

M A G A Z I N E Corvette

Hail to the KING

Unlike Elvis, this '59 Corvette was able to make a late-career comeback, thanks to a powerful C4 infusion.
BY HAROLD PACE PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR





Counterclockwise from above: Non-original engine; accident-damaged exterior; missing trim; LT4 was stroked and fitted with various hot-rod parts, boosting power to 440 bhp; interior looks stock, but isn't.



Looking at this show-winning Corvette today, it's hard to imagine it spent 30 years imprisoned in a hangar. Craig Day was a car and airplane collector who stashed away nearly 100 cars and 25 airplanes in eight hangars near Dallas, Texas starting in the 1970s. This Corvette, a rough but complete '59, was driven in and parked in 1973. When Day passed away in 2001, his relatives had no idea what was in the hangars until they opened them up.

In 2003, the faded red '59 appeared on eBay and was promptly snapped up by fellow Texan Carr Campbell, who was grieving for his immaculate 8,000-mile 1996 Corvette Grand Sport which had been totaled. A lady in a kamikaze minivan T-boned him on December 7, 2002—yes, a day that will live in infamy. With its strong LT4 engine, ZR-1 wheels and flared rear fenders, the Grand Sport is a rare and collectible one-year model. Campbell held on to the remains and hoped to utilize the parts some day.

The '59 had signs of accident damage, the soft trim had rotted away, the engine and transmission weren't original and the car wouldn't start. In short, it was a perfect project car for a guy with his own shop: Carr's Corvettes & Customs. Campbell and his wife Jennifer thought about what was going on in the world in 1959, and decided to name the car Elvis, for the king of rock and roll, who spent that year in the military but still found time to meet future bride Priscilla.

Campbell had been rebuilding Corvettes and GM muscle cars since the 1980s, so he knew just what to do: He tore down the '59 to the bare frame and started over. The chassis was shipped to Paul Newman Car Creations in California to be modified to accept the C4 Grand Sport running gear. Newman (no relation to the late movie star) kept the stock X-member but changed everything else to accept the C4 suspension, 4-wheel disc brakes, rack-and-pinion steering and the LT4 engine. The resulting frame is much more rigid than a standard C4 frame.

The Grand Sport has a wider rear track than the '59, so Campbell sectioned and widened the rear fenders 1.5 inches on each side to clear the tires. This necessitated reworking the contour of the rear bumpers to match. He also repaired the old body damage to the nose and left fender before making all the gaps fit perfectly—not an easy task on any Corvette. The firewall was smoothed and the wiper motor relocated under the dash.

Devil in Disguise

When the frame arrived back in Texas, Carr installed the LT4 engine, but by this point the V8 was far from stock. First, it had been stroked from 350 to 383 cubic inches. Eagle



supplied the crank and rods, spinning Speed Pro forged 10.5:1 pistons. The standard “hot” LT4 cam feeds the ported and flowed heads, which were reworked by Total Engine Airflow. The intake was ported by Campbell, and an MSD distributor and wires were added. A front serpentine system was purchased from Street & Performance, incorporating a chrome 140-amp alternator, the power-steering pump and a compressor for the Classic Auto Air C1 A/C kit. Campbell assembled the engine and fitted Sanderson cast-iron headers and Borla mufflers to pump out an impressive 440 horse-

power (up from 330 standard horses) and 460 lbs-ft of torque.

But this impressive list of parts doesn’t begin to cover the incredible amount of underhood detailing that makes this resto-mod stand out from the rest. And unlike some customs we’ve seen, Campbell showed a lot of restraint by not going overboard with excessive chrome or graphics that would have cheapened the overall effect. For example, he had custom aluminum radiator built up by Be Cool, which also provided the dual electric fans; the trick setup doesn’t

draw attention to itself.

Campbell attached this potent mill to the 6-speed ZF gearbox from his dead Grand Sport, and added a SPEC Stage 2 clutch and pressure plate. A custom steel driveshaft connects the gearbox to a Dana 44 differential fitted with a 3:45 final drive.

The GS suspension was left stock except for the addition of conventional Bilstein shocks to replace the “active” F-45 units. The disc brakes were treated to Baer cross-drilled rotors and EBC Green Stuff pads. Campbell fabbed the brake and fuel lines from stainless



steel. The 17-inch Grand Sport wheels (8.5 inches wide up front, 9.5 in back) were chromed and wear Kumho 255/45ZR17 and 285/40ZR17 rubber.

All Shook Up

Once the body was prepped, it was turned over to Frank Waggoner in McKinney, Texas for paint. He custom-mixed '65 Nassau Blue with silver pearl, but used coarse metallic particles for a more sparkly finish. Then he shot the coves in '03 Speedway White with an added layer of pearl. "When you add pearl over the paint it makes it sparkle more," explains Waggoner, "but with

Top, left to right: Polished '96 Grand Sport wheels house Baer rotors; stunningly executed trunk features paint and carpeting to match the exterior color.

the bigger metallic in the blue it wasn't needed. So I mixed it with the paint, which tones it down, just to give more shine. But the white was painted over with pearl because otherwise it doesn't show very much." The result is a color that is at once familiar, but also exotic. Up front, the standard '59 grille was replated.

Inside, the dash is standard '59, but the gauges were updated by D&M Restoration to look original while working with modern

mechanicals. For example, the tach and oil-pressure gauges were converted to electronic operation. A Budnik 15-inch "half-wrap" steering wheel perches on an Iditit chrome steering column. The seats started life as '59 units, but were modified to sit two inches lower and three inches deeper in the back cushion. Campbell did the upholstery: white leather for the bolsters with white perforated leather inserts. The seatbelts are '61 Corvette reproduction units in Jewel Blue. And although the original Corvette Wonder Bar radio looks correct, it has been converted to full digital with iPod, CD and DVD inputs. For even more practicality, Campbell added power windows and cruise control.

The project took Campbell ten months to complete. Once done, he immediately began driving the Corvette to car shows, where it attracted crowds of admirers—even among purists who normally decry anything short of a completely correct restoration. The body still looks right, the trim and grille are original and even experts seldom notice the widened rear fenders.

Campbell now has a shop full of restorations and restomods to keep him busy for the foreseeable future. But to be in the car business you have to sell cars, so Campbell reluctantly decided to let Elvis go. "I have a lot of seller's remorse," laughs Campbell.

Can't Help Falling in Love

Ed Bedore is a hardcore car guy who has owned a number of classics, among them several nice Corvettes. He was at the 2008 NCRS show in Waco, Texas, when a friend of his told him *not* to go into one of the display rooms, or he would have to buy the car inside. "I wasn't even looking for a car at the time," Bedore recalls. But his curiosity led him inside and, sure enough, he emerged the new owner of the shiny blue C1.

"Right after I got it," recalls Bedore, "I took it to the 2008 NCCC National Convention, where it took first place in Concours Custom A, first in the C1 class and won the People's Choice Award." It has also received best-in-class awards at the Dallas Autorama (twice) and at the 2009 Darryl Starbird Show in Oklahoma. It now shares garage space with a '69 427 Convertible and a Kirkham aluminum Cobra replica; Bedore is a true equal-opportunity collector.

Currently, Campbell is back at work on customer cars, which leaves him little time to wrench on his own '70 LS5 Corvette and matching-year GTO convertible. While he still misses the '59 Corvette, he at least knows it went to a good home, and gets to see it every now and then. Seeing how well that restomod turned out, though, we wouldn't be surprised to see him build another—and keep it. ○