



Winter's Shortest Month



February already! I'm wondering if this is all we are going to have for a winter this year. The boys have been wanting snow to go sliding and such, but it's been lacking so far.

I'm hoping that our CORSA members read my letter in the latest *Communique* - along with pictures of some of us on the inside front cover. It was nice to finally receive some recognition for the club.

I am planning to do a few little things to my Corsa this month. For one I need to change out my accelerator pumps. The driver's side carb squirts fuel only half the time when the accelerator is hit. I'm also hoping to get my new convertible top on before the convention. I've

had it for about 6 years now, but who is in a hurry?

I hope all are doing well. If you ever have any questions or ideas, please do not hesitate to ask me or anyone else on the leadership team.

And when technical questions arise getting ready for the 2012 Convention, there are quite a few of us Dirigo members who would be more than happy to lend a helping hand.

Ronnie Tinkham, President
Gorham, ME

Car Clubs Make Things Happen

When Sgt. Adam Troxel of Georgia found himself called up to active duty in 2011 he had to set aside the refurbishment plans for his 1980 Corvette. While he served overseas, Classic Corvette Club [Marietta, GA] members responded to his wife Holly's request and took over his Corvette project. She had been asked only to "get the brakes done" but club members had other ideas of how to spend Sgt. Troxel's re-enlistment bonus.



Once the word went out many parts, supplies and services were either donated or heavily discounted. "I have to applaud the Corvette community in general for stepping up and doing what needed to be done and helping us make this happen," one club member said. "I have always said that the car brings us together, but the people that you meet in the Corvette hobby are just super people. This project proved that beyond the shadow of a doubt. I am personally proud to be part of that community. It just renewed my faith in humankind. It was just a wonderful project. I don't think anybody who had any sort of contact with it would not be extremely happy."

Needless to say, the overwhelmed Troxel was stunned at the first sight of his completed Corvette.



As described in a Hemmings blogpost, "beyond doing a great service for a deserving soldier, the project had its benefits to the club as well, despite the hard work and long hours they put in. 'We did it because we wanted to,' volunteer Calvin Cruce said. 'It was a labor of love. I will say that the entire Corvette community that we came in contact with stepped up and just did things above and beyond. Without a doubt, it was a lot of fun for us because we bonded together as a club as we did it. It was well worth all the man hours that we put into it just to see Adam's face when he first saw the car. I can think of probably a dozen people who spent a lot of long hours working on the car. Some of them had mechanical ability, but had never restored a Corvette before, so it was a learning

process for them. It was a lot of fun. We enjoyed it. It was hard work. It was frustrating sometimes. But the end game was worth every minute of it, every skinned knuckle, every frustrating thing that we ran into.' "

CORSA 2012 Convention Update



In the December issue of *DiriGO* we profiled new member Kevin Gaudette, of Middleboro and Vineyard Haven, MA, and welcomed him and his Lakewood to our club.

From the [2012 CORSA Convention blog](#) we learn that Kevin is a core part of the group arranging the various tours that will take place during the convention, tours that as of this writing are planned to include the Mohegan Sun Casino, historic Boston and the mansions of Newport. If you're interested in volunteering at the convention, the Northeast Corvair Council [NECC], a coalition of Corvair clubs which serves as the host for the Sturbridge event, would enjoy hearing from you. Contact either:

- Brian O'Neill [bmoneill@juno.com]
- Ray Bombardier [bomma@comcast.net]

Tales of Conventions Past

[Jim and Marilyn Westervelt, Tenant's Harbor, have a long shared history and leadership positions with CORSA conventions. They share their recollections below –ed.]



Motors Technical Center in Warren. Other events included a banquet that night and a buffet on Sunday evening with the awards presentation. Sunday also featured a swap shop and flea market of more than just auto-related items.

We had met Maine's Ron and Marion Moller, as well as Vermont's Bill and Kathy Cotrofeld [Cotrofeld Automotive] at a prior event.



When Kathy and Bill decided to host an event in Vermont that October we drove east and enjoyed meeting so many other Corvair enthusiasts. Later the Vermont group, now called VICE (Vermont Independent Corvair Enthusiasts), became a CORSA chapter.

For many years Marilyn and I, as well as our son Bradley were members of the Detroit Area Corvair Club. I found myself elected president of the club; during one period Marilyn served as secretary and Brad as treasurer.

In August of 1979 the DACC hosted the International CORSA Convention in Southfield, Michigan. As Marilyn and I had also joined the Friends of Corvair of Ohio, we met that group convoying up from Ohio at the border in Monroe, MI and led them to Southfield. Then we took on our duties at the registration table.

As we had previously planned road rallies for both clubs, we organized the convention rally for Friday afternoon. On Saturday morning Corvairs paraded from Southfield to the General



As members we volunteered to lay out the Road Rally for the 1997 Lake Placid CORSA Convention. Living in Michigan meant several long drives to Lake Placid to do the planning; each time we continued on to Maine. In May 1996 we found our home here in Tenant's Harbor, thus adding additional tasks to our west-east drives to finalize plans for the rally.

In June, 1997, the Lake Placid event began with a worker orientation meeting on Monday

morning. The convention formally opened on Wednesday with a tour of the Adirondack Museum, followed by an opening ceremony and a parade. Thursday the concours took place, along with a pot luck luncheon.

Friday morning was a meeting of the road rally workers, followed by a meeting of the participants, with the actual rally beginning at 12:30. We had been to the 1993 CORSA convention out in California, flying out, renting a car, then participating in that road rally. For that rally we were given photos and then were to attempt to locate the pictured places during the rally.

We took this idea and reversed it for the one in Lake Placid. In laying out this rally we found various scenic places on the route which we thought were unique, then asked the participants to find the places and photograph them. Marilyn made arrangements with a K-Mart in Rochester, Michigan to purchase one hundred single-use Kodak cameras at a very good price. We then gave each participating vehicle one of the cameras. On one of the many trips to plan this event, we found a photo shop in town which gave us a good deal on developing the photos from each camera. That evening after we received the packets of photos, Clark and Joanne Hartzel, and Marilyn and I, stayed up until the early hours of the morning sorting and tallying the entries.

On Saturday evening the banquet was held along with the awards ceremony. The photo packets were given to the participants as a memento of the road rally. Saturday morning there was a special breakfast held at the host hotel for the V.I.C.E. members.

During all this planning for the Lake Placid Convention, we were also in the midst of selling our home in Rochester Hills, Michigan. Marilyn handled all the packing of our household goods, plus a couple of yard sales. We then moved into our home in Tenants Harbor in August of 1997.

Two of our Corvairs were moved on the moving van, but one was left in Ohio and we then returned later and trailered it home. Even though we could no longer participate in the Friends of Corvair group we were made life members when we moved to Maine.

“Crazy George’s” Corvair of the Month Entry



George Hertlein, Cornville, ME, who tells everyone he’s “Crazy George,” entered his ’65 140 hp Coupe in the **Corvair Forum’s** “Corvair of the Month” competition for January 2012. He found his customized car in Las Vegas, where the previous owner had converted the engine from a 110 to a 140. George estimates the custom engine, courtesy of the ministrations of Rick Salisbury, now puts out 175 hp!



Dirigo President Ron Tinkham sent out an email urging members to visit the Forum and consider a vote for George’s coupe. With its lowered suspension, mag wheels, subtle striping and neat interior, it’s a real head turner.



We look forward to seeing George's car at a future event.

Toys for Boys

For many enthusiasts in Maine winter weather quarantines their Corvairs into a garage. One way to spend quality time with your Corvair involves the world of model cars.



An on line search [excluding EBay] uncovered a treat for LM fans – a sleek 1969 Monza Convertible made by the Yat Ming Company. The cars come in either black or frost green. At \$29.95 plus shipping, the price seems reasonable. You can find vendors of these models through Clark's and Amazon.

2102 Econorun

If your travel plans will take you to the West Coast this May, Dirigo member and former Mainer Mike Klaus e-mailed us with a fun notice:

"The 39th annual Northwest Corvair Econorun will be on May 4, 5 & 6 in La Conner, WA. It looks like a beautiful spot, and North Cascades Corvair Club has great plans for an amazing Econorun drive along the Puget Sound, into the gorgeous Skagit Valley, and along the wondrous Cascade Mountains. This will be the best collection of Corvairs west of Sturbridge this year!"

According to CORSA Oregon La Conner is about 60 miles north of Seattle WA or a 4-hour drive from Portland, OR.

Mike left Maine with his stunning cordovan brown EM convertible for Washington state but retained his membership in Dirigo Corvairs and sent Ron Tinkham a congratulatory note when the club received mention in the *CORSA Communique*.



I certainly remember Mike's bravery in traveling with me in my '66 Monza to the 2007 Bay State event at Clark's Corvair, opting to leave his mint convertible at home.

Should you find yourself on the Left Coast this May, we're sure Mike will give you a royal

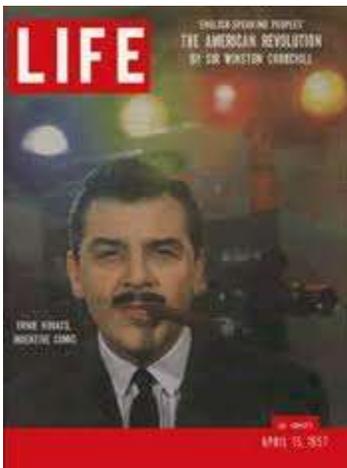
welcome. For more information check out the North Cascades Corvairs website <http://northcascadescorvairs.org>

A Day That Will Live in Infamy

Fifty years ago this past January 13, Ernie Kovacs, a comedian whose antics and wit influenced future comics/hosts such as Johnny Carson and David Letterman, died after crashing his Corvair into a telephone pole in Los Angeles.



Back when you could smoke with impunity on television, Kovacs mirrored Groucho Marx by appearing with a cigar on his network show.



Since the police investigating his accident found an unlit cigar, they speculated that he might

have been searching out the car's lighter when that car hit the pole on a rainy night.

At the time Kovacs' fame meant his death at age 42 warranted special coverage.



Let's all remember this event when we feel we must glance at our cellphone's messages while driving our Corvairs.

Dog Bites Man

It's not really headline news because all enthusiasts know that Jay Leno loves Corvairs.



Still, when the *New York Times* asked celebrities to cite their three favorite Chevrolets during

their centennial, Leno selected his 1966 Corsa. To quote Leno from the *Times*, "People might think this a rather odd choice, too. But it was a real revolutionary car, especially for its time. Rear-engined, air-cooled. I have a '66, and I just love it."

Leno also found a '61 Rampside and spent over \$50,000 restoring it for his collection.



[I could tally up the monies spent of my last six cars and not come close to \$50,000 –ed.]

The Political Silly Season

It seems that 2012 will remain a noisy, somewhat offensive year as the state primaries for the 2012 presidential election forge ahead. Blissfully the bickering candidates rarely come to Maine.

We're relieved to note that Ralph Nader has – so far – set aside his quadrennial quest for the presidency.



Through *Autoweek* we're reminded that in 2004 Nader's supporters worked hard to get him onto the ballots of every state. In Oregon his team apparently went overboard by forging signatures, some hundreds of them. One happened to be that of Robert Anderson, Gresham, OR, whose company produced Corvair-8 parts. The *Willamette Times* quoted a fuming Anderson saying "it is ridiculous to think I would sign a petition to help Ralph Nader do anything, let alone run for president."

John Fitch's Corvairs



When my father left the Merchant Marine and came ashore he found work that enabled him to bring home dozens of automotive enthusiast magazines – which I promptly devoured while ignoring my homework.

Whereas British automotive magazines, sent courtesy of my uncles and aunts in England, ignored American racers, the American magazines covered the efforts of post-war drivers such as Briggs Cunningham and John Fitch. During the 1950's few Americans could secure drives in Formula One events; only these two men ever took the checkered flag. Their efforts made it possible for Phil Hill, Dan Gurney and Mario Andretti to enter the F1 ranks.

Fitch's greatest racing successes came in road events such as LeMans and Sebring. During these years Ed Cole made him the head of the Corvette racing teams. His interest in "road racing" led him to engineering Corvairs, the most European of contemporary cars, to get the most from them.



He set up shop near Lime Rock, the Connecticut race track he ran, and made the early model Corvair the car it should have been from the outset. Whereas the California enthusiast shops focused on extracting more horsepower from the 140 cubic inch engine, Fitch looked to tame the sudden effects of oversteer, add then-rare radial tires, smooth out the shift linkage, quicken the steering, and improve the throttle linkage. Then he worked on the engine breathing and carburation [four carbs!] and gussied up the cheesy interior.

You could buy the parts through mail order from his Falls Village, CT company or buy the car fully equipped through selected Chevrolet dealers. Either way you had an immensely entertaining car to drive – all built upon Corvair's drivetrain, suspension engineering and taut unibody construction.

For the 1964 model line Chevrolet incorporate several of Fitch's fixes into the last year of the EM. Fitch realized the LM's changes meant he could focus on the car's appearance and fitments. At the same time he turned his thinking to an all new car – one that could offer a sports car alternative to the Corvette.

In 2002 Kit Foster of *Autoweek* wrote a fine summation of John Fitch's celebrated life as a specialty car builder.



"Fitch had been enamored with sports cars since witnessing his first race at Britain's Brooklands track in 1939. He bought an MGTC after World War II, then opened a dealership and went racing. While managing the Lime Rock track in the 1950s he instituted the 'Little Le Mans' series, a competition for small-displacement stock sedans."

"Transition to Fitch's car building; when Chevrolet's Corvair appeared in 1959, Fitch reworked its suspension, brakes and steering, adding radial tires and a four-carburetor setup to develop the Sprint conversion package. John Fitch & Co. set up shop near Lime Rock; later the company would supply kits for installation by selected Chevrolet dealers."

"With the success of Little Le Mans, Fitch considered emulating one-design sailboat

racing for a series in which identical cars would focus solely on driving skills. He envisioned a “Super Sprint” series, with special chassis, tuned Corvair mechanicals and a fiberglass body. He enlisted a friend, noted illustrator Coby Whitmore, to help with body design. The timing, however, wasn’t right. SCCA had just adopted its Formula Vee rules, neatly satisfying the one-design market.”



“From the demise of the Super Sprint concept the Phoenix was born. For some time Fitch had wanted to build his own *gran turismo* automobile based on American parts. ‘It should be possible to build a car that can be serviced by dealers of American cars nationwide,’ he said. The goal was to make Phoenix such a car. Fitch and Whitmore adapted the Super Sprint design to the Corvair chassis. Fitch contracted with Frank Reisner’s *Costruzione Automobili Intermeccanica* in Turin for steel bodies, to be shipped to Connecticut for drivetrain and suspension installation. Intermeccanica craftsmen set to work on the prototype, cannibalizing a ’65 Corvair and building the new body.”

“The Phoenix recipe was drawn from several trusted, Sprint-proven components: a 170-hp Corvair engine upgraded with four Weber 36DCLD carbs, Girling front disc brakes and all

its chassis modifications. Handling calibrations resulted in rear tires that were larger than the fronts. The twin “blisters” protruding from the car’s hood are not a throwback to the dual side-mounts of the 1930s; under each sits a spare tire.”

Creature comforts were part of the Phoenix package: Leather bucket seats had a “breathing” capability, force-fed with cooling fans. The driver’s seat was tailored to the owner in height and angle, and the rear window retracted electrically.”

“Select Chevy dealers were tapped to sell the Phoenix. But then Fitch decided to enlist Abercrombie & Fitch, the New York sporting goods store (no relation to John himself), to display his prototype and take orders. The plan called for an unveiling in A&F’s store window [Madison Ave at 45th St.] on the Fourth of July 1966. They almost made it—the car arrived on the seventh, after an Alitalia airlift.”

[On July 8, 1966, the New York Times ran a full page story headlined “Luxury Car of Tomorrow is Unveiled Here” but Fitch insisted it was a genuine sports car.]

:The press loved the Phoenix. *Car and Driver’s* David E. Davis found it “absolutely above reproach... the acceleration and handling are right up there with the best European GT cars.” It’s still above reproach. Controls and indicators are where the driver wants them and the car’s road manners are impeccable.”

“Some 100 customers plunked down deposits for the \$8,700 Phoenix. ‘We were going to build 500,’ said Fitch, ‘and see how the wind blew.’ It didn’t blow much good Fitch’s way: On Sept. 9, 1966, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law

the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act, which created regulations and standards for automobiles. ‘We didn’t enter into the Phoenix project lightly,’ Fitch explains. ‘We designed in the safety provisions we felt were important: a crush zone, an integral roll bar and bumper and headlight heights all to SAE standards. But we didn’t know what regulations we would have to meet.’”

“Years later rules were worked out for small manufacturers, but Fitch couldn’t wait and neither could his customers. He returned all the deposits and moved on.”

[Paula Reisner worked directly with her husband Frank to create their Turin-based company and has co-written a book, *Intermeccanica: The Story of the Prancing Bull*, which has an interesting chapter on the Phoenix effort. She notes that Fitch notified them in 1967 that Chevrolet would stop production of Corvair components, making further Phoenix production unfeasible. British manufacturers like Lotus, TVR, Gordon-Keeble, Reliant, among others, would also confront similar problems when Ford, BMC or British Leyland would halt production of needed engine or drivetrains.]

Today, John Fitch lives within driving distance of the 2012 Convention. We’re certain that depending on his health, every effort will be made to help Fitch participate in this convention.

Happy Valentine’s Day!



As an enthusiast I can think of nothing more romantic for you and your loved one than this pin (perhaps that explains why I’m still single!).

The pin, actually part of a lame marketing campaign to counteract the backwash from *Unsafe At Any Speed*, would only confirm what your significant knows already – that you love your Corvair more than your S.O.

It’s snowing on the island as I write this, but given our mild winter so far, perhaps the roads will be clear and you can treat your loved one to a ride in your other loved one – your Corvair!

Got Ideas?

It’s 2012 and Dirigo Corvairs plans to continue its entertaining activities for Corvair enthusiasts of all stripes.

Maine has 22,783 miles of road, over which only 380 are interstate highway – rarely has a state’s roads been better laid out with a Corvair in mind! Why not invite members to visit your region of the state for one of our events?

If you have an idea for an event, a gathering, a drive, a new locale, a rally, a tech session, a charitable effort – get in touch with any

member of the Leadership Team and share your thoughts.

If you're a newer member or prospective member, visit our website, www.dirigocorvairs.org, to download free copies of this newsletter and keep up with club announcements. Members, if you know of someone with an interest in the Corvair, why not forward a copy of DiriGO to them and invite them to join you at an upcoming gathering?

For now our Leadership Team remains:

- Ron Tinkham, Gorham – President
- Ron Moller, Cape Neddick – Vice President
- Ken Holm, Whitefield – Treasurer
- Kathryn Billington, Norridgewock – Secretary
- Jeff Aronson, Vinalhaven – Editor/Webmaster

According to our bylaws the annual meeting, which will include election of officers, will take place next April.

Dirigo Corvairs is the newest chapter of CORSA; for more information see www.corvair.org.

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