

Perfect Gift

After creating an LS3-engined '60 restomod for his wife, one Corvette enthusiast had a hard time giving away the keys.

| BY HAROLD PACE | PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR |



Kathy Sanders knows what she likes. She and her husband, Galen Sanders, have had a number of Corvettes, muscle cars and other sporting machinery, but once Kathy saw her first 1958 Corvette at a car show in Hot Springs, Arkansas, she knew the 4-headlight C1 was “her” Corvette. “It looked like a sculpture, a work of art,” she recalls. “After that, it was always 1958 to 1961 models that caught my eye.”

Years ago, Galen, a long-term car enthusiast, had bought Kathy a Mercedes-Benz as an anniversary present. In 2008, he declared it was time for another such gift—but it would be a Corvette. They had had several classic muscle cars restored to original condition in the past, but for this new project the pair decided to go down the modified path. They wanted vintage Corvette looks, but modern Corvette performance. In other words, they wanted to build a restomod.

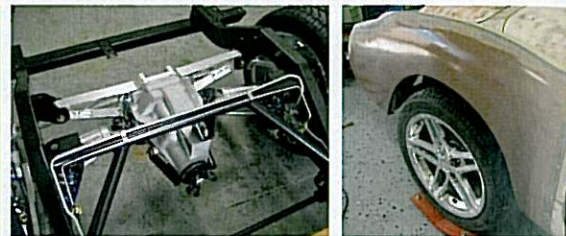
The first step was to find a suitable four-headlight C1 donor car. They tracked down a rough, 1960 “barn find project car” on the ProTeam website and purchased it. When the Corvette arrived at Carr’s Corvettes and Customs (CCC) in Plano, Texas, it proved to be in worse shape than had been expected. “I drove it around the block, but it was not enjoyable,” recalls Galen. Carr Campbell, who would be orchestrating the restoration, quickly determined that the Corvette had been wrecked several times, rendering some parts of the car beyond repair. For example, the entire front clip of the body would have to be replaced. Still, the Sanders were not downhearted; they saw a lot of potential in the Corvette.

Once the car was dismantled, the real work began. The starting point was a Street Shop aftermarket frame, which allowed for the use of modern, independent suspension—in this case, 1996-spec C4 underpinnings. Though the springs, shocks and anti-roll bars were stock Chevy parts, the brakes were aftermarket-supplied: Baer calipers with cross-drilled and slotted rotors. A custom master cylinder from Master Power Brakes was chosen to coordinate the stopping power. The Sanders went even more modern when it came to selecting wheels: They opted for reproduction C6 Z06 alloys (8.5 x 17-inch front, 9.5 x 18-inch rear). They mount Kumho radials (245/45ZR17 front, 275ZR45-18 rear). No white-wall, bias-ply rubber for this Vette.

As with the wheels, the engine compartment was brought all the way up to today’s standards, and an LS3 was installed. It wasn’t left stock, however. The 6.2-liter V8 was enhanced with a Comp Cams bump stick, and the heads were ported and matched. On the dyno, this translates to 421 rear-wheel horsepower and 420 lbs-ft of torque.



Left: An aftermarket cam and a cold-air intake give this LS3 a bit more power than stock. Above: Baer brakes are surrounded by reproduction C5 Z06 alloys. Below, left to right: A replacement frame allowed for the use of C4 independent suspension; to make room for the wide tires, the rear panels had to be modified. Bottom: Upholstery supplied by Al Knoch Interiors.



The engine was paired with a GM 4L65E 4-speed automatic transmission. Explains Galen, “The original car was a manual, but we restored it with an automatic because Kathy doesn’t drive a standard—that’s my proof that it is indeed Kathy’s car!”

Concerned that the Corvette have an appropriately throaty exhaust note, Galen made sure that CCC installed a sporty set of pipes. Sanderson ceramic-coated headers were hooked to dual MagnaFlow 2.5-inch resonators in front of 2.5-inch MagnaFlow mufflers. The exhaust tips that stick out the rear bumpers are fakes; the actual ones dump downward from just behind the rear crossmember. The pulses hit the ground right below the faux tips so that the sound seems to be coming from the stock location. As a result, the rear bumpers stay looking like new.



Before the body could be dropped down on the thoroughly upgraded chassis and powertrain, a lot of work had to be done. The rear quarter panels were replaced with “bulged” ones that added 1.5 inches of clearance for the wider tires. The original rocker panels were cut off; before new ones were bonded on, steel reinforcements were fabricated and installed. The rear bumpers are original but the fronts are both new. All seams and cracks were corrected using fiberglass, not filler. Achieving close, accurate panel and bumper fit required many hours of delicate work. (The body was massaged by CCC body man Bill Dornwell, while primary assembly



was done by Cory McDonald.) The original windshield side posts and door-pillar posts were restored and rechromed and all the stainless-steel trim on the windshield frame, doors and decklid was straightened by hand and polished to a brilliant shine.

Painting duties were handled by Trade Secret Auto Care in Plano. Kathy veered from the Corvette color palette, but kept her choice within the Chevy family, at least for the main body color. It was painted 2008 Trailblazer SS Silverstone Metallic; the coves were painted 2008 Lexus Chrystal White.

The interior came in for a complete update. The custom torch red dash and leather upholstery were supplied by Al Knoch Interiors. The stock factory gauges were rebuilt and converted to electronic operation, and a Painless Performance wiring harness was added. A custom 15-inch steering wheel

was wrapped in matching red leather and mounted on an Ididdit column. AOK Retro seats were covered in Torch Red and fitted with perforated inserts. Even the trunk was trimmed in matching leather, and includes a Corvette hood emblem.

The original Wonderbar stereo system was updated internally to digital operation, and sports iPod and CD inputs. A dash-mounted dual-voice coil speaker is complemented by 6-inch kick panel speakers in custom-made enclosures. Two 7-inch subwoofers are mounted in the trunk side panels. The system is topped with a Clean Sweep digital sound processor and amp.

The Sanders live in steamy Louisiana, so CCC installed a modified Classic Air C1 Perfect Fit air-conditioning unit. When it comes to being protected from the elements, this C1 has both hard and soft tops.

It took two and a half years for the '60 to make the change from rough barn find to completed restomod. "Carr kept us informed with e-mails and pictures," recalls Kathy. Still the wait wasn't easy. "Near the two-year mark I began to think I would never see 'my' car with paint and chrome. Then about six months later, the picture came. There was no disappointment, but it didn't prepare me for actually seeing the car in person for the first time."

That occasion took place in Texas. The restomod was on display at the Lone Star Corvette Club Classic in May (see sidebar). Though Kathy and Glen were happy to show off their prized Corvette, they were even happier once they were finally able to take it home to Louisiana and start putting on some miles. Problem is, Galen has been a little reluctant to hand over the keys. As Kathy says, "Now, if Galen will just let me drive my car!" ○

Lone Star Corvette Club Classic



BRINGING TOGETHER UPWARDS of 600 Corvettes this year, the Lone Star Corvette Club Classic is the biggest event of its kind in the Southwest. The three-day Fort Worth gathering features track time at Texas Motor Speedway, scenic road tours, an indoor car show and a host of other activities.

As usual, a wide assortment of Corvettes were brought to the 2011 event,

from C1s to C6s, in both stock and modified form. While purists hung out at the National Corvette Restorer's Society originality display, racers looked to shed that elusive 0.001 second around the autocross course and customizers gazed at rows of flamed and airbrushed creations. There was something for everyone. We heartily recommend dropping in for the fun next year.—H.P.