater installed and the car to the port to be shipped, so I missed that one.

Corvettes have always been made of plastic in one form or another: my first plastic Corvette was all of about six inches long. I think it came from Revell. It's seen below, peeking out from beside the ice bucket and other booze paraphernalia of my bachelor apartment in Germany. (I must add that, other than my not having a Corvette, life was good!)



That model Corvette was the second plastic model kit I ever built, the first being the Monogram 1/48th T-28A seen on top of the hutch. In those days, plastic models were considered sissy by “real” modelers (like me!) who had started their miniature modeling by carving on a block of wood until the result looked like an airplane. Therefore, I had condescended to build the T-28 only because I had flown the type in USAF pilot training.

But I still wanted a real “sports car” to reach the image I would have liked to have had. In those days “sports cars” were still defined by British nameplates like MG, Triumph, Austin-Healey, and the Holy Grail, Jaguar. But when I arrived in Germany, the British auto unions were all on strike, making affordable left-hand-steering-wheel English sports cars unavailable. But I needed a car NOW, and couldn’t wait. So, I had to settle for a “wanna-be”-sports car, the sheep-in-wolfs-clothes Karmann-Ghia convertible seen below, with its Italian designed (Ghia) body built by a German coachbuilder (Karmann), all sitting on plain vanilla Volkswagen “Beetle” chassis and its little four-banger air cooled engine.

So, I gave Georg Rittersbacher VW g.m.b.h. of Kaiserslautern my two thousand dollar check on an Orlando bank, they gave me the keys, installed my “U.S. Forces in Germany”

license plates, whereupon I flopped the top, and drove off ... but not before taking this picture.



It was a neat little car. But not a real "Sports Car". And certainly not a Corvette!



It was very pretty but underneath still a “Hitlermobile” Volkswagen. The little wanna-be-sports-car served me well and faithfully in Germany, even scrambling easily up the hill in all weathers to the Mace missile launch site where I worked!



Actually, the place only LOOKED like Stalag 13: it was really pretty good duty!)



(Below, my shot of that Grunstadt launch site from the front seat of my T-bird ... the first two alert missiles at left. Our missiles were all very nakedly above ground and in the open back then.





A year or so later in Germany I met the love of my life and married her twice. (Long story.) But I still lusted for a Corvette. When my three-year missile tour ended, my orders back to the 'states were back to flying, this time to Mother Air Force's much unloved and ridiculed aerial dump truck, the C-123. (In a zoomy-zoomy jet Air Force the type had been programmed to be out of the Air Force and in the reserves by Fiscal Year 1963. But at the last minute it had very recently found the mission ... short, austere runway combat logistics ... in a "limited war" (Vietnam) for which it had been designed. It's just that nobody in a Big Bang Air Force dominated by SAC had recognized that before.

So, not long after my bride and I were back to what used to be called the "Z.I." (Zone of the Interior) on April 5th, 1963, I found myself thrashing THIS turkey west across the Pacific.



(Note this was years before the pucker-string-shorteners (J85 booster jet engines) were added...)

Note that while I call it a turkey, I will strongly resent YOU using that same term of endearment on the airplane.

On the deployment the sixteen airplanes of the 777th Troop Carrier Squadron flew and flew and flew: it took us ten days and eighty hours flying time just to get it TO Vietnamsixteen hours with no autopilot between the there-ain't-anything-dry-between-California-and-Hawaii! Today's turbine jockeys might yawn and say, "....so?"; but remember this was the age of BRE's (Big Round Engines) with thousands of parts going up and down and round 'n round, trying to thrash each other into junk. Fortunately, the Charley-Ace-Deuce-Trey had two of the best; Mr. Pratt and Mr. Whitney's magnificent R2800.

Our orders called that squadron deployment a "six month Classified Joint Training Mission". Training. Yeah, right. Very realistic training, with real bullets. At first, we logged training time if shot at and missed, and combat time if shot at and hit. So, who was getting the training?

But I still lusted for a Corvette.

In 1962 Chevrolet had recently mesmerized the auto world (most especially ME) with the new, second-generation, ***I-gotta-have-one***, Corvette "Sting Ray". Two words, then. (Car guys might enjoy reading a contemporary Car and Driver evaluation of that new 1963 Sting Ray here ... <https://www.caranddriver.com/reviews/a15145912/1963-chevrolet-corvette-sting-ray-road-test/>)

But at my now-exalted rank of captain AND having survived a Vietnam tour, I thought that I DESERVED a Corvette!



I had been back from my Vietnam adventure a couple of months when my car-guy older brother back home, knowing my Corvette mania, called to say he'd found a deal for me; a new 1964 Corvette convertible with both soft and detachable hard top, AT A DISCOUNT.

But four thousand bucks sounded like the National Debt to my stingy soul.

But my bride solved my crisis easily, saying, quote; "We've got the money: either buy the damn Corvette now, or shut up about Corvettes FOREVER!"

I sure picked the right woman to marry....

We went home to pick it up on December 9th, 1963. To put that date in perspective, it was two weeks and one horrible weekend after our president was assassinated in Dallas.

The full price out-the-door at the St. Charles, Missouri Chevy dealership, including both the convertible soft and detachable hard tops, was \$4,250.

Which finally brings us to the MODEL!



... which is the real subject of this article!

(you probably thought I'd never get to it...)

Soon after the purchase of the 1:1 scale 'vette, I came across the newly issued AMT kit of the same car in a variety store near Fort Bragg (today "Politically Correct" Fort Liberty). That purchase was at the \$1.49 box-label price. (The kit is now EXTREMELY "collectible": just now when surfing for the box art picture below, I came across an example of that very same but *EMPTY* and battered kit *BOX*, offered on eBay for twenty dollars!)



But I didn't build my Corvette model; the unbuilt kit moved with the stash all over the 'states and even a couple of continents; then beyond military life into retirement with the years stretching to decades.

In a word, I chickened out: knowing that I couldn't do the kit justice. My attempt in 1960 at that first-generation Corvette in the bachelor apartment in Germany had taught me that getting a car model right was entirely different than getting an airplane model right: painting a model car is ENTIRELY different your favorite airplane camo!

So finally, I bit the bullet and asked a CAR modeler friend to build it for me.

That car guru was Larry Huff, a fellow member of my IPMS/Robert L Scott chapter in Georgia. Larry was an electronics engineer whose late start in modeling had come when gifted a model kit as a diversion during a long hospitalization after cancer surgery. Once started, he was "all-in", reading every book he could find and picking the minds of modeling friends. While that first model had been an airplane, he was soon concentrating on cars only, then narrowing it down to mostly NASCAR racers, other race cars, and hot rods. Soon, he was THE "go-to" expert on car models in our chapter, freely sharing with others just how he got those remarkable finishes and other techniques that he had mastered ...and that I had so admired but couldn't do myself.

He won at all levels of model competition. And, he was a really great guy.



Larry pulled out all the stops on my model, with many aftermarket items like the miniature faux “knock-off hub alloy wheels” wheel covers of the real car.



Also, of note many items like the teeny logos and windshield wipers seen in my pictures.



He also “scratched” personalized items replicating my Georgia license plate in back,



and the “Route 66 – the Mother Road” plate in front. (Georgia is a one-plate state.)



Early Corvettes were stars in TV's "Route 66" show of the late 1950's and early 1960's, which featured two young studs without visible means of support driving an always-new 'vette all around America, doing good deeds. At least, that's what I was told. At the time I was overseas, so never saw a single episode!



Who among you remember Buz (Martin Milner) and Tod (George Maharis)?

I have a more solid "US Route 66" connection from my youth: as a kid the famous and iconic highway went through my hometown in Illinois, about three blocks from where I grew up!

There were other NON-aftermarket items that Larry added himself; an example the nearly microscopic studs around the cockpit where my tonneau cover was attached.



Yes, I know, Chevrolet never offered a tonneau cover for their plastic automobile: mine is the only Corvette I've ever seen with one.

My tonneau is seen above covering the right side of the cockpit at a 2010 Corvette club "mall show". (For any curious car guys, the car is a never-restored "survivor", with not only "matching numbers" but ORIGINAL numbers ...on everything.)



I installed the aftermarket tonneau myself. I must add that drilling holes to screw studs into my virginally new Fiberglas car was nerve wracking! But the tonneau added immeasurably to my enjoyment of the car because the top went from being down “sometimes”, to being down nearly all the time. Even in the winter. Eat your heart out, Yankee Car Guys! Larry’s only glitch is evident in this picture: working from memory and not a picture, he didn’t add studs all the way across the rear deck!

Recalled just now from sixty years ago is returning to Pope AFB in the wee hours from a late October, eight hour over-water C-130 navigator training sortie, to find the windshield of my top-down Corvette covered with frost on both the outside AND THE INSIDE. I scraped both, opened the driver-side tonneau, got in, and drove home top-down with the heater going full blast... (Translation: “.... if you’re gonna talk the talk, you gotta walk the walk.”)

A corollary: if you’re on the interstate and get caught top-down in a thunderstorm, drive like hell and don’t slow down....done that too....

When I did things like that, people pointed at me and laughed, but I was having more fun. I’ve always held firm the principle that convertible tops are meant to be flopped: if you want a top over your head all the time, buy a car with a steel roof. And especially, if you

REALLY want to enjoy a convertible in the long term, find a girl friend who isn't worried about her hair being mussed up.

Soon after Larry presented the completed mini-Corvette to me I went the extra mile to display and protect it with the real "Cadillac" of a display case seen below. Featuring a beautiful walnut base and a tight-fitting, mirrored acrylic cover, it protects the model while allowing (via the mirrored back walls of the case) viewing from all sides.



Last year I passed stewardship of my 'vette ... I don't really consider it "selling" the car ... to a long-time (but younger) "Vettehead" friend who can take better care of the classic than this ninety-year old.

My friend Larry passed away in 2013, and last year the love of my life after sixty-one years of marriage and many great adventures passed away as well. So now I'm left with a lot of great memories, some of which I've unloaded on you. It was a great ride.

Fred Horky

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