



Corvairsation

Tucson Corvair Association
Volume 26, Number 11

www.corvairs.org

Tucson, Arizona
April 2002

1967 magazine ad

**Some cars
travel best on 4-lane
superhighways with lots of
gas stations**

(Let this one take you away
from all that)

Congratulations !!
Chris Cunningham and Victoria Brown
married on April 6.



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APRIL 20, 10AM Tour the Franklin Auto Museum
1405 E. Kliendale Rd.

Corvair 500 Sport Coupe, America's lowest priced hardtop—\$2128*

You can swing a Corvair onto a scenic road like this without giving the gravel, curves and bumps a second thought. Corvair's rear-engine location, crisp and easy steering, and flat-riding independent suspension have a way of improving the most unimproved road. And thanks to its air-cooled 6 (which never needs water and uses gas only with utmost moderation) it really doesn't matter whether

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*Manufacturer's suggested retail price for 500 Sport Coupe (model 10132). This price includes Federal Excise Tax and suggests a delivery and handling charge. Price also includes charges, accessories, other optional equipment and local taxes, additional.

Corvair 
The rear-engine road car

Tucson Corvair Association
Established 1975

Corvairsation is a monthly publication of the Tucson Corvair Association, which is dedicated to the preservation of the Corvair model of the Chevrolet Motor Division of General Motors. The Tucson Corvair Association is a chartered member of the Corvair Society of American (CORSA), Chapter 857.

Monthly Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month, except December. One technical/social event is planned for each month except July and August.

Membership Dues are \$15 per year for singles and \$18 per year for families. Initial dues are \$15 for singles and \$22 for families (includes name tags). Make checks payable to Tucson Corvair Association.

Change of Address: Report any change of address or phone number to the Membership Chairperson. Do not report such changes to the Corvairsation Editor.

CORSA Membership Dues are \$30 per year (\$70 for 26 months) and include a subscription to the CORSA Communiqué, a monthly publication. CORSA membership is not required for membership in the TCA, but is highly recommended. See any TCA officer for more information.

Classified Ads are free to members and \$3.00 per 4-line ad to all others.

Deadline for materials submitted for publication in the Corvairsation is the 10th of month to the Editor.

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Tucson Corvair Association

Mountain View Restaurant at prince and Mountain Ave

Minutes of March 27, 2002

At 6:45 Chris Cunningham swung the gavel. In attendance were Chris Cunningham, Barry Cunningham, Dave Baker, Don Robinson, Gordon Cauble and grandson Bo Terril, Lance Gillingham, Herb Berkman, Allen Elvick, Chris Compton, Paul and Art Dunn, Tim Green, Van Pershing, Dave Lynch and John Torpey. Our guests that night were Niel Bishop, Dan and Derek Miles, Al Brown and two guests from the Phoenix Club, Tom Schrum and Frank Nickerson.

Tom started the meeting with information on the convention in Flagstaff. All hotels are booked solid as well as many camp grounds. There will be a banquet at the activity center in town, more details later. Bus tours are being arranged, tours to the Grand Canyon will include a box lunch and admission to the IMAX theatre, tickets are \$59 pp, there will also be a tour to the meteor crater, tickets are \$32 pp.

Thanks Tom

There will be a swap meet, albeit a small one, total space reserved (so far) is 70' x 70'. We're hoping for more space will open up later.

The races will include the economy run, a ralley and the valve cover down hill race.

Gordon Cauble filled us in on the '60 coupe Chuck Petit generously donated to the club. The talk was to raffle the car off to help build up the clubs account.

Thanks Gordon

Raffle tickets were sold off for the door prizes, the winners were Dave Baker – ignition coil, Don Robinson – distributor cap, Gordon Cauble – oil filter, Dave Lynch – sun shade and Allen Elvick won 2 distributor bodies. Many thanks to the donors of the door prizes.

Allen Elvick gave us a run down of the treasurers' report. Beginning balance was \$1967.21. Income funds came from raffle tickets, aluminum can collection and member dues, total income was \$95.00. our expenses were the Corvairsation for February and March, name tags and a repair bill for the clubs new 1960 coupe, total output was \$794.45. Our ending balance came to \$1267.76.

Thanks Allen

Dave Lynch wanted to share his brake shoe experience with us. He had replaced the rear shoes on his car, drove about 3700 miles with them and then discovered he had a slight problem. After removing his rear wheel and drum he noticed that the brake shoes had cracked in half and were literally falling apart, and this is after *only* 3700 miles! WOW!! The one shoe he had brought in for us to see was in two pieces. We're glad he didn't have to do any hard braking in a turn.

Thanks Dave.

Paul Dun had brought in a slide show for us, this was of a vintage race that took place in Phoenix last month. The slides were great, I'll try and list all of the cars that he had slides of in no particular order. '70 Lotus formula 3000, '69 Camaro, '66 Shelby GT350, '65 Corvette big block, Sunbeam Tiger, a late model Corvette, AMC Javelin, Austin Mini, Ford Cobra, Lotus 7, Lotus Elan, Porsche 911, XK120 Jaguar, Austin Healey Bug Eye, Datsun Roadster, Fiat Abarth, Late model Volvo, Alfa, Triumph GT6, Austin Healey 100-6, Devin. Thanks again for the slides Paul, it was fun to see what kind of vintage iron is still out there running.

With the ending of the slide show that was about it for the meeting that night. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 and was pretty much seconded by everyone.

Lance Gillingham – Vice president; Allen Elvick – Treasurer; Dave Baker-Librarian; Recording Secretary – John Torpey; Paul Dunn – Webmaster and Membership Chairman; Merchandise Manager – Don Robinson and Barry Cunningham is our new Member at Large.

A Letter from the President:

There has been much interest and concern from many TCA members wishing to be part of the upcoming 2002 CORSA International Convention in Flagstaff in June. Representatives from the Cactus Corvair Club attended our March meeting to inform and solicit help from our Club members. Sign-up sheets were passed around the room for the registration table, hospitality room, and other fun tasks. I encourage everyone to support the Cactus Club in hosting the 2002 CORSA International Convention in Flagstaff June 25-29. Contact Tom Schrum at 602-841-1580 to sign up. Look for the detailed schedule of events included elsewhere in this issue. The theme is "A CoolVair Affair." Sign up and get involved. The April meeting falls on the 24th and begins at 7pm. We will have the private VIP room this time. Come early and throw the bull in the parking lot!

Sincerely, Chris Cunningham



from the editor-----

March's mid-month took us to the Elvicks' after a tour over Gate's Pass to Kinney Road, south to Ajo Way and on to our gracious host, the Elvicks. I hadn't been down Kinney Road in several years and had forgotten how much fun the twisties were on that thoroughfare. It was a perfect warm day and we were looking forward to those great pancakes from the old Norwegian family recipe. Really, there was much more and I don't mean only food. Oh, yes, the food; Allen whipped up several varieties of pancake all of which were delicious. Dawn fixed her special coddled eggs and I think that was the a first for me; they were excellent.

Marianne prepare the Norwegian bacon and all the of delicious goodies.

In addition to the Elvicks' Corvairs, they have three model As. Let's see. Who made those? They also have an impressive lot of antique tools and several old gas pumps. All of this is laid out in a beautiful large acreage. Thanks to all of the Elvicks for a great mid-month. I went home back up the twisties and over Gate's Pass for another fun ride in a Corvair.

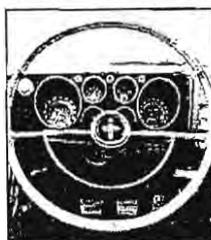
This April mid-month Saturday takes us to the Franklin Foundation Auto Museum. These cars are beautifully hand crafted and always a joy to see. They are technically very interesting, just like a Corvair. The easy way to get there is to take Cherry Ave. north off of Fort Lowell Rd. two blocks to Kliendale and turn left (west).

We need to muster up and volunteer where we can at the Corsa meeting in Flagstaff. Plan ahead. If you need lodging in Flagstaff, contact Paul or Nell Dunn on our web site or by phone from the number on the inside front cover of this Corvairsation.

The Show Low Summer Classic Car Show is coming up and information is contained elsewhere in this issue of the Corvairsation.

Have you checked our web site lately?

Van has prepared another bit of early history of the automobile for us. Enjoy!



CORSA 2002 International Convention June 25-29 Schedule

Tuesday, June 25, 2002

Vendor Setup 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Registration 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM
 Vendor Sales 1:00 PM - 6:00 PM
 Hospitality Room 1:00 PM - 9:00 PM
 Concours Classification 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM
 Welcome Party 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM
 Cole Competitor's Meeting 7:45 PM - 8:00 PM
 Concours Participants Meeting 8:00 PM - 9:00 PM
 Concours Judges Meeting 9:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Wednesday, June 26, 2002

Concours Classification 6:30 AM - 8:00 AM
 Concours & Car Display Setup 6:30 AM - 8:00 AM
 Hospitality Room 8:00 AM - 8:00 PM
 Registration 8:00 AM - 8:00 PM
 Tour: Meteor Crater 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM
 Concours d'Elegance 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM
 People's Choice Car Display 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM
 Vendor Sales 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM
 Model Car Setup 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM
 Valve Cover Races 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM
 Tech Session 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
 V8 Registry Group Meeting 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
 Virtual Vairs Group Meeting 8:30 PM - 9:30 PM

Thursday, June 27, 2002

Registration 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
 Hospitality Room 8:00 AM - 10:00 PM
 Tour: Grand Canyon 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM
 Rally Participants Meeting 8:30 AM - 9:00 AM
 Rally 9:00 AM - 2:30 PM
 Tech Session 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
 Vendor Sales 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM
 Ultra Van Group Meeting 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
 AirVairs Group Meeting 8:30 PM - 9:30 PM

Friday, June 28, 2002

Autocross Tech Inspection 7:00 AM - 8:30 AM
 Hospitality Room 8:00 AM - 10:00 PM
 Registration 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
 Autocross Participants Meeting 8:30 AM - 9:00 AM
 Autocross 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM
 Tour: Grand Canyon 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM
 Banquet Table Assignments - Chapters 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM
 Vendor Sales 10:00 AM - 8:30 PM
 Model Car Judging 10:00 AM - Noon
 Banquet Table Assignments - Individuals 10:30 AM - Noon
 Tech Session 3:30 PM - 5:30 PM
 CORSA Chapter Officers Meeting 7:15 PM - 7:30 PM
 Corvair Preservation Foundation Meeting 7:30 PM - 8:00 PM
 CORSA Annual Meeting 8:00 PM - 8:30 PM
 Corvanatics Group Meeting 9:00 PM - 10:30 PM

Saturday, June 29, 2002

Registration 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM
 Hospitality Room 8:00 AM - Noon
 Vendor Sales 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM
 Economy Run Participants Meeting 8:30 AM - 9:00 AM
 Economy Run 9:00 AM - 1:30 PM
 Tour: Sedona 9:30 AM - 3:30 PM
 Cocktail Hour 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM
 Banquet & Awards 7:00 PM - 11:00 PM

A Brief History of The First 100 Years of the Automobile Industry in the United States

Chapter 12 - Insolent Chariots Unsafe at Any Speed.

by Richard A. Wright

The American auto industry's golden age started with the end of World War II and it began fading in the mid-'60s. Through the '50s and the early '60s, Detroit dazzled the world with a procession of cars that were reliable, luxurious, powerful, low-priced, often beautiful, always interesting.

Americans loved them and bought them in undreamed-of numbers.

There were hints of what was to come. Along with the good-humored cracks about Studebakers back in the '40s, Bob Hope and Jack Benny also joked about the smog in Los Angeles. Before the '60s ended, Detroit did not think the jokes were funny. Automobile exhaust was suspected of contributing to, if not causing, the smog.

Detroit was also coming under increasing fire as engines got more powerful and tailfins got bigger. Critics wanted more sensible, more economical smaller cars. Many servicemen returning from Europe brought back little Volkswagens, MGs, Triumphs and Porsches, strange-looking relics of the '30s.

Detroit had not ignored the small car. Both Ford Motor Co. and General Motors had plans at the end of World War II to build small cars. Harlow Curtice, president of GM through most of the '50s, explained why neither program came to pass: "You can take the value out much more rapidly than you can take the cost out."

At the end of World War II, American makers were invited to consider purchase of Volkswagen. Ford executives dismissed the idea, as did Chrysler Corp. One Ford executive put it this way: "You call that a car?" While Ford and GM canceled their small-car programs -- both of which had been quite advanced -- Chrysler offered a smaller version of its '49 Plymouth and Dodge, which was a dud and was killed by '52.

The Crosley, Kaiser's Henry J and Allstate (marketed by Sears), the Nash Metropolitan, Willys Aero and Hudson Jet all came and went in the early '50s. But the VW, dubbed "the Beetle" by its owners and later by the importer, continued its steady and rapid sales growth.

In 1952, Charles E. Wilson resigned as GM president to become secretary of defense in President Eisenhower's administration. He had served GM well during the hectic war years and the post-war changeover. He had been a central figure in bringing labor peace to the industry. But he is remembered most for telling the Congressional

committee considering his nomination "what's good for GM is good for the country," a statement often cited as an example of corporate arrogance.

But that was not what he said. And what he did say was not out of arrogance but out of Wilson's old-fashioned patriotism.

At the confirmation he was asked if he could make a decision as secretary of defense in the interest of the nation if it were adverse to GM.

"Yes sir, I could," Wilson said. "I cannot conceive of one, because for years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors and vice versa. The difference does not exist."

Harlow Curtice, as general manager of Buick Division in the late '40s, was intrigued with a custom job Buick's chief engineer Ned Nickles had done on his car. The engineer had put four "portholes" on each fender with bulbs wired into the distributor so they would light sequentially as each of the engine's cylinders fired.

Curtice ordered the portholes put on all Buicks, but without the lights. They became Buick's trademark. Like tailfins, they had no function except to sell cars. Buick moved from its eighth rank in sales to challenge and displace Plymouth in third.

Curtice succeeded Wilson as president of GM in 1952 and the Buick portholes were an example of his uncanny ability to divine what the buying public would go for.

Ford Motor Co. demonstrated that despite all the scientific research available, the odds are steep against a new car. It introduced the Edsel as a '58 model amid great hoopla. It was dropped in '60.

The Edsel has become a symbol of failure, but in fact Ford lost little but face. The production facilities used for the Edsel were sorely needed to meet demand for the Falcon, Ford's highly successful compact car. Had it not been for the Edsel, the Falcon could not have set a record as the biggest selling new car ever introduced.

The first rumbles of trouble came from dealers who were losing sales to imports. Many in Detroit dismissed the growing ranks of foreign car buyers as oddballs, flakes, college professors and leftists. But many of the dealers knew they were buyers with above-average incomes, many of whom owned more than one car. They were not all oddballs, they were trend-setters.

When George Romney took over the new American Motors in 1954, he ordered that the Rambler be revived and launched his famous

crusade against Detroit's "gas-guzzling dinosaurs."

Detroit was not worried. It sold more cars in 1955 than it had in any year in its history. Then in 1956, sales slumped, but import sales doubled. Romney was convinced. So was Ed Cole, general manager of Chevrolet. He wanted to build a small car of unusual design and he did. But not quite the way he wanted.

The Big Three unveiled their "compacts" as '60 models -- Ford Falcon, Plymouth Valiant and Chevrolet Corvair. The Falcon and the Valiant were very conventional, but the Corvair was all-new, revolutionary in many ways. Its air-cooled six-cylinder engine was in the rear of the car. And unlike Charles F. Kettering's copper-cooled engine of the '20s, it worked well.

There were compromises between Cole's original design and what GM top management approved for '60 introduction. Frederic Donner had succeeded the ebullient salesman Curtice as chairman. The financial people were taking over Detroit and not just at GM.

Tire diameter was cut, the aluminum engine was modified, the plush interior was downgraded and a \$15 stabilizing bar was deleted from the suspension system.

A Chevrolet test driver rolled over the first prototype on the test track, admittedly at high speed. A Ford test driver also rolled one over. Word spread at Ford that the Corvair had problems. In high-speed turns, the rear end of the Corvair tended to lift or "jack" and the wheels tucked under. And because of the rear engine placement, the car tended to oversteer, that is, turn more sharply at higher speeds. Most American cars have always understeered, which means they make a wider arc when turning at higher speeds. The combination of jacking and oversteer made the Corvair handle quite differently from most cars.

The Corvair split GM deeply. When Semon "Bunkie" Knudsen, son of William Knudsen, was named general manager of Chevrolet in 1961 succeeding Cole, it is said that he insisted he be allowed to make some changes in the Corvair or he would quit the corporation. Knudsen installed the stabilizer bar on the '64 Corvair and ordered a completely new suspension based on the Corvette's design for the '65.

But before the fix was made, more than one million Corvairs had been sold and the car had come to the attention of a young Harvard Law School graduate named Ralph Nader. Nader had been handling insurance litigation in Hartford, Conn., and gathering information about auto accidents. In 1964, this austere, intense loner moved to Washington and set up shop as a self-appointed lobbyist for the public.

He served as unpaid consultant to a new Senate Subcommittee on Executive Reorganization, chaired by freshman Sen. Abraham Ribicoff, former governor of Connecticut and brother of a Ford dealer.

Ribicoff decided to hold hearings on the federal government's role in auto safety. Among Detroit "celebrities" called to testify were GM Chairman Frederic Donner and the new president, James Roche.

They were not prepared for the hostile grilling they received from Ribicoff and, in particular, the committee's counsel, Robert Kennedy. The brusque Donner and the grandfatherly Roche turned in dismal performances.

Nader had collected an enormous amount of data about the Corvair and wrote a book, "Unsafe at Any Speed," an indictment of the auto industry in general and the Corvair in particular. By 1965, more than 100 lawsuits involving the car had been filed.

It came out that GM had hired a private detective to follow Nader to try to "get something" on the crusader. But there was nothing and the public was outraged that mighty GM would put a gumshoe on the trail of this lone lawyer. The upshot was that Roche appeared again before a congressional committee and publicly apologized to Nader. It was a class act by Roche. It was also a painful humiliation for this honorable man.

The Corvair was dead. In his book Nader cited the suspension on the '65 Corvair as an example of excellent engineering, what Chevrolet could and should have done in the first place. But the damage was done. Nader probably did not kill the Corvair by himself. He had a lot of help from Ford Motor Co. in the form of the Mustang, introduced in 1964. Corvair sales plummeted and in 1969 it was quietly dropped.

It was not widely mourned at GM. The Chevrolet sales department had never liked it, many dealers didn't like it; it was an engineer's car.

The auto industry was making money and sales were strong as the '60s came to a close. But things had changed. The golden age was over. Detroit was on the defensive. America's love affair with the auto, some said, was on the rocks.

JULY 6 2002

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Cunningham (520) 733-7387.

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