

Picking a 396 or a 427?

Both mid-year big-blocks can be a ton of fun; just don't forget your asbestos shoes, and buy the best example you can find

by Colin Comer

Some like it hotter

Q I'm thinking of buying a mid-year big-block. 1965 396 or 1966 427—which one is better?—*J.A., Sacramento, CA*

A *Technically speaking, neither is "better." Both the 396 and 427 engines are incredibly robust and have very few weak points. What it boils down to is personal preference. The 396 is unique because it is a one-year-only fitment in the Corvette, as well as the first big-block and the first year for disc brakes and a host of other improvements to the Corvette in general.*

Now, the '66 427 is also the first year for the 427, which some will argue is just as important. If you want a '66, the early "450" horsepower examples are touted as being worth more. That may be, but under that air cleaner decal there is no difference. I think between the '65 and '66 cars in the marketplace, you'll get more bang for your buck with the '66.

My advice, as with any Corvette, is to just look for the best example you can find, make sure it is what it purports to be, and do your homework. I've owned both '65 396 cars and '66 427 cars and I'd defy anybody to note a difference in normal driving. Either way, you can't lose when you get a good big-block mid-year. They are a ton of fun; just don't forget your asbestos shoes.

Just avoid rainy days

Q The wipers quit working on my '58 Corvette. It looks like a bitch to repair them. Should I give it a go or just turn it over to a shop and write the check? Any idea how much this'll cost me?—*P.K., St. Louis, MO*



1966 427

A *If you are patient, pretty handy with mechanical things, and willing to study the factory service manual and some parts books, you can fix it yourself. You are correct; it is a complex Rube Goldberg-esque design with cables and pulleys, but like anything else, it's just nuts and bolts, as they say.*

If you do give it a go yourself, one tip: Don't put the wiper arms on until you are 100% positive everything is working correctly. I've seen lots of paint jobs scarred up and parts broken when the wipers go the wrong way the first time the switch is flipped.

The alternative is indeed to let a Corvette specialist fix it for you. Or you can go the resto-mod route and install one of the kits that converts the whole works to a more modern system. Cost? Like anything else these days, it is likely a time and materials repair. At \$95/hour, you can expect a \$300 repair if you are lucky, and a \$1,000 repair if you are not.

The parts are cheap and readily available, so doing it yourself will save the lion's share of the expense if you don't count your time. If all this is still daunting, do nothing and just avoid rainy days—or buy lots of Rain-X.

Resist the urge to tinker

Q I've been trying to decide between a big-block C3 with 3x2 carburetion or just a 4-barrel car. The price difference is significant. Is the 3x2 setup worth the extra money, does it give significantly more performance, or is it just more trouble to tune?—*D.H., Denver, CO*

A *"Worth" is a relative term. Functionally, you'd likely be better with a single 4-barrel car. They are indeed easier to tune and offer performance that is comparable, unless you are looking for every last tenth of a second in the quarter mile. The added performance of the factory 3x2 cars comes more from changes to the engine specifications than carburetion.*

All things being equal, a 3x2 car will maintain its price premium over a 4-barrel car, so if you ever sell you will get the extra initial cost back, as well as have more potential buyers, as high-horse cars are rarer and much more desirable. As far as tuning a car with "trips," find a good mechanic with a chassis dyno and have him set them up once. You'll find when that is done they will stay in fine tune for many years. Just resist the

nearly irresistible urge to tinker with them.

Hard tops just sit in the garage

Q I just bought a pretty good old 1959. It needs paint and it doesn't have a hard top. This seems like the time to get one and paint the whole thing together. What should I pay for a hard top and what should I look out for in terms of damage and problems? Is it worth getting one at all? I'm going to have to replace the soft top anyway.—*J.Y., Pasco, WA*

A *If you think you'll actually USE the hard top, then yes, it is a neat accessory. The problem is I bet it would sit in the garage taking up space most of the time, if you are like most people who have one. They look great installed, but driving with one on is an acquired taste. They amplify everything we try to ignore about our beloved cars—heat, noise, and rattles.*

If you are still in the market, try Glassworks in Crescent, Pennsylvania (thehardtopshop.com), as they sell fully restored hard tops for around \$6k, unpainted, which isn't that much more than people have been getting for beat-up used ones for years.

If your car has the frame for the soft top, I highly recommend putting a new convertible top on as well. You'll never be able to predict when you may need it, although it is usually when you are farther from home than you have ever been and there are no gas stations or overpasses in sight to provide shelter. Whatever you decide, good luck with the new "lid" and congrats on the pretty good old '59. ■