

# **CORVAIR HOUSTON**

## **HISTORY and INFORMATION BOOKLET 2014**



# **CORVAIR HOUSTON**

Corvair Houston was organized in 1974 and incorporated in 1983. As a chapter of the national Corvair Society of America (CORSA) it is dedicated to preserving the Corvair for future generations. The Club conducts regular monthly meetings and also sponsors or participates in other activities through the year; local and national car shows, picnics and barbecues, races and museum events, and road trips to locations in and around Texas.

We offer information about Corvair parts, restoration, maintenance and repairs. Our meetings are normally held on a Saturday and are always preceded by an informal gathering in the parking lot. After the meeting a group often heads for a local eatery for sandwiches and conversation.

Annual dues are \$25 per family, \$20 if you are a member of CORSA. A monthly newsletter publishes information about recent and upcoming events, cars and parts for sale, and Corvair related news. Note that Corvair ownership is not required for membership to Corvair Houston – merely an appreciation for a unique footnote to automotive history.



# PAST PRESIDENTS

X = 2<sup>nd</sup> time

<b>1974</b> John Noser	<b>1975</b> Gene Marshall
<b>1976</b> Pete Nelson	<b>1977</b> Bob Brenner
<b>1978</b> Travis Jackson	<b>1979</b> Travis Jackson
<b>1980</b> Bob Blissard	<b>1981</b> Charlie Craig
<b>1982</b> John Noser- <b>X</b>	<b>1983</b> Larry Keast
<b>1984</b> Peyton Bay	<b>1985</b> T J Carlton
<b>1986</b> Tom Clarke	<b>1987</b> Bill Clarke
<b>1988</b> Bob Brenner	<b>1989</b> Charlie Craig- <b>X</b>
<b>1990</b> Steve Sartor	<b>1991</b> Bill Clarke- <b>X</b>
<b>1992</b> Paul Tuch	<b>1993</b> Bobby Vahldiek
<b>1994</b> Dick Centar	<b>1995</b> Greg Riley
<b>1996</b> Steve Sartor- <b>X</b>	<b>1997</b> Greg Wrobleske
<b>1998</b> Roger Garrett	<b>1999</b> Greg Riley- <b>X</b>
<b>2000</b> Glenn Commons	<b>2001</b> Dennis Svetlik
<b>2002</b> Todd Hasfjord	<b>2003</b> John Spenn
<b>2004</b> Gerald Readore	<b>2005</b> David Brown
<b>2006</b> Mike Tidwell	<b>2007</b> Matt Feehery
<b>2008</b> Mark Clarke	<b>2009</b> Jim Watkins
<b>2010</b> Tony Pomponio	<b>2011</b> Ricki Jannise
<b>2012</b> Mike Tidwell- <b>X</b>	<b>2013</b> Greg Wrobleske- <b>X</b>



# **CORVAIR HOUSTON**

## **THEN AND NOW . . . . .**

In the context of the times, 1974 saw many Corvairs on the streets, for sale on car lots all over the area, and parts that could be bought at your local Chevrolet dealer.

So it was not an unusual effort to organize a group of Corvair enthusiasts. The result was a wonderful mixed bag of personalities from all lifestyles, careers, locations, etc. All brought their own enthusiasm in preserving, driving, racing, sharing stories, and noting the differences in their own cars.

In early 1975 the first Corvair newsletter, The Spyder, was offered. It was clearly a class offering and became the handout and introduction to 100's of future members.

There is no doubt; the stage was set for a club that had the name of a car in its title, and a soul in its membership. Every effort included members, their spouses and children. Meetings were a joyful laugh-filled event that certainly included Corvairs, but first and foremost valued it members.

Corvair Houston had a very high profile in the local area, turning out for car shows, charity events, parades, racing events and just driving



our Corvairs. It was a joyful time, filled with enthusiasm for new found friends, and the purpose of enjoying our unique automobiles.

It is interesting to note that no one was sensing that our cars would ever be relegated to antique status.

How could we know that time, technology, and a quarter of a century would have us looking back to those days of Corvairs in every driveway, parts at every dealership and, for us in Texas, R-12 becoming illegal?

So here we are, after 40 years of Corvairing, and all of today's members are reaping the rewards of the solid beginnings.

Look around at Corvair Houston meetings. You'll see the same enthusiasm, friendly faces, helpful ideas, and great humor.

Well, I'll be damned, we haven't changed...

**Guy Bobkoff**  
**Corvair Houston Historian**  
(See current officers, last page)



# **CORVAIR REPAIR & PARTS**

## **LOCAL**

Demos Automotive 713 526 3781  
Call for Mike Tidwell

Ed Murphy (used parts) 281 251 8553

## **NATIONAL**

Clark's Corvair Parts, Inc. 413 625 9776  
[www.corvair.com](http://www.corvair.com) or 888 267 8247

Corvair Underground, Inc. 503 434 1648  
[www.corvairunderground.com](http://www.corvairunderground.com) or 888 825 8247

Corvair Ranch 717 624 2805  
[www.corvairranch.com](http://www.corvairranch.com)

The Vair Shop 815 469 2936  
[www.vairshop.com](http://www.vairshop.com)





The Corvair Society of America (CORSA) is a worldwide organization with 3,848 members and 125 chapters. Founded in 1969, it is a large and devoted group of automobile enthusiasts; one of the best single marquee clubs in the world. CORSA, a non-profit organization, was incorporated to satisfy the common needs of individuals interested in the preservation, restoration, and operation of the Corvair. CORSA's long range goal is to promote reproduction of parts and render technical assistance to increase your enjoyment of the Corvair, and to further the general public's appreciation of the car.

CORSA is governed by a member elected Board of Directors with selected committees in charge of such varied activities as Parts and Repairs, CORSA chapters, Concours, Competition, Museum, and a host of other activities. A full-time business office and staff serves as a clearinghouse for worldwide CORSA and Corvair information.

The Corvair Preservation Foundation (CPF) is a non-profit charitable foundation that is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of the Corvair. The Foundation operates the Corvair Museum as well as archives and exhibits.



CORSA publishes one of the highest quality magazines of any single marquee automobile club. The monthly CORSA Communiqué is of the highest quality and professionally edited.

For more information or to join **CORSA:**

## **Corvair Society of America**

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# EDWARD N. COLE

Corvair history must begin with Ed Cole. Born in a small town in western Michigan in 1909 to a family of modest means, there was no reason to believe this man would develop into the automotive innovator that he was. After completing high school, he attended the General Motors Institute School of Engineering. He experienced a long and successful career at GM: General Manager of the Cleveland tank plant, Chief Engineer of the Chevrolet Division, General Manager in 1956 and then President of General Motors in 1967. Ed Cole was a top ranked engineer, innovator, leader, iconoclast - - and father of the Corvair.

Exactly when the Corvair seed germinated in his mind may never be known, yet we do know that work began on the car sometime in May of 1952, when he became Chief Engineer at Chevrolet. After countless engine designs and modifications, a test unit was ready. In the early part of 1956, a Corvair drive-train was fitted into a Porsche and tested with some high speed runs. Ed Cole did the testing and at the conclusion exclaimed, "This is it!"



But the job was by no means finished. Problems came from every direction. First, there was the aluminum needed for the engine. Then there were tires that had to be designed for a rear-engine automobile with a 108 inch wheelbase. Suspension, body design, interior design, cost analysis, and a selling job to convince top General Motors officials that a flat six air-cooled, aluminum block, rear-engine car with unit body construction was needed and, if approved, a plant to build such a car.

After the project received GM President Harlow Curtice's approval, it then had to go before the Engineering Policy Committee, and finally the GM Board of Directors in early 1958. In July of that year, GM began to convert and retool the Willow Run Plant in Michigan to build the Corvair, with backup assembly in Oakland and St Louis. It was just in time to do battle with the European minis in and for the American economy car market.

## **THE ENGINE**

The original engine design was to include two castings, but aluminum technology to date had not progressed far enough. So the



engine had to be redesigned for dependability, ease of repair, and reliable air cooling – all to be accomplished inexpensively. These requirements did not parallel each other and engine costs climbed beyond expectations. In its final form, the basic engine consisted of ten castings instead of the original two. With the labor and material involved, the engine costs multiplied five times higher than was anticipated. But there was no turning back for Ed Cole. He had the engine he wanted and he knew it would work.

## **THE “EARLIES”**

On October 2, 1959 the first Corvairs were introduced in dealer showrooms. The 500 Model was priced at \$2,038. Dealers would barely be able to pay the light bill with their profits from a sale. The Chevrolet Division must have found a bargain in gray paint and matching material for the seat - it was the only color available. The 700 was only slightly better with a choice of gray, blue or green cloth covered seats, matching headliner and door panels, and color keyed paint on the doors and dash. Despite all of



its exciting new engineering, the car appeared dull and austere, and there was little to influence a new car buyer's mind.

The Monza 900 coupe came to the rescue in May of 1960. The engine was refined with a new camshaft which added 15 hp, and a four-speed gearbox was now available. But what really sold the car and started a new trend towards an American type sporty car were the interior features; bucket seats up front, fold down rear seat in back, full carpeting, aluminum and chrome trim, deluxe steering wheel, special door and window handles, and glove compartment lamps! The exterior was equally pleasing, with stainless steel and bright aluminum trim in just the right places, and full wheel covers! Near the end of the 1960 production year, Motor Trend chose the Corvair as their Car of the Year!

## **THE "LATES"**

General Motors had its new car spies hard at work. They knew of Ford's plan to introduce the Mustang and they knew they would have to compete. True, they had their Camaro



with a big block V-8 on the drawing board. But too much had already been spent on the second series Corvair, with its all new suspension and body styling, to abandon it now. And it was Ed Cole's brainchild. They had to go with it. Besides, it out-handled most of the European cars. It was compared with, and bettered GM's own Corvette by .01 G. Even though all the automotive writers praised it highly, sales began slowly.

## THE MUSTANG

Precisely timed, it was released a full five months before the newly styled Corvair. Its price was \$2,368, far below the 1964 Corvair Spyder, its closest competition. Mustang's advertising campaign, the largest ever to launch a new car, further buried the Corvair. Still another blow was dealt when the Mustang was chosen as the Indy 500 Pace Car. The "muscle-car" image was born, and the Corvair engine had no room to expand. The expensive engine had already been modified extensively and a larger engine would upset the weight balance, the refined suspension, and handling features. And of



course there was no money or time available for research and development.

## **THE NADER**

Yet another challenge arose when a young lawyer named Ralph Nader wrote an article for a magazine, and later, in November 1965, a book "Unsafe at Any Speed". It stated that the early model Corvairs (1960-1963) handled poorly and were dangerous to drive. Although the book stated that GM highly improved the later series, and though other makes of cars were cited too, the media highlighted the Corvair, and the general public was convinced that all Corvairs were unsafe.

## **'TIL 1969 DO US PART**

Even before Nader burst onto the scene, GM had decided (in April, 1965) to abandon the Corvair in favor of Camaros and Chevelles and Novas. The orders from the top were: discontinue development and continue to meet safety and pollution requirements only.



So why was Corvair production permitted to continue until May 14, 1969? Possibly because it was Ed Cole's pet project, or possibly just to amortize the tooling, or perhaps because of the brawl between Nader and GM.

## **POSTSCRIPT**

So from what or whom did the Corvair name derive? Most company personnel say the CORV came from the Corvette and the Air from the Bel-Air.

And what was the final Corvair tally? During the Corvair decade 1,786,243 vehicles came off of US assembly lines (plus 48,927 in Canada) in various shapes and forms: coupes, sedans, convertibles, station wagons, trucks and vans.

The least produced model in any given year was the 1962 Loadside. There were but 369 of them. The most produced model in any one year was the 1962 Monza coupe – 151,738. There were a grand total of 1,386,792 earlies, and 399,451 late models.



Now we know why the early advocates always get their way!

The Corvair was a brave experiment, and a pivotal one. Though the Department of Transportation in 1972 had determined that the Corvair was as safe as or safer than other auto to which it was compared, it was the car that provided the catalyst for government regulation of the auto industry.

The Corvair was also a car ahead of its time . . . appreciated in its day by those with the foresight to buy it new; appreciated today by those who collect and restore them.



# Current Officers – 2014

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## Current Address

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# NOTES:





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