



The vintage '54 Vette of a Cedar Rapids Corvette Club member sits comfortably in the barnyard of the family farm.



A crowd gathers as one of the show's stellar attractions is maneuvered into position.



Across the street from the showroom, a candle-powered invitation summons the curious from many miles away.

A CORVETTE IN EVERY BARN?

News pays a visit — and a tribute to Corvette aristocracy in Cedar Rapids.

Hard by the banks of an average-sized river sits a fair-sized town directly on the beaten path to nowhere. According to legend it is cut off from the outside world by an impenetrable forest of corn, a midwestern Mohave desert that thwarts the zealous attempts by humanity's hipper half to spread fun and culture among the inhabitants. Ah, yes, to approach Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is to feel your sensory organs winking out one by one and . . .

"Uh, Fred."

"Yeah."

"That farmer we just passed?"

"Oh, yeah, the one with the beautiful daughter. What about him?"

"Oh, nothing. Just wondering

how a guy who sees so much corn could stand driving a '68 Vette painted Safari Yellow."

Clearly, it's wise to avoid preconceived notions about Iowa. In a town like Cedar Rapids they shatter readily. This is a city that points with pride to its "per-capita." Like the highest tons-per-capita production of goods for export, or the highest per-capita standard of living of all U.S. cities. Unofficially, it was rumored that the surrounding farmlands pour forth the finest in per-capita femininity, too. But the most interesting "per-capita" in our view is an obvious abundance of Corvettes for a city of 100,000. That plus an amazing level of interest in Corvette among residents in general.

One cites as proof the overwhelming success of a recent Corvette exhibit held by the Cedar



There were a few times, like dinner hour, when the crowd thinned to a point where you could actually see the cars.



A pretty coed gets a Vette education.

Rapids Corvette Club in the service area of the Club's sponsor, Rapids Chevrolet. Estimates put the one-day-only Saturday crowd at between four and five thousand people. Which might even be conservative, considering the dunes of peanut shells which accumulated periodically between cars.

As might be expected, the majority of visitors were young people, but a goodly number of grandparent types and those in between did make the scene — testimony enough to the stature Corvette enjoys in Cedar Rapids.

Of course, the historical content of the show itself might have had a lot to do with it. Visitors had the chance to pore over, and compare, 31 Vettes dated 1954 to 1968, most in cream condition. One of the real show-stoppers was a white '54 belonging to Lowell Phelps. Very few of the admiring onlookers had to be told how scarce im-

maculate babies like this are becoming. The model run for '54 Vettes was only 3,600, and only 300 in Corvette's first year, 1953. Naturally, a '53 in show condition would have been pretty hard to come by. So Lowell let his car do double duty since virtually no major changes distinguish the two Corvette model years.

Perhaps one of the really remarkable facts about the show was that the Rapids Club had to go outside its membership for only one model year, 1960. They put a call through to the Corvette Club of Iowa in Des Moines and in the true neighborly spirit of the corn belt, 53-year-old Don Hoskins knocked off work and hustled his "sweet '60" 125 miles down the pike in time for the show. Judging by the ever-present knot of admirers hanging around Don's impeccably polished machine, its absence would have been sorely felt.

That the exhibit was so remarkably well received seems only natural for a Corvette Club as progressive as this one. Side attractions like "The Little Theater" in the back of the dealership, which showed continuous racing and rally films, helped assure the show of success. From start to finish, everything came off precisely according to plan.

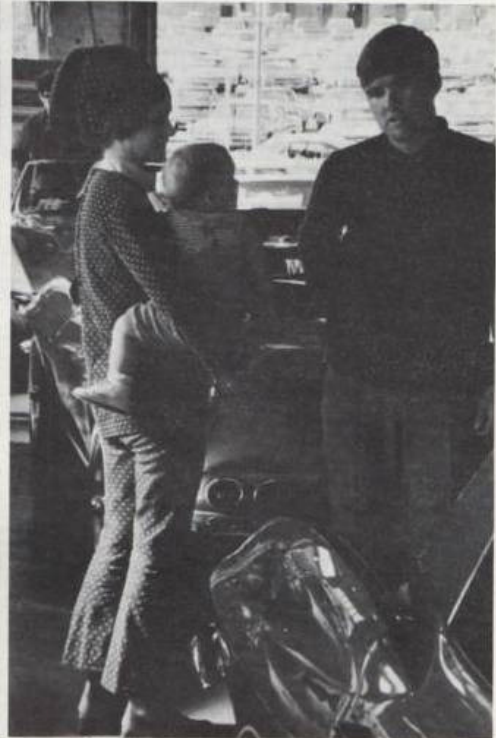
But no one was prepared for the ensuing mob of spectators. Undoubtedly, part of the cause for such a favorable response can be attributed to a program of good public relations. Each year the club holds an Easter egg hunt for underprivileged children. And then there's a club safety record practically without parallel; no major accident by any member since the club was formed . . . and only one speeding violation in the last year. The record is probably proportionately better than that of any



The Little Theater, seating capacity 25, drew standing room only crowds as the afternoon wore on into evening.



As the crowd temporarily dissipates, dealer Bill Fletcher seizes both the moment and the broom to restore order to his shell-littered service entrance.



Two of this fellow's more recent acquisitions look to him plaintively as he contemplates a third.

group of drivers anywhere in the country, and has surely contributed to furthering the Corvette driver image around town as well.

Still, you don't draw a huge crowd just for being a nice guy and obeying traffic laws. So enter Chevy dealer Bill Fletcher, the club's sponsor and one of the chief factors behind Corvette popularity in Cedar Rapids. For one thing, Bill was instrumental in making the show a sure hit. He wrote (and paid for) radio and newspaper publicity that plugged the show far in advance of the opening, then threw a bash for club members and wives right after it closed. He also had a big searchlight going at night. And believe it or not, he gave his salesmen the afternoon off, just as the crowd hit its peak.

A liberal-thinking graduate of Harvard Business School, Bill is as much a part of the club as any of its members. His genuine interest in

club activities and his donation of dealership facilities have provided an exceptional atmosphere, one conducive to club progress and solidarity. Naturally, he sells more Corvettes. But judging by the amount of personal time spent with the group, Bill's reward seems to be nothing more than the pure pleasure of involvement. Could be that his spirit and generosity are an underlying cause for the club's phenomenal growth rate—from six cars to 43 in just five years.

But don't conclude that the Cedar Rapids Corvette Club's list of "good things going" ends with Mr. Fletcher. Among the club's assets are roughly a dozen performance events yearly that members can plan for far in advance. Things like numerous rallies and gymkhanas in addition to trips to Elkhart Lake and the Indy 500. Speaking of gymkhanas, the club has its own private course owned by an

ex-stock car driver turned farmer (whose only charge to the group is the chance to compete whenever events are held). Vice president "Frenchy" Massure swears by the course; says there's nothing like a track hewn out of rich solid earth. But then, you might expect an overly partial statement like that, especially from a guy who once loved frozen-lake gymkhanas . . . until he found a hole in the ice where his Vette used to be.

Some people think geography makes a place "happen." With others, it's the super-abundance of neon and nightclubs. But to hard-working guys in the CRCC like Jim Heeren and Lowell Phelps, who put this Corvette show together purely out of pride, fun is where you make it happen. If it's anything to do with Corvettes and Cedar Rapids, you can bet it'll happen frequently.