

# Torch Song

This red-on-red '59 restomod sings to the tune of a 480-horsepower LS3 V8.

| BY HAROLD PACE | PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR |

Jorge and Mercedes Fernandez really know how to celebrate an anniversary. For their 30th wedding anniversary they opted for something much more exciting than a string of pearls, and definitely more red than white: a '59 Corvette restomod.

After starting his own business and expanding it from coast to coast, Jorge was in a place financially where he could reward himself a little, and share the spoils with his wife. But first, he had to decide what kind of Corvette to buy. "I knew I wanted a 1958 or 1959 model," Fernandez says. "I didn't like the hood on the '58 as much, so we settled on a '59." He also wanted a car with modern performance, comfort and safety, so a restomod was called for, one that would be custom-built to suit his needs.

After an exhaustive Internet search for a builder, the couple selected Carr's Corvettes and Customs (CCC) in Plano, Texas. "I had seen photos of 'Elvis,' a custom '59 that Carr built (*Corvette Magazine*, September 2009) and that was all it took," remembers Fernandez. The CCC shop is a long way from the Fernandez's Florida home, but Jorge regularly visits nearby Dallas on business, so the arrangement made sense.

Shop owner Carr Campbell recommended a partially completed '59 project car in his shop as a good starting point. This Corvette had been wrung out at the drag strip in the 1970s, wrecked and badly repaired. It was a perfect candidate for restomod treatment since many of the original parts were missing. The CCC crew had performed the chassis upgrades when the Fernandezes signed on to the project, but had not started in on the bodywork or installed a new engine.

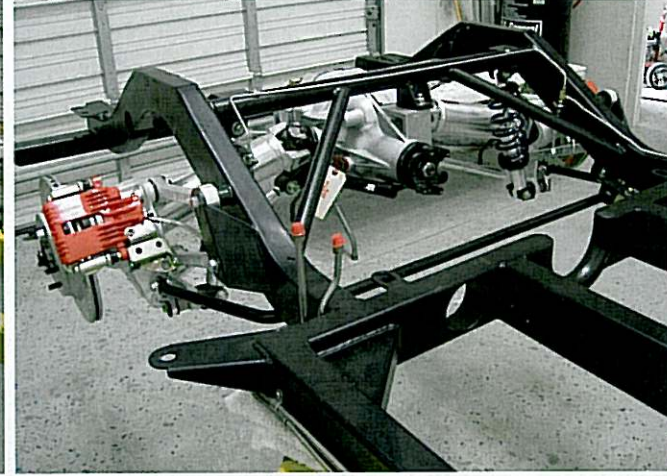
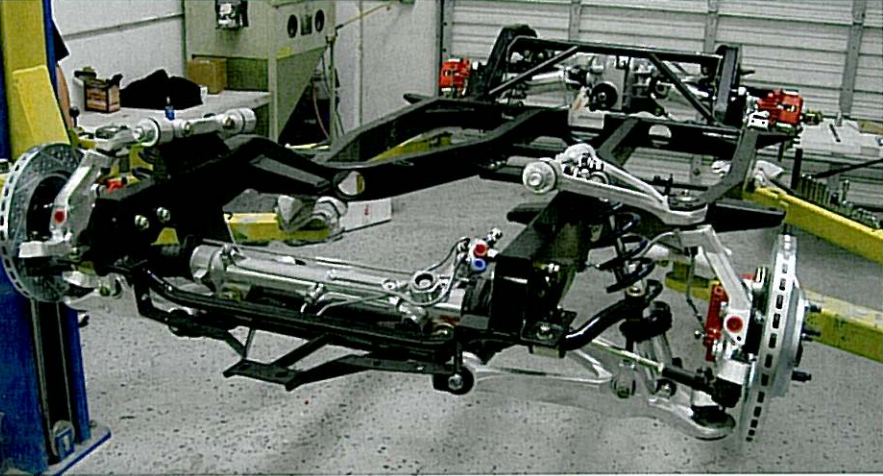
The original '59 frame had been replaced with a new unit from Street Shop. To improve stiffness, CCC added braces and gusseting to the steel chassis. The fully independent C4-based suspension that comes with the Street Shop kit was retained, but CCC installed lower-rate springs to the adjustable QA-1 coil-over shocks—350 instead of 450 pounds in front, and 200 instead of 350 pounds in back. The replacement springs were also two inches longer in front and one inch in back. To compensate for the softer springing, CCC fitted stiffer anti-roll bars. The DSE power rack-and-pinion steering system from the Street Shop kit was retained.

Stopping power comes courtesy of four 13-inch Baer rotors, with 4-piston calipers in front and dual-piston calipers in back. The system is boosted by an ABS Power Brakes system. A set of C6 ZR1-look polished alloy wheels (8.5 x 17-inch front, 9.5 x 18-inch rear) are shod with Kumho Ecsta SPT rubber (255/45R17 front, 275/40R18 rear).

Although the frame had already been painted black, Jorge wanted it Torch Red, just like the rest of the car, save for the Bright White body covers. "It's my favorite color, I admit," he says of '03 Corvette Torch Red. The chassis was powder-coated by Quality Powder Coating in Carrollton, Texas, but the body was painted in-house by CCC. "It really helps for a shop to have its own spray booth," says Campbell.

Before picking up the paint gun, CCC technicians soda-blasted the body down to bare fiberglass. The damaged areas were repaired and wider (by 1.5 inches per side) rear fenders were fitted to make





Above, left to right: The Street Shop frame was originally powder-coated black; C4-spec suspension. Opposite, left to right: Torch Red frame; 480-hp LS3 V8.



Mounted on ZR1-look multi-spoke wheels, the 275/40R18 rear tires necessitated the widening of the original bodywork—an inch and a half on both sides.

room for the wide rear tires. To get that “show car” look, the body was block-sanded three times using guide coats before the final coats of PPG base and clear were applied by Keith Hickman.

Once the running gear was attached to the Torch Red frame, the body was fitted. The CCC crew then spent many hours carefully adjusting panel fit and gaps to better-than-new specifications. As any restorer can tell you, first-generation Corvettes were never perfectly assembled at the factory.

The restomod theme continues in the interior with a pair of Al Knoch seats that provide a modern amount of side bolstering yet fit in the original space. They’re covered in Torch Red leather, as is the dash. The original gauges were restored and converted to electronic functioning by D&M Restoration. The CCC crew installed matching Torch Red carpeting as well as a CON2R C1 reproduction steering wheel trimmed in matching

leather by Gabe’s Custom Interiors. And although the original Wonder Bar radio still resides under the dash, it has been converted into a modern digital stereo with iPod inputs. It is powered by a 100-watt amp and blasts through a Kenwood dual-voice coil speaker in the dash, as well as leather-wrapped kick-panel speakers. Helping to maintain the vintage vibe is a Classic Auto Air air-conditioning and heating unit with custom-made stainless braided hoses.

**W**here a 283-cubic-inch small block once resided now lives a 376-cubic-inch LS3 crate engine from GM Performance Parts. LS-generation V8s are famous for their prodigious power outputs—this one is rated at 480 horsepower—but not their aesthetic beauty. CCC went to work on that, devising flat-topped valve-cover adapters that hide the coils and wiring under vintage Corvette finned valve covers (see sidebar). The engine

was painted orange (House of Kolor Sunset Pearl), and is one of the few non-red parts on the car. The Lectric Limited wiring harness was hidden to achieve a cleaner look. Sanderson ceramic-coated headers were added; they dump into a custom exhaust system featuring MagnaFlow mufflers.

The beautified V8 feeds power to a Tremec TKO-600 5-speed manual transmission with a Keisler clutch, shifter and driveshaft. A Dana 44 final drive unit was fitted with 3.50 gears. “Although this Corvette is technically my wife’s car, she doesn’t drive manuals, so she also gets a driver, me, to take her where she wants to go,” explains Jorge.

The Fernandezes had never owned a Corvette before, nor did they ever think they would. “Coming from a family of immigrants,” explains Jorge, “when I was young, I never even considered that I would ever be able to buy a Corvette. But in this great country, if you have a dream, you can get it.” ○

## FINNED VALVE COVERS

THE CLASSIC CAST aluminum finned valve covers were introduced on 1956 Corvette models fitted with the optional (RPO 469) 225-hp engine. In 1957, base engines continued to wear stamped-steel Chevrolet valve covers, but the high-output carbureted and fuel-injected engines displayed the finned Corvette covers.

The early Corvette valve covers had nine fins, but there was an interference problem with the 1957 fuel-injection units and some had the top fin ground back for clearance. In early 1957, Corvettes were fitted with seven-fin covers on injected engines and, eventually, all optional engines. The 1956 to early 1959 covers have stag-

gered retaining bolt holes, while the later 1959 to 1967 models have even spacing top and bottom.

The finned covers were produced through 1967, and there were numerous minor variations in lettering height and notches in the gasket flange. Despite the variations, all staggered-bolt covers wore part number 3726086 and even-bolt covers were p/n 3767493.

Finned valve covers were not used on other Chevrolets, but Chevy parts departments reportedly sold plenty of them back in the day. They have been widely reproduced by the aftermarket (with varying degrees of accuracy) and are available today.—*H. P.*

