

# YELLOW



# YEOWSERS!

As if running 10s for less than \$10k wasn't enough, this Corvair gets it done with a front-mounted Buick 455.



After relocating the firewall rearward, there was plenty of space to drop the massive Buick right in. According to Larry, despite its substantial external dimensions, a 455 weighs about the same as a small-block Chevy. These Bulldog Performance aluminum heads are the first set of Buick castings the company ever built.

By Stephen Kim

Photography by Robert McGaffin

**T**he evolution versus creationism debate is one of those volatile subjects you just shouldn't discuss, but for the sake of debate, we're going to do it anyway. What prompts such dialogue in a car magazine is a vehicular specimen that transforms what is typically an either-or proposition into a harmonious coexistence of both beliefs. A front-engine, Buick-powered Corvair that runs 10s and rides on a G-body chassis doesn't just spontaneously materialize by itself. The ingenuity of its craftsmanship and the diversity of its gene pool most certainly required an omnipotent creator. Nevertheless, had the lineage of rear-engine Chevys not gone sterile, it may have evolved into something that bears an uncanny resemblance to Larry Bell's '67 Corvair. It's a fascinating convergence of diametrically divergent ideologies, but when it comes to cars, two schools of thought are better than one.

To describe Larry's car-building ability as omnipotent is by no means a stretch of the truth. Here's a man who mounted a unibody car on a conventional frame, turned what was a trunk into an engine bay, stuffed that space with a big-block Buick, and





fabbed it all himself in his garage for less than \$10,000 using a heap of salvage yard parts. So significant are these engineering triumphs that the car's 10.96-at-123-mph e.t.'s seem like only a minor achievement. Not one to gloat, however, he quickly deflects much of the credit to his friend Mike Myers who, through an act of sheer happenstance, realized that the Corvair and G-body have the exact same wheelbase. "Mike had a Monte Carlo that had been sitting in the snow for a long time, and he took the body off to sell it to someone," Larry explains. "He slid the frame back in the garage, laid down a bare Corvair body on top of it to maximize garage space, and real-

**"The Corvair was the first GM vehicle with an IRS, turbo and rear-mounted engine, but unfortunately, firsts don't always work that well."**—Larry Bell

ized that the spring pockets on the two cars lined up perfectly. The Corvair was so rotted out that Mike had nothing to lose, so he just started whacking on the car to see if he could mount it onto the G-body frame, and it worked."

Coming from a family of Corvair nuts, his friend's freak discovery laid the foundation for a future project in Larry's head. The big difference was that, unlike Mike, a small-block Chevy wasn't part of the plan. Once the proud owner of

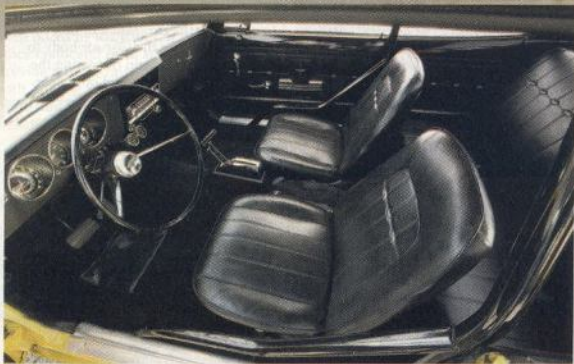




The 455 Buick is well known for its impressive torque output, as these poor Mickey Thompson's can attest. When wheelspin isn't the goal, the Corvair pulls 1.5-second 60-foot times. Not bad at all considering the entire suspension is a stock '85 Monte Carlo, except for the front shocks.



a '72 Grand Sport convertible that saw its share of street skirmishes, Larry has been an avid Buick man for several years. "I went to Mike's house once he was further along with his project and decided that I also wanted to build a Corvair as long as I could fit a 455 Buick in it," Larry recalls. Fortunately, he knew just where to go to find a suitable project car. His dad had purchased two Corvairs (one that was wrecked with low miles, and another intended to be a donor) that he planned on turning into one solid car. He never got around to it, so Larry gave him a call to buy both cars from his dad. "He had asked me if I was interested in taking them off his hands in a past conversation, and I said no. When I called him back to take him



Although it's mint, the interior is all original and hasn't been restored. As the story goes, the Corvair was wrecked in the front and back in 1969, and parked in a barn until Larry's dad bought it over 30 years later. An aftermarket tach blends seamlessly into the gauge cluster in place of the factory clock.

up on his offer, he said he just called a salvage yard to come haul them off. Had I called him two hours later, this car would not have been built," Larry

says. The next step was scoring a frame, and Larry again happened to be at the right place at the right time. He spotted an '85 Monte Carlo SS at a salvage yard





that was moments away from getting crushed, and talked the owner into letting him have the frame for free.

While you can chalk up his impeccable timing to luck, the rest of the project was made possible only by Larry's remarkable fabrication skills. "There is a tremendous amount of custom fitting involved, so a project like this isn't for the faint of heart," he advises. Larry didn't keep a running tally, but he estimates that he's invested several hundred hours of labor over the course of a year



to complete the car. Much of that time was spent mating the Corvair body to the G-body frame, and relocating the motor to the opposite end of the car.



The reinforced sections of the unibody had to be cut out of the Corvair, which Larry says was quite a challenge. "After cutting and narrowing the rocker panels, I slipped the Corvair body over the side rails of the G-body frame. The front of the frame was cut near the steering box, and the back of the frame was cut right above the rear wheels. The frame was welded directly to the body at those points, which I thought would give me a harsh ride, but the car is so smooth it's unbelievable. The location of the cuts allows running a G-body suspension underneath a Corvair," Larry explains.

To put the scope of this undertaking into perspective, attaching the body to the frame was just the beginning. Since rear-engine Corvairs don't have trans tunnels, Larry modified the floorboard out of a G-body to fit. Furthermore, the firewall had to be moved rearward to make space for the big-block; a new floorboard was fabricated where the engine used to live, and a gas tank out of a '72 Skylark was relocated to the back of the car and tucked up underneath the newly created trunk. Surprisingly, in the midst of all the hacking performed in the name of functionality, he didn't forget about the pretty stuff. Bolt-on aesthetic embellishments are in short

**"I remember my dad racing a friend of his with his Corvair when I was a kid, and the thrill of cheering him on stuck with me."**—Larry Bell





supply for Corvairs, but once again Larry's fab skills paid off. He bought a hood scoop for a Chevelle, then cut, curved, and stitch-welded it at 1-inch increments to re-contour its profile to match the Corvair. The same treatment was applied to the spoiler, which is off a Camaro; a process that took 40 hours by itself.

Perhaps the biggest drawback of transforming a unibody chassis into a full-frame car is the weight penalty. The extra metal bumps curb weight up to 3,200 lbs, which is still relatively lightweight, but that mass isn't much of an issue with a 455 under the hood. It's



based on a \$100 salvage yard core that's been bored to 462 cubes. It retains the stock crank and rods, and Wiseco slugs provide a 10.2:1 ratio of squish. Topped with Bulldog Performance aluminum heads and a mild 231/239-at-.050 Lunati hydraulic flat-tappet cam, Larry

## WHERE THE MONEY WENT

1967 Chevy Corvair:	\$450
1985 Chevy Monte Carlo chassis:	\$0
Paint and body:	\$1,000
Wheels:	\$600
Front tires:	\$120
Rear tires:	\$320
Engine block:	\$100
Crank:	stock
Rods:	stock
Pistons and rings:	\$350
Bearings:	\$50
Machining:	\$1,000
Cam:	\$130
Lifters:	\$40
Pushrods:	\$300
Rockers:	\$350
Timing set:	\$35
Cylinder heads:	\$1,800
Intake manifold (used):	\$250
Carburetor:	\$500
Distributor:	stock
Ignition box:	\$150
Plug wires:	\$90
Oil pan:	stock
Oil pump (used):	\$3
Gaskets:	\$100
Headers (swap meet):	\$100
Mufflers/collectors:	\$260
Fuel system:	stock
Carter pump (swap meet):	\$5
Radiator:	\$150
Water pump:	\$25
Cooling fan (boneyard):	\$25
Trans (boneyard):	\$400, built by owner
Converter:	\$250
Shifter:	\$100
Rearend (used):	\$450
Rear suspension:	stock
Front suspension:	stock
Brake shoes:	stock
Seat covers:	stock
Gauges:	\$0
Rollbar:	\$300
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$9,803</b>

**"If you're not good at metal work, you don't want to attempt something like this because it's very difficult."**—Larry Bell





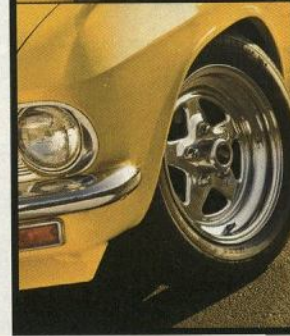
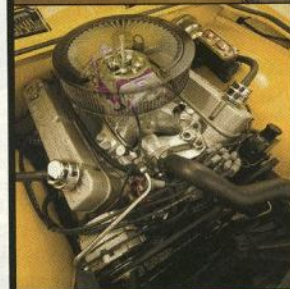
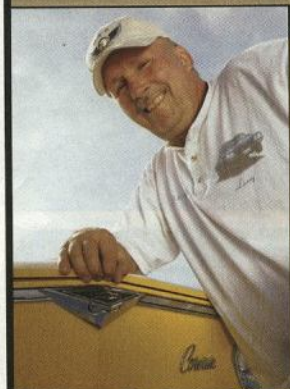
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estimates the output at 550 hp. It's all backed by a 200-4R trans and an 8.5-inch 10-bolt rearend, both out of a Buick Grand National. Although definitive dyno numbers would be nice, the only performance figures that really matter are the Corvair's 10-second e.t.'s.

While mechanical kinks are inevitable in a project of this caliber, the Corvair has only had one chronic ailment. As rear-engine cars, Corvairs had no need for a grille up front, which made cooling the Buick mill quite a chore. "I didn't want to cut a hole between the headlights for airflow because it would have ruined the look of the car," Larry explains. "I used the largest radiator that would fit between the frame rails, and angled the top of it forward to direct air through it from the bottom of the car. It overheated at first, so I cut the back of the bumper a bit to improve airflow, and that solved my cooling problems for good."

Obviously, Larry is one hell of a craftsman, and without question, the creator of one wicked street machine. His original goal was to build a car that looked like it came equipped with a front-mounted big-block Buick from the factory, and he's been wildly successful in his endeavors. In the process of addressing the Corvair's quirks—its vapid powerplant, oddball engine placement, marginal driveline strength, and love-it-or-leave-it styling—he's infused it with adaptations that could have prolonged the platform's existence had they been developed decades prior. **PHR**

**"You can cover up a lot of sins with carpet, but my car looks factory, even in inconspicuous spots."—Larry Bell**



### BY THE NUMBERS

#### '67 CHEVY CORVAIR

Larry Bell, 55 • Moro, IL  
Total cost to build: \$9,803  
Best ET: 10.96 at 123 mph

#### ENGINE

Type: Buick 455 (462 cubic inches)  
Block: factory block bored to 4.349 inches  
Oiling: stock  
Rotating assembly: stock 3,900-inch crank, resized stock rods, forged 10.2:1 Wiseco pistons  
Cylinder heads: Bulldog Performance aluminum castings  
Camshaft: Lunati 231/239-at, .050 hydraulic flat-tappet, .517/.541-inch lift, 112-degree LSA  
Valvetrain: Edelbrock double-roller timing set, Smith Bros. pushrods, T&D shaft-mount rockers  
Induction: Kenne Bell single-plane manifold, Proform 950-cfm carb  
Ignition: stock distributor, MSD 6AL box  
Exhaust: T/A Performance 17/8-inch long-tube headers, 3-inch collectors, Flowmaster mufflers

Built by: owner

#### DRIVETRAIN

Transmission: GM 200-4R trans, custom 3,200-stall converter and trans cooler, B&M shifter  
Rear axle: GM 8.5-inch 10-bolt rearend, 3.42:1 gears, limited-slip differential

#### CHASSIS

Front suspension: stock '85 Monte Carlo with cut factory coil springs and Lakewood 90/10 shocks  
Rear suspension: stock '85 Monte Carlo  
Brakes: stock '85 Monte Carlo

#### WHEELS & TIRES

Wheels: Weld Prostar 15x6, front; 15x8, rear  
Tires: Michelin 195/60R15, front; Mickey Thompson 275/50R15 drag radials, rear

