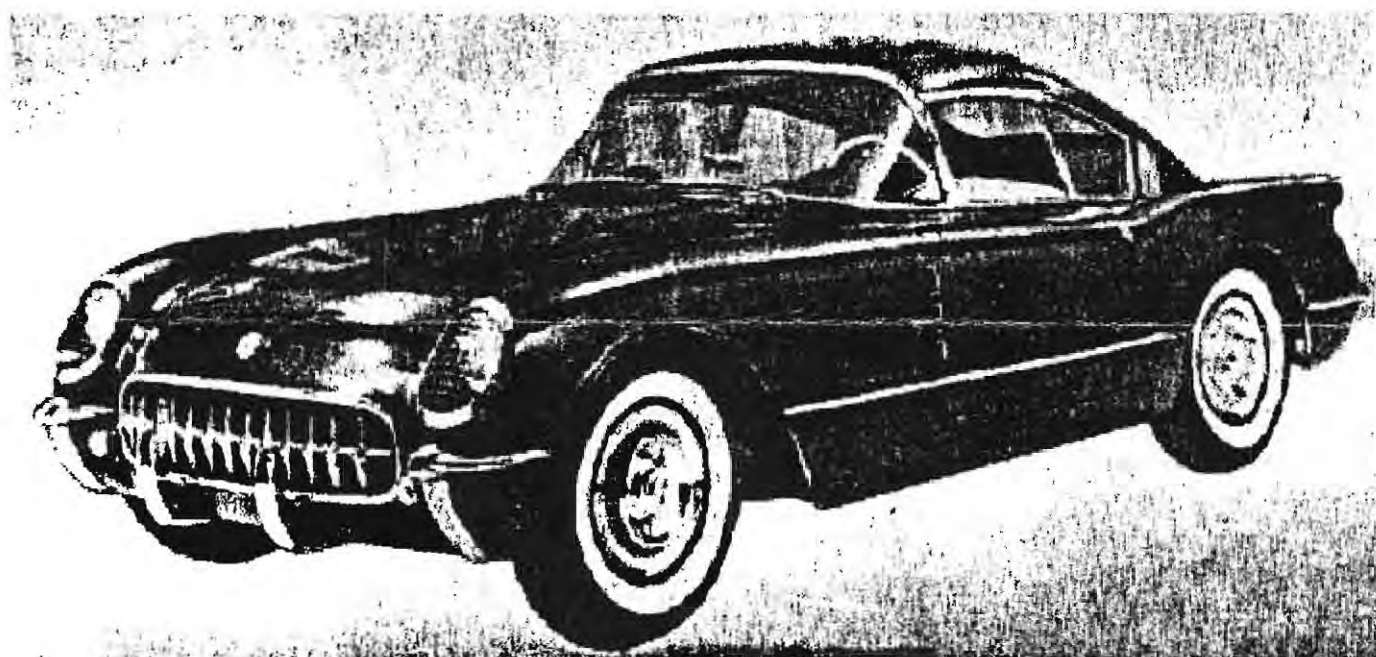


Corvairation

Tucson Corvair Association
Volume 25, Number 6

Tucson, Arizona
August 1998



The first Corvair was a Corvette! This Corvair was shown at the 1954 G.M. Motorama. The description read, "The Corvair is a streamlined two-passenger coupe version of the Corvette. Except for the overall height of 51", the general specifications follow those of the production sports car. No commitments for production of the coupe (or the longer Nomad station wagon) have been announced."

TUCSON CORVAIR ASSOCIATION

EST. 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 America (COSA \ 857).

MONTHLY MEETINGS are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month except December. One technical/social event is planned for each month with the exception of July and August.

MEMBERSHIP DUES: Initial dues \$22.00 per year for Fa. and \$ 15.00 for singles , (includes name tag) renewable \$ 18.00 and \$ 15.00 and payable to the TUCSON CORVAIR ASSOCIATION through the Membership Chairperson.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Report any change of address or phone number to the Membership Chairperson. Do not report such changes to the Editor.

COSA MEMBERSHIP DUES are \$28 per year and include a subscription to the COSA Communique, a monthly publication. COSA membership is not require for membership in TCA but is highly recommended. See any TCA officer for information.

CLASSIFIED ADS are free to members and \$2.50 per 4-line ad to all others.

DEADLINE for all materials submitted for publication in the Corvairsation is the 1st for that month's issue. Mail or deliver all materials to the Editor.

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Editor's Note: In the late 70s John Wipff published a couple of volumes called The Compleat History of the Corvair for the Corvair Nut!! In Volume I he presented several chapters of information that we would like to share (or reshare, as the case may be) with you over the next few months.

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST CORVAIR WAS A CORVETTE

By John Wipff

Corvair got its name from an experimental Corvette, first shown publicly in 1954. The name was a contraction of 'Corvette' and 'Bel-Air.' The 'Bel-Air' was, at that time, Chevrolet's top line passenger car and the 'Corvair' looked like a 1954 Corvette with a fast back.

The ideas for the Corvair predate the 'Corvair' by several years. I say ideas because there were, for that day, many radical ideas incorporated in the Corvair. More about them later.

Ed Cole (Edward Nicholas Cole, born September 17, 1909, died May 2, 1977) is generally regarded as the 'Father of the Corvair' (in spite of what I said about Father Time in the Foreword). A Michigan native, Cole was employed as early as 1933 by Cadillac as an engine designer. During WW II he worked on tank designs and in the 40's, he and John F. Gordon helped develop the 1949 Cadillac high-compression engine.

In 1950, he was made manager of Cadillac's Cleveland Tank Plant. He equipped a room at the Lakeshore Hotel for engineering work, and he, Harry Barr and Kai Hansen (all three later worked at Chevy together), used to spend many off-duty hours at the drawing board, dreaming up ideas for the first, all-new, post-war cars. For some reason, many designs in those days had the engine in the rear.

Cole may have been influenced by the British Burney car or the Scarab. Preston Tucker had produced fifty cars, demonstrating that a large passenger car with a flat opposed 6-cylinder engine was feasible, if controversial. Cole himself built a Pontiac with the engine where the back seat usually was. This car, to say the least, was eye-catching. It sported a de Dion rear end and dual rear wheels on each side. He drove this car through most of the winter of 146-'47.

Many of the trio's early designs had air-cooled engines. Cole had worked with this concept in WW II when GM tested a version of the M-3 Tank with a Wright radial air-cooled engine, as did Cole's private plane, a Bonanza. Cole came to believe that this type of engine was best for a car that had to be simple, light and trouble-free.

May 1952. Cole is promoted to Chief Engineer at Chevrolet. His ideas are needed to perk up the slightly drab image of Chevy. His ideas include the establishment of a R & D department, headed by Maurice Olley, who had worked on the 'Cadet' project. Olley is considered by many in the industry to be the foremost idea-man for small cars.

Cole directs research in the area of unit construction and special tire design. Nash has the jump on GM in unit construction and Cole knows that weight will be crucial in a small car. In 1955 Cole negotiates for the aluminum he knows he will need.

Spring of 1956. A re-worked Porsche holds the first drive-train components of what will later be called a 'Unipack'. After a high-speed try-out of this first attempt, Cole bounces out of the car, smiling, and says, "This is it!"

But he still has a selling job to do at Chevrolet. GM solves that problem, (if it is one), by making Cole General Manager of Chevy Division in July 1956.

He immediately installs the experimental drivetrain in two Porsches and several Vauxhalls and begins extensive road testing.

August 1956. Cole and Harley Earl, GM's Chief Stylist, arrange to begin styling studies in Bob McLean's semi-secret Research Studio. In scale models at first and later on a 102" wheelbase, an interior package is worked out. The project is then moved, full-sized, to the Advanced Studio, under the direction of Ned Nickels.

Early 1957. Chevy engineers produce one complete car with a body of their own design. The car has virtually no lines in common with the car finally called the Corvair, but the engineers don't care, as long as they can drive it! They even call it a mule. It has bulbous lines and even a fake grille (with a bug-screen installed on the car when tested in Kentucky and Tennessee).

September 1957. After a hard-sell job on Harlow Curtice, the last of the one-man rulers of GM, Cole sends a memo dated September 9 to top GM officials stating that Chevrolet would handle the design, development, testing, styling and manufacturing process development for the Holden 25 (it did not state, nor could it at this stage, that Chevy would manufacture the car).

Holden is the name of a car produced in Australia by GM and is to be the cover name for the Corvair project. Chevy had designed cars for Holden before, so when parts suppliers are asked to bid on parts and machine tools to be delivered to the Port of San Francisco for the Holden 25, no one is tipped off to the ruse, including journalists. GM's overseas Operations Division heightens the drama by issuing orders to Chevy for the 'new car.' It even wires Chevy in November, 1957, asking for 'top priority' for the 'new car.' And top priority is what it gets. Neither Cole nor Curtice is a man to put something off. In October, two more 'Holden' prototypes are approved. In December, the car is approved by the GM Engineering Policy Dept. And in January, 1958, by the Board of Directors. The passage by the Board allows Chevy to have jurisdiction over the car and, finally, gives Chevy cash for production.

July 1958. A new plant at Willow Run breaks ground. This plant is exclusively for the production of Corvair.

But before we get into the actual design and production, there is an interesting parallel to be drawn between Corvair and another rear-engined car. This other car is so similar in so many respects that it seems very fitting at this point to digress just a little.

The name of that car is the Tucker.

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Car Collectors' Magazine, 1979
Corvair Decade
Corvair Affair
How to Hot Rod Corvair Engines
Chilton's Repair and Tune-up Guide for the Corvair
Unsafe at Any Speed, Ralph Nader
Stories from a Twentieth-Century Life, Sears
Corvair History and Restoration
Windmill, 3-1-71 to 10-1-72
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From one Corvair lover to another..

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Send ads directly to CorvaIr sation editor*****

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FOURTH WEDNESDAY of each month (except December)

DENNY'S RESTAURANT 6484 E.BROADWAY. Tucson,Az.

6:00 pm: Parking Lot Bull Session

6:30 pm: Dinner (optional)

7:30 pm: Meeting starts

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Wednesday Aug.26 1998

Thursday Sept. 3 1998

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