



Corvairsation

www.corvairs.org

*Tucson Corvair Association
Volume 28, Number 14*

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July 2004*



Inside:

A Death in the Family

Was John C. Fitch's Sprint a Kit Car?

TCA Events at a Glance

In 1962 you could buy his 'Vair variant, the Fitch Sprint, three different ways: order it directly from him, have the package installed by your dealer, or you could order and install it yourself.

Fitch, pictured at right at 85, was born in Indianapolis in 1917.



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 Chervrolet Motor Division of General Motors. The Tucson Corvair Association is a chartered member of the Corvair Society of America (CORSA) chapter 857.

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

Membership Dues are \$15 for individuals and \$18 for families. Initial dues are \$19 for individuals and \$22 for families (includes name tags). Make checks payable to Tucson Corvair Association.

Change of Address: Report any changes 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 subscription to the CORSA Communique, 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 per 4-line ad to non members. Deadline for materials submitted for publication in the Corvairsation is the 10th of the month.

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JUNE 2004 GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

June 23, 2004

Members Present: Bill Maynard, Lynn Marrs, Dave Lynch, Lance Gillingham, Allen Elvick, Don and Sue Robinson, and Dave Martin. Guests were Bruce Porter and Mike Strong.

President Bill Maynard called the meeting to order at 7pm.

Approval of the Minutes for May 26, 2004:

David Lynch made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Don Robinson and the motion passed unanimously.

Financial Report:

Allen Elvick reported that the club finances are in good standing. The Club spent \$273.98 this last month for a pop-up canopy, Corvairsation and tune-up clinic expenses. Cash on hand is just over \$4000.00. Lance Gillingham made a motion to accept the financial report, Don Robinson seconded this motion and it passed.

Committee Reports:

Presidents Report: Bill Maynard - Bill Maynard welcomed everyone to the June meeting. He gave a big thank you to Sue and Don Robinson for hosting the Swim Picnic Party. Even thro it was very hot, a good time was had by everyone, great food, super company, good conversation and cool wet water to jump in. Don and Sue, thank you for the big effort and work you put into this. If you have missed Don's BBQ skills, you have really missed out. Yum! Bill would like to remind everyone to keep the Fan Belt Toss Swap Meet in view as it will be here before we know it. The Corvair club shirts have been ordered.

Vice-President's Report: Barry Cunningham

No report at this time

Merchandise:

Don reported that he still has a lot of hats, coffee mugs and t- shirts to sell. It would be really nice for the club members to have a polo shirt with name and Corvair logo on it.

If you have not signed up for a shirt please talk to Lynn Marrs at the July meeting, the order has been turned in, but we can still order more if needed.. Shirts are \$18.00.

Library:

Lance Gillingham and Julius Berky are still working on the wiring for antique radios, when they have these, they will put them in the library for everyone to use.

Raffle: No raffle tonight.

Dave Lynch, Bill Maynard and Lance Gillingham drove their Corvair's to the meetings.

Old Business:

Fan Belt Toss is the first full weekend of November in Palm Springs. John and Amy Young will supply the trailer to put the parts in and transport to the swap meet. The parts will need to be tagged and a price put on each article. Barry Cunningham is checking into the procedures to register and rent spaces. The pop-up canopy has been purchased to be used as cover at the swap Meet. Plan to leave early the Friday Morning before the Swap meet if you can.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be July 28, 2004.

Adjournment:

Don Robinson made a motion to adjourn at 7:30pm, Dave Lynch seconded this motion and the meeting was adjourned at 7:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn

Lynn Marrs,
Secretary



From the President...

I'm looking forward to seeing you all at the July meeting. Make sure you have marked your calendars for the big picnic on Mt. Lemmon on September 26, 2004. We will meet as a group at McDonald's at the Catalina Highway and Tanque Verde at 10am. If you cannot make it that early, head directly to the picnic at Rose Canyon. Join us any way you can!

Discussion has come up regarding putting together a Car Rally for October. Please contact me with your ideas and expertise. My e-mail is (Billfromtucson @webtv.net) or call me at 325-8497.

We all were sorry to hear Barry Cunningham was so ill. We are glad to hear he is back in the land of the living!

I hope you are making your plans for the Fan-belt Toss Swap Meet, it will be a great Club activity. Bring a friend and we will see you at the meeting!

Bill

Death In The Family

by Van Pershing

After 34 years of selfless service to the Pershing family, the '65 Corsa was killed in a tragic automobile accident on the morning of June 22nd at the intersection of Ruthrauff and I-10. A thoughtless driver made an illegal left turn in front of the car and its driver, long-time TCA member Van Pershing. Van was unable to avoid the crash. Although suicide was not suspected, a state of depression might have contributed to the accident; since just the day before, news was received via the Corvairsation that the Casa de los Niños Car Show was cancelled this year.

Over the last 24 years, the Corsa participated in many Casa car shows. It enjoyed very much rubbing fenders with the other Corvairs in the Club. Family members mourned the death of their long-time friend and will miss it dearly. No date or time is available at this printing for the memorial services.

The Corsa at rest shortly after the fatal collision. The driver escaped serious injury.

TCA 2004 Events at a Glance

JULY

28 WED *Regular Monthly Meeting* - 6pm.
Optional dinner at 6:20, meeting starts at 7pm. Mountain View Restaurant 1220 E. Prince Road.

AUG

11 WED *TCA Board Mtg.* Wildcat House 6:30pm.

25 WED *Regular Monthly Meeting* - 6pm.
Optional dinner at 6:20, meeting starts at 7pm. Mountain View Restaurant 1220 E. Prince Road.

SEPT

8 WED *TCA Board Mtg.* Location TBA 6:30pm.

22 WED *Regular Monthly Meeting* - 6pm.
Optional dinner at 6:20, meeting starts at 7pm. Mountain View Restaurant 1220 E. Prince Road.

26 SUN *Rose Canyon Lake Picnic* 10am - meet at McDonald's at Tanque Verde and Catalina Hwy.

NOTE: no mid-month activity in July or August.



The Fitch Sprint Was a Kit Corvair

by Harold Pace

When the Corvair came out in October 1959, it soon attracted the same type of tuner attention that Hondas vehicles now enjoy. Dozens of companies sprang up to supply performance and appearance parts to jazz up Chevy's plain-jane compact. Although designed as a Euro-style econobox, the Corvair had the potential to outperform cars with many times its power output (or cost). The first series Corvairs (1960-1964) had handling issues related to their rear swing axles, a design shared with VWs, Porsche 356s, some Triumphs and Mercedes. The first Corvair was an uninspired



two-box design with little in the way of charisma. However, the idea of a rear-mounted air-cooled flat six sounded a lot like a Porsche and soon hop-up parts were popping up everywhere.

Although tons of companies made Corvair parts, there were a few companies that set the high mark for Corvair development. EMPI, who had started out selling VW performance parts, added Corvair bits to their lineup. A special high-performance and racing Corvair, the Stinger, was built by the Yenko Chevy dealership that later made the famous 427 Camaro musclecars.

Yenko Stingers were only sold in turnkey form and deserve a column of their own down the road. Our focus here is on the Fitch Sprint, a refined 'Vair variant that turned the Detroit pancake into a European-style GT car with enough go to keep up with early Porsches, and even a Corvette, on a winding road.

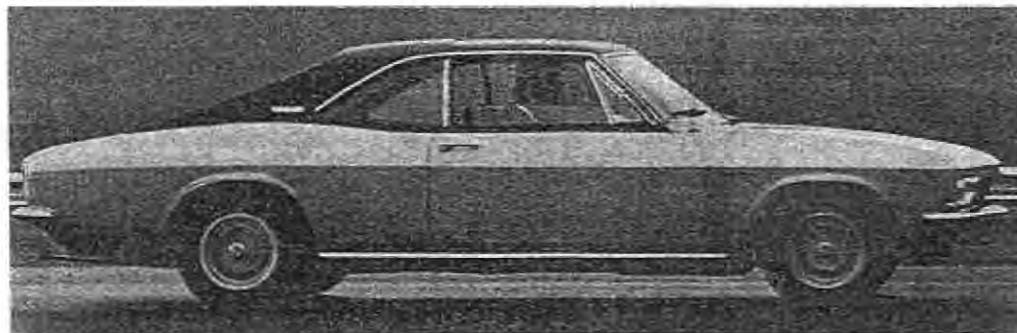
John Fitch had the perfect background for developing a special Corvair. He had won Sebring in a Cunningham, driven for Mercedes in European endurance racing and headed the first Corvette racing effort in 1956. He was an accomplished inventor, a WWII fighter pilot and, in general a super-serious car guy. He lived just a short distance from Lime Rock Raceway in Connecticut, and set up a consultancy for all things automotive.

In 1959, Fitch was one of a handful of experts allowed to test the pre-production Corvairs, and he immediately saw possibilities in the new design. At the time, Chevrolet did not see the Corvair as a performance car and failed to follow up on his recommendations, so Fitch went to work on his own.

The Sprint Arrives

By 1962, Fitch was selling parts to build the Fitch Sprint, a steroid package that transformed the Corvair from pussycat to tiger. You could buy a new Corvair with the Sprint package installed directly from Fitch, have an authorized dealer order and install the parts, or buy the hot parts from Fitch and install them yourself. This makes identifying factory-built cars nearly impossible today.

The first Fitch Sprints normally started with a two-door Monza coupe equipped with the twin-carb 102-hp engine, four-speed box, 3:55 final drive ratio, seat belts (Fitch was a pioneer in the field of automobile safety), a padded dash and the GM Convenience Accessory Group. The Fitch improvements started with two more carburetors and a tuned exhaust system to raise power to 145 hp. The rear springs and shocks were upgraded, rear camber was increased to 2 degrees negative and the steering was quickened up.



Above left: The Fitch Sprint looked best on the second generation Corvair like this one. **Above:** From the front, the Sprint looked like any other Corvair, but it didn't run like one!

The pathetic original tires were swapped for high performance Michelin X radials, and Fitch added a steering damper borrowed from the Corvette.

A wood-rimmed steering wheel, electric tachometer and other trim pieces gave a more sophisticated feel inside. A padded vinyl roof was offered, along with Lucas driving lights, trim stripes and special hub caps—all this for around \$563, bringing the cost of a turnkey car to \$2,995. The kit could be installed on any Corvair, and there are examples of Fitch convertibles and even station wagons. Or you could order the parts individually according to your needs (and budget). The Sprint performed and handled so well that Chevy reconsidered and introduced the turbocharged Monza Spyder with their own suspension upgrades. However, the Sprint was vastly superior to the Spyder in all respects except maximum speed, and both made 0-60 in 12 seconds. The Sprint received a lot of attention and was tested by Motor Trend, Car and Driver, and Road & Track magazines.

By 1964 Fitch had increased power to 155 hp, and the price had climbed to \$3,627 for a loaded model. Top speed was 110 mph and the quarter-mile came up in 18.1 seconds. The only weak area was the anemic Corvair drum brakes.

Second Generation

In 1965 Chevy introduced a new Corvair with fully independent rear suspension and sporty, modern styling. Chevy took a page from the Fitch book and added a 140hp Corsa

option with 4 carburetors. Fitch went to work on the new 'Vair and transformed it into an even better car. Starting with a standard Corsa, Fitch added 15 more horses by improving the air cleaners, crank breathers

and timing. Adjustable Gabriel shocks were added in back, along with rubber progressive-rate bumpers for the springs.

The front suspension was set to ¼ degree of positive camber combined with 1-1/2 degrees negative in back. Once again the steering was quickened up for faster response, and a set of metallic linings improved the brakes. The trim, interior and lighting options were continued from the previous Sprints, but one option stood out from the rest. Fitch had noted automotive artist Coby Whitmore design a sporty top called the Sprint



Fastback 904 Ventop (pictured below). This was painted flat black and made the Corvair look a lot more sophisticated. Quarter-mile times dropped to 17 seconds at 79 mph. The Sprint was a highly respected car and original examples are highly prized by collectors today. Identification is tricky, as buyers could specify any combination of performance and trim parts, and most were installed by the owners.

Other Fitch Projects

When the Olds Toronado came out in 1965, Fitch saw potential in the porky front-driver. He developed a Phantom Toronado package that added \$2,000 to the price of the new Olds. Fitch reworked the power steering and brakes to return some pedal feel to the overboosted GM systems. Koni shocks improved the handling, as did Goodyear R5 radials. An electronic magneto was fitted, along with an improved exhaust system. The brakes received special Fitch pads and linings, and the headlights were upgraded to the same Lucas units used on the Sprint. A sunroof was included, as was forced-air cooling in the seats. Most had two-tone paint jobs with black lower rocker panels. Fitch also offered special kits for Pontiac Firebirds.

Although improved production cars were bread-and-butter projects for Fitch, in 1966 he also designed an original sports car called the Fitch Phoenix. This lovely two-seat sports car was based on Corvair running gear and was originally intended for racing. The chassis was designed by Gerald Mong, who also built the successful

Bobsy racing cars. Styling was again by Cob Whitmore but by the time the prototype was finished the racing angle had been shelved and the Phoenix had been transformed into

refined touring sports car. Just when everything seemed to be falling in line, Chevy dropped the Corvair in 1969 and the Phoenix became a one-off. A shame, as it's a lovely car.

When he wasn't designing cool cars, Fitch also invented movable crash barriers, managed the Lime Rock racetrack and continues to be a welcome guest at vintage races all over the world. He is one of the few people who really deserve the term Renaissance Man, and the Sprints are a small part of his legacy.

- From Kit Car Magazine July 2004

Spares and Vairs

FOR SALE: 1963 Monza Coupe, red, 140hp with Carter 4-barrel. Drives great, nice interior, must sell. Best offer. Don Henn, 520-743-3346.

FOR SALE: Corvair Parts - new and used, late and early, rare and not so rare. Taillight lenses, carb parts, hubcap inserts, arms, trim, misc., and much more. **July Special:** Corvair Ignition Rotor new \$2.50 - Clark's price \$4.30.

WANTED: Late Model Corvair 2-door body/shell/complete car. Needs to be fairly straight and rust freeish. Need something to build a new car!! Contact Van at work: 594-5159 or home: 743-9185 or vpersh@yahoo.com

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Tucson Corvair Association Corvair Society of America Chapter 857

Regular Monthly Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month.

November meeting is on the third Wednesday.

The December meeting is an annual Holiday Party.

Meeting Place: Mountain View Restaurant, 1220 East Prince Road, 293-0375

Parking Lot Bull Session: 6pm - Dinner: 6:20pm (optional)

Meeting: 7pm.

Upcoming Events:

October Rally? Call Bill for information on this exciting event. Details inside.

September 26 SUN - Rose Canyon Lake Picnic/BBQ on Mt. Lemmon

November 12-14 FRI-SUN - Great Western Fanbelt Toss in Palm Springs, CA

Mailing Panel Photo: Burt Brown's Flaming Red 1960 4-dr Sedan



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