

REPORT NO. 3 IREC INTERNATIONAL REGISTRY OF EARLY CORVETTES

THE CORVETTE TRIANGLE. . . . The production figures for the early Corvettes, quoted in IREC Report No. 2, have produced an unresolved conflict of information among three respected authorities on the subject. According to data published by the noted Chevrolet historian and auto writer Karl Ludvigsen, the Calendar Year production of the 1953 Corvette was 314 and the Model Year production was 300. If the commonly accepted figure of 300 is valid for the production of the 1953 Corvette, then a logical assumption would be that the additional 14 cars appearing in the 1953 *Calendar Year* production figures would include the first fourteen of the 1954 cars, produced at Flint prior to the closing down of the original Corvette assembly line and its move to its new permanent quarters in St. Louis. This assumption was recently refuted by Joe Pike, Assistant Merchandising Manager for Chevrolet and long-time Editor of *Corvette News*—certainly sterling credentials to qualify as a Corvette authority.

Mr. Pike's letter states, in part: ". . . the 1953 production run was only 300 Corvettes, as you know, and they were all built in Flint. Therefore, the end serial number was E53F001300, indicating production at St. Louis not Flint." This causes the curious to ask what, then, happened to those 14 cars cited in the Calendar Year figures of Mr. Ludvigsen? We can add that nowhere in all of the materials which have been generated by IREC and its research effort over the past few years, has any car turned up nor has any owner claimed to have a serial number later than E53F001300, lending credence to the validity of the 300 Model Year production figure.

Further clouding the issue is this comment quoted from the 1954 edition of Ward's *Automotive Yearbook*, a reliable industry source of information: "Hand lay-up has the advantage of low-cost tooling when only a few pieces are to be made, as for last year's Corvette production of 315 units." This comment seems to agree with Karl Ludvigsen's understanding, except as to the precise number made. Ward's 1953 *Calendar Year* production is seconded by a 1954 issue of a popular auto magazine which states: "Only 315 Corvettes were built during 1953. Production facilities are to be moved from Flint to St. Louis, and as of presstime, output has jumped to 500 a month, which is only half the ultimate goal."

What we are left with is a series of questions with varying authoritative answers. Whether the first fourteen 1954 Corvettes were manufactured at the end of 1953 in Flint, or whether they were the first cars made in St. Louis early in 1954 is not resolved from our current "triangular" sources of information. We don't know what references were used by Mr. Ludvigsen for his information. We suspect that the serial number plates of the 1954 cars were all made up at one time and if the first 14 cars were to originate in Flint instead of St. Louis, would Chevrolet tool up a new run of serial number plates for just 14 cars (or 15) just to reflect their change of origin? That seems doubtful. Nor do we know where Ward's and the magazine cited obtained their data. Perhaps only when the production records of the Chevrolet Motor Division of General Motors are opened for examination by a qualified historian, will answers to these questions be resolved. Here at IREC we hope that will happen some time prior to the 1978 silver anniversary of "America's only true production sports car."

Another interesting feedback to our Report No. 2 concerns the production expectations of Chevrolet when the St. Louis plant opened in 1954. Previously we have made reference to their anticipation to see 10,000 units a year starting in 1954. One of IREC's participants recently wrote to say he has a promotional post card produced by Chevrolet for the Brussels Auto Show January 16-27, 1954, picturing the 1953 prototype Corvette on its face. After arranging to have the text translated from the original French, it turned out that the manufacturers were estimating a 1954 production of 25,000 units! It appears the overseas publicity department was even more enthused about the car's prospects than were the conservative PR men here in the states. And how about that for a rare piece of original Corvette literature!

One other comment which might be appropriate in this era of rumors concerning the Corvettes about to be made out of steel, aluminum, pancake batter or rubber cement. . . . a 1953 issue of a prominent automotive magazine states: "Few people doubt that Fiberglas has a future in the automotive industry, but whether or not it can compete on the same plane with steel is another matter. Although Chevrolet says that as far as Fiberglas is concerned, they have 'cast the dies', they also say cautiously that when a yearly productive capacity of 15,000 cars is reached, it's cheaper to produce bodies made of steel. Make of this what you will." (That's funny. . . . I didn't realize that 1961 was the last year they made those things out of Fiberglas.)

UPDATING THE PROGRESS REPORT. . . . Response to the publication of these Reports of the International Registry of Early Corvettes continues to produce new entries to fill the gaps in accounting for the 1953-54-55 production of Corvettes. As of April 1, 1974, here is our condensed progress report:

	1953		1954		1955		1953-55	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Total Prod.								
Accounted for	166	55.0	879	24.1	177	25.3	1222	26.3

Based on the data now available, we are convinced that at least 50% of the original production of the first three years of Corvette is still around, and the major portion of those cars will eventually find their way into the IREC data. We are appreciative of the help of those now participating and hope many more will join in the effort to make IREC as complete and as significant as possible to all owners of the early Corvettes.

THE 1954 PALETTE (RESPONSE). . . . IREC Report No. 2 concentrated its attention on the color choices available to the purchaser of a 1954 model. Perhaps the most surprising result of our research was the authentication of a blue vinyl interior choice, having been combined either with a Polo White or a Pennant Blue exterior. Our best substantiation of those combinations came from two original owners of such cars who still have them to this day, twenty years after delivery from their Chevrolet dealer. Other IREC registrations were also noted for further back-up evidence that a bright blue vinyl interior existed as a factory installed color choice. Since publication of that Report, two further examples have been reported in Polo White on Blue, by non-owners of the cars.

One of them was recently seen in the Northwest, and the Corvette owner who saw that car asserts its authenticity after careful examination of it. He was, in fact, relieved to see IREC publish information concerning that color choice since he found others who thought he was "nuts" when he made reference to that car's color combination. It seems that few people have seen them and therefore they don't readily believe in them. (All references to Santa Klaus and the Loch Ness monster aside.) Another qualified observer of the Corvette scene, who specializes in the repair and restoration of the car in the Northeastern part of the country reports that the previously unregistered Corvette No. E54S004329 was in a factory Polo White and bright blue interior combination, owned by a party in his area. The seats are in the original blue with white stitching together with the original kick panels. Only parts of the door trim showed some evidence of having been redone at one time. And, he reports that the owner has had the car since early in the 1960s. From this additional information, we can reiterate what we said last time around: "It would appear that this is a limited but well-authenticated factory color combination."

THE 1955 PALETTE They may have manufactured only 700 of them, but the 1955 Corvette seems to have a reputation for having come out in a veritable rainbow of color combinations compared to its predecessors. We refer to its "reputation" for variety, since the selection apparently grew only from five to seven that following year---unless another two colors might be better substantiated than they are now. The 1955 contributions to the Corvette color chart include these entries:

Polo White/Sportsman Red — Carried forward once again, this was the most prevalent color for the third year, but with color variety otherwise gaining ground, for the first time the majority of the cars for this production year were not in Polo White with the red interior. Current IREC research data indicates 47.2% of the 1955s carried on this traditional combination.

Gypsy Red/White with Red Stitching — Displacing the 1954 second place volume holder came this striking mixture. Chevrolet made a slight change from the Sportsman Red exterior of the previous year and opted for what they christened Gypsy Red. They then endowed the interior with a reverse of the standard red interior---choosing red stitching running through white vinyl. That this was the second most prevalent combination in 1955 should be another surprise to many, but our current sampling indicates that 20.8% of the reliably reported cars came in it. The earliest reliable entry with this combination was VE55S001297. Following that one an otherwise very original VE55S001348 reported in this way with just 51,000 miles on the odometer and was purchased from the original owner in 1962. Obviously, Gypsy Red on White began early in the model year and was popular with the production planners.

Harvest Gold/Green — Harvest Gold made its appearance late in the 1955 Corvette manufacturing process, and came with either one of two interior color choices. It appears about 11.3% of them received a medium-toned green vinyl interior, representing the third most often registered IREC entry. Number VE55S001617 is the earliest registered car of this persuasion. In restored condition, it is assumed to have been left in the original color configuration when the work was done. Three cars later in the production line, number 1620 was reported in as a "restored yellow (Harvest Gold?) on Black" with approximately 76,000 miles. The next car, No. 1621, was reported in as customized now but Harvest Gold on Green originally. While none of these are stock original cars untouched by owners, the logic of several of them having been produced so close together at that late date in the 1955 model year run forms convincing evidence of the likelihood of their contemporaneous manufacture in that grouping and speaks strongly for the authenticity of the combination.

Harvest Gold/Yellow — The alternative color choice with the Harvest Gold exterior color was a pale yellow vinyl interior. IREC data reveals 9.4% of the cars in certifiable color combinations came in Harvest Gold on a Yellow interior. The earliest one reported was number VE55S001220, purchased from a Ford dealer as a used car in 1964 when it was nine years old. None of the cars in this group are of an assured original configuration, but most of them present enough data to confirm the combination as authentic. The only area of confusion now centers around sorting out the Harvest Gold group between the interiors of green and yellow. Some of the cars were reported as "Green and Yellow" and some as "Yellow and Green" and it has been difficult in some cases to make the distinction between what color refers to vinyl interior materials and what color is paint oriented. We hope to further study the Harvest Gold group for a clearer picture of what was happening back 19 years ago.

Gypsy Red/Red with White Stitching — The Sportsman Red on Red interior combination of 1954 was carried forward into 1955 as Gypsy Red on Red, in an era when all sports cars sold best when they were painted red. About 5.7% of the accepted 1955 car color combinations were reported in this mixture. Number VE55S001291 is the earliest reported, and white it has been repainted, the original color is claimed to be red on red and the odometer reading of 52,000 helps to substantiate the claim. A stock original VE55S001407 with 50,000 miles on it also helps to fix this claim to authenticity.

Pennant Blue/Shoreline Beige — One of the carry-over color combinations from 1954, Pennant Blue on Shoreline Beige fell from second highest volume of production to sixth in 1955, based on our IREC sample. The Registry shows VE55S001050 in this combination, and the information indicates a fairly original car purchased from the second owner in 1972 and showing 34,000 miles on the odometer. Four cars later number VE55S001054 was manufactured in the same configuration. Once again, the car is restored to its original arrangement, shows 97,000 miles of use, and was purchased in 1971 from its second owner. There can be little question about the claim to authenticity made by the 1955 Pennant Blue on Shoreline Beige cars.

Coppertone Bronze/Shoreline Beige — The rarest color combination we can certify for 1955 is this blending of the Bronze on Beige. Just 1.9% of the seven accepted combinations reported in with this choice. Our best reference for authenticating it is VE55S001278, a third owner car with history known right back to the delivery point. It is reported as a stock original car with 66,000 miles. Your IREC Registrar has seen three additional examples of this combination, one of which is probably spurious, and the other two convincingly authentic. Drawing a few assumptions from our reference data now available, it might be proper to assume a range of between ten and twenty of these cars were produced in 1955. How many of those remain today is now known, but we hope to narrow the scope of probability as more information is accumulated in the future.

IREC, Continued

In the mass of other color combinations reported for the 1953 production year, two emerge with a potential for authentication, but are not yet both likely and verifiable. In the past we have been asked whether we have ever heard of a 1955 Corvette with an *original* black vinyl interior. While there are many customized and altered cars with that favored interior color, only one is in the running for possible authentication at this time, but the combination seems unlikely. A car has been reported on an Inquiry Sheet as Polo White with a Black interior with white stitching. The other data about the car does strongly suggest that this should be the eighth accepted authentic color.

The car was purchased from the second owner in 1968 with 32,500 actual miles on its odometer. Its previous owner said that the car had been in storage for seven of the ten years he had owned it after purchase in 1958, and had only been driven on short trips. However, the strength of argument for this car is diminished by the fact that the interior and drive train have been redone, the chrome is only in fair condition, and several decorative pieces are missing. Further, the original engine has been replaced. This information casts the shadow of doubt over the car's mileage accuracy and expressed history. In view of the fact that the color combination is the sole known example of Polo White on Black vinyl (the only suspected use of that color, through 1955) we tend to exclude it at this time, and hope for a stronger case to be made through more information about the car or through a second car of this combination which presents unimpeachable credentials.

One more combination is reported which is possible, but is also unlikely and not quite convincing enough at this time to be included in the basic group of seven accepted 1955 Corvette colors. A car with 112,000 miles of road experience, which is reported as Maroon on Red and Tan today, is claimed to have been a Harvest Gold on Red and Tan originally. It is the only example of this combination reported, and would certainly represent one of the strangest scrambling of color concepts in the history of Corvette production. Speaking in its favor is the fact that it seems to be a stock original car otherwise and has been owned by the present owner since 1959---15 years! If anyone else has ever come across a Harvest Gold on Red and Tan (Beige) we would like to hear from them as to when and where the car was encountered. Inclusion of color pictures would certainly help as well.

Until production data is available from the manufacturer, the color choices of the early Corvettes will obviously be tainted with doubt and mystery. Only careful inspection of a car can give a clue whether it is in its original production dress or whether over the period of years since its manufacture it has been altered from the original. Inclusion of other data about the mileage, condition, prior ownership, originality vs. restoration configuration, missing parts, rebuilt parts---all these things help draw the picture to substantiate the color combination indicated. There is a procedure that can be followed in the careful inspection of the car to help confirm the original color selection. It is not infallible, but may help in connection with the examination of specific cars. Any of those owners who desire more information about this procedure can write IREC for it.

With the enthusiastic help of countless early Corvette owners, progress has been made in determining the palette of colors selected for the cars in those fascinating early days of the establishment of the great tradition of the Corvette. From the earliest days of its life the brilliant color choices matched the design sophistication and mechanical excellence which fostered and sustained the nearly legendary status of the honored Corvette Marque. And the wide participation of the 1953-55 ownership through completion of the Inquiry Sheets of the International Registry of Early Corvettes, has hopefully brought to their fellow early owners as well as to the ownership of all years of the Corvette auto, a broader dimension of understanding about their car and a greater pleasure in sharing the experience of being one of the prideful owners of "America's only true production sports car."

IREC EPILOGUE. . . . Comments regarding this IREC data are welcome. Participation by all previously unregistered 1953-55 Corvette Owners is solicited. We extend our thanks to the many who have already become a part of this effort. We are particularly grateful for the cooperation and encouragement received from Corvette Clubs and publications, including: the Vintage Corvette Club of America, the Classic Corvette Club 53-55, Vette Vues Magazine, Corvette News, and the newly formed National Corvette Restorer's Society. Also making valuable contributions to the IREC effort have been a group of enthusiastic owners, some of whom have gone above and beyond the call of dedication to provide leads on unregistered cars or to complete Inquiry Sheets on cars encountered as early Corvette owners gather to break conversational "bread."

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George F. Campbell
IREC Registrar

OWNER'S PRIDE

Thomas Feuerherm of 11380 S.W. 93 St., Miami, Fla., is very proud of his 53-E54S004213.

