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Did the Chevrolet Vega develop out of stalled plans for a third-generation Corvair?

By Daniel Strohl on May 26, 2021, *Hemmings*

Despite a few commonalities (Ed Cole, aluminum-intensive engines, and maybe a nut and bolt here and there), the Chevrolet Corvair and the Chevrolet Vega were two separate and distinct vehicles. Even though GM employed both in its efforts to push back the tide of imports and to compete in the compact class and one followed more or less right after the other, it's even difficult to say the two shared a predecessor-successor relationship. But could the development of the latter have actually stemmed from the last vestiges of the former?

It's an interesting question, apparently one that H-body fans have often pondered, as David Kelly recently posited in a comment: If Chevy had only put the turbo Corvair drivetrain in (the Vega) as they had originally planned it would have been something.

We followed up with David, who attributed his comment to two sources. First, he cited the louvers stamped into the decklids of the coupes and on the rear quarters of the station wagons - louvers that he and other Vega fans have occasionally attributed to canceled plans for a rear-engine Vega.

Indeed, the first-generation Corvair coupe and sedan had a louvered decklid, the Corvair station wagon had louvers on its quarter panels, and the second-generation Corvair had openings punched into the panel between the backlite and the decklid. Even the Greenbrier and the other Corvan variants had inlets breaking up their long swaths of sheetmetal.

When it debuted for the 1971 model year, the Vega also had openings stamped into its rear end. The hatchback had them on the hatch aft of the glass, the notchback had them on the decklid, and the wagon had them pretty much where the Corvair wagon had them.

But there's a few holes to poke in this theory that the Vega's poked holes were intended for an air-cooled rear-engine setup. First, how would an engine air inlet have even worked on the hatchback? Second, were the vents actually vestiges of an air-cooled, rear-engine design, that would have meant Chevrolet got as far as tooling up the sheetmetal for a vehicle with that layout, yet none of the Vega's sheetmetal has the proportions for a rear-engine vehicle (not to mention the near-impossibility of making such severe changes as engine location so late in a car's development process within GM).

Third, the theory completely ignores that those vents do have a purpose. They were part of the Vega's flow-through ventilation system. Similar vents for the same purpose appeared on 1971 Chevrolet Impalas and full-size cars.

Don Homuth, our resident Corvair expert who has also owned a few Vegas, said that some people do occasionally make the connection between Corvair and Vega due to the aluminum engine blocks in both cars. But as he noted, the Corvair engine "was never intended to be used in any other GM vehicle. It had essentially no parts interchangeability and there was no Vega configuration that would/could have used it."

Don gave us "a definitive no" to answer the question, but David also cited an intriguing second source: Bob Spinello's Vega history, in which Spinello claims that the "earliest Vega proposals dating from 1967 featured a rear engine, which was shelved for fear of association with the troubled Corvair."

Pretty much every history of the Vega's development begins with GM chairman James Roche's announcement of the XP-887 small-car project in October 1968. By that time, as John DeLorean noted in "On a Clear Day You Can See General Motors," Ed Cole, who was working on his own small-car project using the corporate engineering and design staffs, got GM to approve his project over small-car projects that Chevrolet and Pontiac divisional staff were working on (possibly John Sawruk's mid-engine radial-engine design for Pontiac?).

It could very well be that Cole, who was behind the development of the Corvair, initially proposed a similar layout for the pending small-car project. Spinello's history offers no further detail, but if we look at what GM was doing with the Corvair circa 1967, we might find a little more detail.

True, by that time GM's brass had

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TUCSON CORVAIR ASSOCIATION
Established 1975

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Membership dues are $5 per year for individuals. Make checks payable to the Tucson Corvair Association and mail to the TCA Treasurer.
Change of Address: Report any change of address or phone number to the Membership Chair or email changes to tucsoncorvairs@yahoo.com
CORSA membership dues are $45 per year ($90 for 26 months) and include a subscription to the CORSA Communiqué, a monthly publication. Rates are $37 per year and $74 for 26 months for a "virtual" membership. CORSA memberships is not required for membership in the Tucson Corvair Association, but is highly recommended. See any TCA officer for more information.
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TCA 2021 Events at a Glance

3rd Tues of each month	**Monthly Meetings**. 6:00pm. Meetings are back to O'Rielly Chevrolet, 6160 E Broadway, Tucson. TCA monthly meeting are held in conjunction with the Classic Chevy Club. Enter on the staircase on the west side of the two-story building in Used Cars. ***New permanent meeting time and place will be announced soon.***
Jul 27-31	**CORSA NATIONAL CONVENTION:** ~~Crown Plaza San Diego-Mission Valley, San Diego, CA~~ CANCELLED
Oct 15-17	**"Route 66" TRI-STATE:** Marriot Pyramid Hotel, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Oct 22-24	**Great Western Fan Belt Toss & Swap Meet.** Sunrise Park, 405 S Pavilion Way, Palm Springs, California.

My, how times have changed!

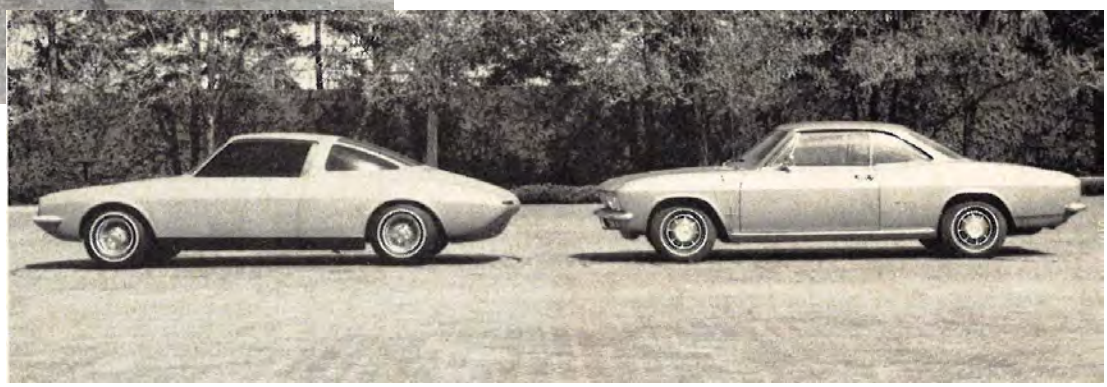
killed off the Corvair - not because of anything Ralph Nader had written, but because it couldn't compete on a cost-effective basis against the Ford Mustang. Chevrolet could wring greater profit from the Nova and Camaro and would thus focus its efforts on those cars. But as noted in an April 1982 issue of *Special Interest Autos*, Corvair development actually did continue after the summer 1965 decision to axe the Corvair.

That development continued in the form of three XP cars: XP-849, XP-873, and XP-892. The first, also known as Corvair II and the 197x Corvair, continued to use a rear-engine layout in combination with a fastback body style; first proposed in May 1965, its development continued until June of 1967. The second, a front-engine fastback, was positioned against Volkswagen's sportier vehicles; its development lasted from January 1967 through August 1967. The third, definitely rear-engine and possibly to be powered by a Chevy II 153-cu.in. four-cylinder engine (not the Iron Duke), had a development lifespan of March 1968 through June 1968 and probably gave us the earliest glimpse at the colonnade body style of the Seventies.

We've noted before that GM's XP numbers generally progressed chronologically, but often skipped around, so the fact that the XP-887 Vega development project falls right among those three third-generation Corvair proposals doesn't necessarily indicate their development overlapped. The timelines, however, do indicate that all three were under development either while Cole was working on his small-car proposal or while GM staff under Jim Musser were developing the XP-887 Vega.

Still not a smoking gun, of course. In a corporation as large as GM, dozens if not hundreds of projects go on simultaneously and in parallel. Even if there were a connection, it doesn't tell us exactly how any of those third-generation Corvair proposals became the Vega. It's possible Cole had a hand in one of those XP projects or used one as his inspiration for the XP-887, but without further proof, we can't definitively make that connection.

XP-849



XP-892

XP-873

A new Tucson Corvair Association in the works!!

As we all know, a couple of years ago we decided to combine Tucson Corvair Association meeting with those of the Classic Chevy Club of Tucson. A few TCA members attended the meetings and several even joined to the CCCT and have been active in their activities. When the Chinese virus panic hit us we went several months with no meetings or activities at all. The monthly newsletter was reduced to quarterly issues, and the website has remained updated as much as it could be with lack of activities and events.

In April three TCA members met for breakfast to discuss a possible revitalization of a club that has been operation since 1975. Since April 2019 TCA has not held any meaningful activities. No "Corvair only" fun.

Pat Croan took on the task of sending an email to all current members to ascertain the general interest in the revitalization project. Eighteen of those contacted showed interest (two members have yet to respond).

A follow up meeting was held by the same three members, to discuss what steps should be taken next. With 18 people showing interest it appears that there is sufficient interest to proceed with efforts that get things rolling once again. The Club will probably restructured to suit the current needs and create a setting that will be more suitable for the wants of the members. Some items one the list included (but are certainly not limited to) car show attendance as a group, technical sessions that will help people get their cars in running condition, possible social events with the Cactus Club, and others. Another topic that was discussed is an easily accessible meeting place such as Watson Chevrolet or another place that is possibly close enough to the freeway for easy access. An eating establishment was ruled out as a possibility because of the lack of choices and the desire to keep the meetings "Corvair" oriented and not food oriented. This will be investigated in the next few weeks.

As things evolve and progress, you will continue to send updated information.

TCA MEETING

Tuesday, June 29, 6:30pm
Culver's
4810 N 1st Ave

Come join us to plan for the future!

Oh, If Only!!

Here are some rendering that were posted on corvaircenter by davemotorhead. Better run down to the Chevy dealer and place your order now!!

Click below to see the complete article:

https://www.holley.com/blog/post/holley_rendered_rides_redemption_for_the_chevrolet_corvair/?fbclid=IwAR1gmo9O_DHzFAXJ8yvzQfYhRaankTWy3RcK6YtsQCYh

Fix your Corvair over the phone

Van Pershing

In 2013 we finished a ’65 turbo Corsa that now lives in Gilbert, Arizona with my daughter and her family. It’s been a fun car for the entire family and has appeared in many family pictures and Christmas cards over the years. Recently the Corsa started to idle erratically and running excessively rich – lots nice black smoke pouring out the exhaust pipe. I was called to scene to practice my magic. Even after some basic adjustments nothing changed. It seems all daughters think their dad can perform miracles!

Back in 2013 I had gone through the wonderful YH with a brand new kit and had everything adjusted to spec just like Bob Helt taught us in his very detailed book. I removed the carb and took it home and checked all the spec again and made sure all the passageways were squeaky clean and reinstalled it. When we fired it up it was still running rough and pouring out black smoke as before. So what could the problem be?

I won’t be the first person to admit that I really dislike the YH carburetor and often wonder if the first Corvette and early Nash mechanics felt the same way. I had pulled out what little hair I have left over just one. The Corvette had THREE!!

In a desperate move I was lead to a fellow Corvair enthusiast in Mesa who knows and loves (and hates) the YH carburetors as well as anybody I’ve ever met: Gary Sudbeck. I gave him a call and described the symptoms and he asked a few questions. After chatting for a few minutes he had a suggestion that would have never come to mind. With authority, he stated that the accelerator pump diaphragm either had a tear or some sort of leak in it. The accelerator pump on these carbs uses vacuum to activate and when they leak raw fuel gets sucked right into the intake.

A new kit was ordered and another go-through was done. The accompanying photo shows what I found when I got the pump diaphragm out. You can see dozens of tiny cracks all the way around it. So either its eight year of age and/or the modern gasoline we are blessed with took its toll.

With things back in order, the 180 runs as it should and the black smoke has disappeared. The EPA would be so happy!

It’s not very often you can get your car fixed over the telephone. Thanks Gary!

After eight years of service

1954 Corvette—Just shoot me!!