

## Don't Turn a Diamond in the Rough into a Lump of Coal

A '58 FI car is a desirable and reasonably rare Corvette and it deserves to be correct—even if it will never again be completely original

### Date-coded or crate motor

**Q** My dad died recently and left me a 1958 Corvette in pretty rough shape. The body and trim seem fine—just dull and dirty—and the seats are cracked, but otherwise the interior is all there. However the engine and transmission aren't. I believe the car was a 290-hp fuelie originally, but I have no idea where the powertrain is now. Am I better off going through all the hoops to track down a date-correct 283/290 and four-speed, or do you recommend some kind of crate engine? I don't want to end up with a crazy custom, but I would like to drive this thing.—*M.H., Park Forest, IL*



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**A** *If this is indeed an original and fundamentally sound FI car that's only lacking a correct drivetrain, you'll do yourself a huge disservice by not tracking down a proper engine and related components. A '58 FI car is a desirable and reasonably rare Corvette and deserves to be made correct—even if it will never again be completely original. I'm sure your dad would be proud if you returned his old Vette to its former glory, rather than hot-rodding it.*

### Not desirable, but cheap

**Q** I understand over 51,000 1984 Corvettes were built, and that they are still a bargain buy because of this number. But surely a lot less than 51,000 examples survive today, and is it possible their value will climb as a result? Also, how many do you think still exist?—*C.F., East Stroudsburg, PA*

**A** *Without sourcing DMV records and other data (a process far more costly than*

*actually buying an '84 Vette) to make an educated guess, there is no way to establish a precise number of survivors. Suffice it to say there are still plenty around thanks to the high original production—and even if only half survive, it's still a huge number. Because of this (and the somewhat inexplicable "Rule of Fours," which says '54, '64 and '84 models have always suffered in the marketplace) I don't see values ever climbing significantly. Bargains are in the eye of the beholder, and the only bargain I see in buying a first-year C4 is getting a fun Corvette for very little initial investment.*

### Beating the pre-ignition blues

**Q** My big-block C3 Vette doesn't like our new reformulated pump gas. If I don't put in race gas it pings like crazy and runs on after I shut off the ignition. Is there a way around this without having the engine modified internally? Nine dollars

a gallon for racing fuel is killing me!—*H.G., Austin, TX*

**A** *The causes of and cures for pre-ignition can vary widely from car to car. So while you didn't mention which big block you have, or any details on the overall powertrain, if it is even close to factory specs and compression ratio there may be hope. First, verify that the engine is in proper tune—and this means the appropriate spark plugs for the engine build and driving conditions, no vacuum leaks, proper carburetor jetting and air-fuel mixture, a properly operating cooling system, correct ignition timing, etc.*

*If this all checks out and you still have an issue, you may need to adjust your ignition timing to the limitations of today's fuel. I'd suggest starting with a maximum of 32 degrees total centrifugal advance, and restricting the vacuum advance (if so equipped) so the timing doesn't exceed 37 degrees total at light-throttle*

*cruise. If needed, you can have the distributor re-curved to maintain roughly 10 degrees advance at idle so the response will be what you are used to, but limit the total advance to the numbers above. If it doesn't detonate after this, and you want to experiment, advance the total timing slightly until you get faint detonation, and then back it off a few degrees.*

*If pre-ignition still persists after taking the above steps, I would try either blending the pump gas with a few gallons of race gas per tank (Sunoco and VP Racing Fuels both market street-legal 100-octane unleaded) or using a street-legal octane booster.*

### Four-speed swap recommended

**Q** I have a 1967 327/300 coupe with a Powerglide that is on its last legs. Will I hurt the value of my car if I install a period-correct four-speed rather than have the automatic rebuilt?

And how much does desirability versus originality come into play?—**K.V., Humboldt, CA**

**A** First of all, you are right that that a four-speed is far more enjoyable than a Powerglide, and much more appropriate for a mid-year Vette. It will also really wake up the performance of your base 327. And second, if you are keeping the car as a long-term driver, the originality question doesn't really gain much traction. That said, since most cars eventually move on to other owners (either through an intended sale or as part of the owner's estate), it is important to preserve their originality as much as possible.

If this were my car, and I intended to keep it, I would absolutely do the swap to a four-speed, but using all correct original parts. It is a bolt-in operation and very easy to accomplish. Then put the Powerglide

and all related parts on a shelf, and should if you ever decide to sell, the most you will be out is the reinstall labor should the new owner want two pedals rather than three. Then you can take the four-speed setup and sell it to another mid-year owner who has likewise tired of his slushbox.

#### Let survivors live

**Q** I'm looking at buying a Survivor-certified 1968 Corvette 427/390 coupe, but I've

heard that first-year C3s had quite a few problems when they were introduced. I don't intend on driving it much more than to and from the occasional show, but I don't want to end up with a car that has issues—especially since its Survivor certification will limit what I'll want to fix. Would I be better off looking for a 1969 model in similar condition?—**D.F., Dallas, TX**

**A** You are correct—when new, the 1968 Corvettes

had their fair share of first-year issues. However I would trust that by now any 42-year old car has already had any mechanical shortcomings proper fixed, and so if you can live with the remaining gremlins that only affect ease of use (for example, difficult-to-operate door handles), I say go for it. The added bonus is you can buy a '68 for less than a comparably equipped '69 in similar condition—so the first-year C3 ultimately offers more bang for the buck.



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#### And please do it quickly

**Q** I put gold 24-inch Asanti rims on my 2007 Vette. Now I have a bad vibration, and the tires stick out so far they rub the body over hard bumps. What should I do?—**B.B., Atlanta, GA**

**A** Take off the wheels, then turn yourself into the Taste Police. ■