

# CAR TALK

## CORVETTE NEWS:

Obviously, we love Corvettes. We're hopeful that the Corvette will continue in production indefinitely. We follow what's happening with the evolving design and success of the Corvette. But, as I've mentioned before, Corvette lovers must also keep an eye on the health and success of the company that builds our beloved Corvette. Overall, these seem to be bright days for both Chevrolet and General Motors, which should put a smile on all our faces.

Not only was the Corvette Stingray named the 2014 North American Car of the Year but, as we noted last month, the Silverado was also named the 2014 North American Truck of the Year. And, of course, last month I listed a whole slew of other awards the Corvette has won this year. In addition to all that, it's worth noting which vehicle came in second in the voting for North American Car of the Year. It was another GM vehicle, the Cadillac CTS. And consider this, all these vehicles were designed during the same time period. This speaks well for the product development capability at GM. And, of course, this is at a time when the microscope is still focused on the company to do well financially and prove they have their serious problems behind them.

For the fourth year in a row, GM posted a profit, with a net income of \$3.8 billion in 2013. And Chevrolet says it received 16,000 C7 build orders by the end of January this year. That equates to roughly 3,000 Corvettes a month, or more than double the rate in 2012.

So this product development capability, combined with GM's positive fiscal outlook and recent management changes, bodes well for the Corvette's future. It gives us reason to hope that the model may even improve at a faster pace than ever before and continue to be GM's clear performance leader. It's hard to believe now, but in 2003 the Corvette was the only high-performance rear-wheel-drive car in GM's entire lineup. (I clearly remember going to the L.A. Auto Show in the early 2000's with Paul Miller, my brother-in-law, and debating with the Chevrolet factory reps about why they needed to be offering decent rear-wheel-drive vehicles in the full-size and performance markets. They kept explaining to us that most people wanted economy and winter-driving capabilities, not the old-fashioned rear-wheel-drive vehicles.) The Cadillac CTS-V came along in 2004, with a Corvette V8 sending 400 horsepower to the rear wheels, but it wasn't until the return of the Chevy Camaro in 2010 that GM started to really put some muscle back into this nearly abandoned segment. Today, there are numerous high-output Camaros to choose from, including the recently-reintroduced Z28, which has a 7.0-liter LS7 engine from the C6

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Z06 under its hood and a set of carbon-ceramic brakes from the ZR1. The 2014 SS, Chevy's first rear-wheel-drive sedan since 1996, is powered by an LS3 V8 --- and is a real hoot to drive, I hear.

So, do you notice a pattern here? As has long been the case, the technology developed for the Corvette eventually trickles down to the rest of the company's vehicles. With the C7 Stingray leading the way, GM appears to be heading in the right direction.

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### **GM's NEW CEO:**

Not sure how much you heard of this, but the General is now under new leadership at the top. When the federal government invested our taxpayer money to help GM out of its financial woes, the feds selected former AT&T CEO Ed Whitacre to take over the reins. I actually worked under Whitacre at AT&T, where he was known as a very sharp businessman who always kept stockholders at the forefront. So he's credited with helping to turn GM around. He was replaced by another non-automotive business leader, Dan Akerson. Now that GM is in better shape financially and has reportedly paid back most or all of its public debt (depending on who you listen to), I guess it was time to get a solid GM car guy back in charge of things. Well, actually they selected a car gal. Mary Barra was promoted to CEO to lead GM forward. She has decades of experience at GM, having started right out of college in 1980. She is a car enthusiast of the first order. Some were pulling for Mark Reuss to get the job, since he's known as a Corvette-owning, car-racing, certified car nut. Instead, they gave Mark Mary's old job as head of global product development. So now, two of GM's best and brightest are running the show. While Barra and Reuss are sharply focused on the company's future, both are well aware of GM's rich heritage and the Corvette's important place in it.

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### **CORVETTE COLORS:**

Perhaps you've seen pictures of the beautiful silver-gray 2015 Z06 that was presented at the North American International Auto Show. A surprise is that this car is not painted in the familiar Cyber Gray, but a new lighter color which is called Shark Gray. Makes sense, right? Shark Gray will replace Cyber Gray on 2015 model-year Corvettes.

So what has been the most popular color on the 2014 Stingrays? Torch Red. Black and Arctic White come next on the popularity list. I hear Chevrolet plans to keep the color

choices at ten, for the foreseeable future. Apparently, ten colors are the maximum the Bowling Green plant can handle.

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### **SO DAD'S A CAR ENTHUSIAST. WHAT DO YA GET HIM FOR FATHER'S DAY?**

If you really want to blow your car nut Dad away this Father's Day, consider one of these gifts:

- 1) Starting at a mere \$399, you can send Dad to rural Minnesota to drive a real battle tank. He gets to blast around in the tank and even run over a car with it. He also gets to shoot fully automatic machine guns. Now that's a real man's gift. **Driveatank.com**
  - 2) How about Bob Bondurant's VIP Program? For \$5,925 Dad will learn how to evade vehicular threats, pull J-turns, ram through barricades and generally improve his car control in this special course. **Bondurant.com**
  - 3) Or, starting at a mere \$199, give Dad a shot at Racing Exotics. He will have a blast driving a fleet of Aston Martins, Lamborghinis, Ferraris and Porsches on a dedicated race course for as many laps as his heart and your wallet can stand. **Exoticsracing.com**
  - 4) For \$399 - \$599, Dad will get instruction on how to master a big-block dragster. **Frankhawley.com**
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### **NCM 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY:**

2014 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Corvette Museum. The milestone will be celebrated August 27-30. Those registered can enjoy the museum with its many displays, including the new one featuring the 8 Corvettes that fell into the incredible sink hole. You can also take part in the Grand Opening of the new NCM Motorsports Park with scheduled parade laps around the road course. There will be many scenic self-guided road tours to choose from, special video presentations and seminars, raffles and an open Membership meeting to take part in. You can also be a part of the 2014 Corvette Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and banquet, where they will induct John Heinricy, Jerry Burton and Dave MacDonald into the prestigious and elite group of recipients who have made a significant contribution to Corvette history.

On-line registration closes on Monday, July 21<sup>st</sup>. Member registration is a paltry \$15 and non-members can register for \$25. And if you'd like to join a caravan from our area to the Museum, registration for that is only \$5.

## Local car shows?

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Looking for an exceptional Corvette road trip for later this summer or fall? Here's another one you might consider. The National Corvette Museum and the Kentucky State Police have once again teamed up to offer a week-long tour called One Lap of Kentucky. The two organizations join together to raise money for both the museum and Trooper Island, a State Police non-profit camp for underprivileged children. This will be their 5<sup>th</sup> annual tour. As always, the tour will be led by a Kentucky State Trooper, now using a marked red Corvette (which definitely attracts attention). Because of demand, they're offering the tour on three consecutive weeks. The first tour will be September 23 through 27.

The tour begins on Monday evening at the Museum with a pizza dinner and drivers meeting. Tuesday morning they will depart from the Museum and take a tour of the new NCM Motorsports Park, including parade laps around the road course (convertibles allowed and no helmets required). Then they'll head over for a tour of the Bowling Green Assembly Plant. Being able to watch the assembly process is a Corvette lover's dream come true; seeing the engineering marvel as the chassis and body come together for the first time and witnessing the birth of new Corvettes at First Start and the emotional drive off the end of the line.

Next it's off to Trooper Island for a tour, some recreation and lunch. This is a place where the tensions and turmoil of our everyday lives can be forgotten, and for one week young people can be given a touch of hope and desire of a better tomorrow. After lunch, the group enjoys an awesome drive to Dale Hollow State Park Resort, where they will feast on a sumptuous dinner buffet and spend the night. This is a cliff top lodge, built of limestone and massive timbers, sitting high on a bluff overlooking the 28,000-acre lake and surrounding woodlands.

After breakfast on Wednesday at the lodge, it's off on another beautiful drive to Mammoth Cave National Park. This is the world's longest known cave system, with more than 400 miles explored. Cheryl and I visited Mammoth Cave back in the late '70's and can certify that it is impressive. After a tour of the Cave and a bit of lunch, the tour continues to the old Makers Mark Distillery. (I see a few of you perked up at the sound of that.) The group will tour the legendary distillery and also take in some of Kentucky's most breathtaking natural beauty. Then it's off to historic Old Talbott Tavern. This tavern has been continuously operated since it was built in the same building and at the same location. Since the late 1700's, the Old Talbott Tavern on Court Square has provided shelter, food

and drink to American travelers. It has been a silent witness to a stunning array of historical personages and events right out of the pages of American history. This where the tour settles in for dinner, then it's on to the hotel for the night.

On Thursday, the tour moves on to another interesting and historic site, Versailles Castle. It is nestled in the spectacular landscape of the beautiful surrounding horse farms and wraps you in a luxury experience worthy of royalty. A tour of the castle is followed by lunch. Next, off to Keeneland Race Track. Sorry, no Corvettes allowed on this track. True to its original mission to be a model race track, Keeneland today is an industry leader in developing and promoting innovations to advance Thoroughbred racing and preserving the sport's history and integrity. The group will be led on a private tour of the facility, including its barn area. Dinner will be found in the Lexington area, at the Parkette Drive-In. This drive-in was featured on the Food Network's Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives back on September 20, 2010. The Parkette is part of Lexington history and is known all over the country for bringing back the glory days of drive-ins.

On Friday, it's off to the Renfro Valley Entertainment Center in lovely Renfro Valley, KY, proudly known as "Kentucky's Country Music Capital". Inside the lusciously green walls of this valley is found a tradition that started back in 1939 by the founder John Lair. Great classic country, southern gospel and mountain bluegrass music rings from the rafters of the Entertainment Center's two unique show theaters. Dinner will be provided in the Historic Lodge Restaurant with wonderful country cookin'. It's served family style. The day is completed with a "Tribute to the Legends" show; country music legends of course.

After breakfast on Saturday, it's off for home.....or your next adventure.

Oh, yeah.....the price. \$950 for car and first driver, \$450 for passenger/co-driver. Price includes meals, entry fees and most lodging.

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## WHAT NOT TO DO:

Ethan in Washington shares his story.

I was rebuilding the engine in my not-so-new car last winter, while anticipating driving it on a big road trip some spring. I had replaced the cam and timing chain among other things, as well as the distributor. I got it all buttoned back together, but after breaking in the engine, there was a slight knocking sound that I couldn't pinpoint. One mechanic friend thought rod-knock and another suggested piston slap from pre-detonation. I checked and

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re-checked all of my work; looked at the firing order, played with timing, tried a known good distributor out of another car, etc., all to no avail.

In a last ditch effort to make my road trip deadline, I sourced a used engine. I worked several late nights and weekends checking over this motor, rebuilding the heads, etc., before swapping it into my car and installing all my accessories onto it. The day before I was to leave, I fired up the new engine, only to be greeted by the exact same knocking sound! All the time I was supposed to spend packing and getting other things done before I left was not spent trying to track down the source of this elusive noise, checking and re-checking everything to no avail. So I went to Hertz, rented a new car and left my headache in the garage.

A few days after I got back, I happened to receive a phone call from a friend out of state, and we got to talking about the issue I was having with my engine. He encouraged me to start with the basics, so yet again I checked my firing order, with him listening in. He stopped me midway through and said the page he was looking at had it listed differently. So I went and pulled my factory service manual off the shelf, opened it to the proper section, and what do you know. I was going off memory all this time and had two of the numbers in the firing order reversed!

So after weeks of head-scratching, hours of diagnosis, replacing good parts and a complete motor swap, I simply switched two plug wires and the noise went away.