



# the fifth wheel

MARCH 2011

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## Inside this issue

<i>The Decade that Taste Forgot!</i>	Pg. 1
<i>The CRV / Piranha Story</i>	Pg. 2
<i>LVCC Welcomes Timothy Turner!</i>	Pg. 3
<i>Git Your Corvairs Out! By Bill Remaly</i>	Pg. 3
<i>LVCC Meeting Notes</i>	Pg. 3
<i>Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords</i>	Pg. 4
<i>Hemmings Is Looking for Corvairs</i>	Pg. 4
<i>NECC Update</i>	Pg. 4
<i>Classified Ads</i>	Pg. 4
<i>LVCC Membership Roster</i>	Pg. 5
<i>Next LVCC Meeting</i>	Pg. 6
<i>LVCC Calendar of Events</i>	Pg. 6

## The Decade that Taste Forgot!

Ah, the 1970s! Polyester suits, avocado refrigerators, shag carpeting, disco music and a Fu Manchu mustache for every man!

We used to celebrate the opening of every new MacDonalds! Cheap burgers and gasoline at 32 cents a gallon. How I miss those days!

But these were times of great trepidation in the auto industry. The feds were raining down new regulations governing exhaust emissions. And automotive performance entered a dark age as GM, Ford and Chrysler tried to develop engines that met the new emission standards.

The engines ran cleaner, but the cars were a lot slower. No longer could you trundle down to your local Chevy dealer and buy your Chevelle with a 425 horsepower big block rat motor. Too much pollution!

But the times were a changin', and people didn't care so much for performance anymore. The baby-boomers were growing up, and now they wanted cheap elegance!

And Detroit dished it out: Padded roofs. Opera windows. Coach lamps. Landau irons. Spring-loaded die-cast hood ornaments. Crushed velour. Perhaps the average American could not afford a 500 SEL Benz, but we had our Corinthian leather! Such class!

Corvair people often bemoan the fact that General Motors axed the Corvair in 1969, but I'm glad they did. Can you imagine a Corvair with opera windows and a fake Rolls Royce grill?



**The 1970s. Can you imagine a Corvair with opera windows and a Rolls Royce grill?**

*The Fifth Wheel* is published monthly by the Lehigh Valley Corvair Club (LVCC), Inc. We accept articles of interest to Corvair owners for publication. Classified-style advertising of interest to Corvair owners is available free of charge to all persons. Commercial advertising is also available on a fee basis. Please contact our newsletter editor for details.

LVCC is one of the many regional chapters of the Corvair Society of America (CORSA), a non-profit organization that was incorporated to satisfy the common needs of individuals interested in the preservation, restoration, and operation of the Chevrolet Corvair. LVCC caters to Corvair people who live in and around the Lehigh Valley Region of eastern Pennsylvania. This is a very special car club! LVCC dues are \$10 a year for CORSA members or \$15 a year for non-CORSA members.

## ***The CRV / Piranha Story, by Nicholas K. Whitlow*** ***Reprinted here with permission from the author.***

## **Powered by CORVAIR!**

During the early 60's, automobiles were made mostly of metal. Plastic was starting to be used more frequently, but the plastic companies wanted to do more.

Marbon Chemical, a division of Borg-Warner, decided the best way to promote the use of plastic in automobiles would be to build an entire car out of plastic. They hired a young designer by the name of Dan Deaver to come up with the design for the car which was to be "thermoformed" out of the Marbon material called "Cyclocac." Deaver's design was not only functional for the molding process, but a striking new style that still looks modern today.

Deaver was also co-founder of Centaur Engineering, which was in the race car business. With the resources of Marbon, and the expertise of Centaur, the first plastic prototype was constructed in late 1964 and first displayed at the SAE convention in Detroit in January 1965.

This prototype was called the CRV, short for "Cyclocac Research Vehicle." It was a two-seater roadster with a wrap-around windscreen, and featured a rear-mounted, 4-cylinder water-cooled engine. The chassis was based on the Centaur racecar tubular frame. Workers put the finishing touches on the first CRV prototype just prior to its' debut in January 1965.

The CRV was a hit at the SAE show, so Marbon decided to take the next step and build a more powerful version and race the car in competition to test the durability of the material.

Centaur was commissioned to build the racer and have it ready for an SCCA race at Mid-Ohio in June 1965. It was constructed by Centaur employees and friends. Trant Jarman would be driving the car. As an incentive to finish the car on time, Marbon offered to make Centaur Engineering their Concepts Division. The car was completed on time

and Centaur went big time.

This second prototype, the CRV-II, was another roadster and was built over a fiberglass chassis tub with suspension pieces attached to metal framework in the front and rear. It was powered by an air-cooled Corvair engine mounted in the rear. Bulges had to be added to the rear fenders to allow for the oversized racing tires. The car did quite well in competition and went on to win it's class in SCCA that year. Even a crash with a Jaguar during one race showed the plastic body was durable enough for everyday use.

The CRV-III was the third prototype build by Centaur, but was not a complete car. It was built for crash testing. Needless to say, plastic cars do not afford a great amount of protection. During the test, the car was demolished and the driver would have been impaled by the stock Corvair steering column that had been used. This was changed to a partially collapsible Toronado steering column on all later cars.

The next step was to build a more practical, street version of the car, so CRV-IV was build in February 1966. It featured a full windshield and coupe roof.

The doors opened in the conventional method, but the side windows were part of the roof and opened "gull wing" style.

Again, the car was Corvair-powered, and featured two Porsche rear grilles in the top of the rear deck to aid cooling. The gas tank was a cylindrical fiberglass affair that was mounted to the chassis on the passenger side, just in front of the rear wheel.

A second coupe, CRV-V, was built a short time later, and can be identified by the rectangular mirrors mounted on the doors. Both cars were immediately sent overseas to promote the use of plastic at Marbon's foreign production facilities. It is not confirmed if either car was ever returned to the USA.

It was never Marbon Chemical's intention to manufacture cars, but merely to create a market for their plastic products. They had hoped to find someone that would want to take over production of the CRV so they could sell them the parts.

Then along came AMT Corporation of Troy, Michigan. AMT was a major plastic model car manufacturer and was



***The Corvair-powered "Man from U.N.C.L.E." Piranha. Fully-restored and currently owned by Robert Short in California.***

doing very well at that time. They were looking for ways to promote their model products and offering a plastic-bodied specialty car sounded like a natural.

AMT purchased the rights from Marbon to build the plastic car, and agreed to purchase the plastic bodies and fiberglass chassis from them. Originally AMT planned to build 50 cars a year. To promote the new venture, AMT decided to build both a drag racing and sports racing version of the car. They even gave the car a new name, the "Piranha."

The Piranha dragster was build and toured the drag racing circuit in 1967 and was a big hit. It was one of the first rear-engine "funny cars" and almost cracked the 200 MPH barrier.

Besides the well known dragster version, AMT built and sponsored a sports racing version of the Piranha. It was driven in various events by Dick Carbajal.

AMT also hired the famous car customizer Gene Winfield to build a special car for the new TV series, "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." Winfield suggested using a Piranha, and thus the "Man from U.N.C.L.E." car became the most well known Piranha.

Soon, AMT started to build street versions of the 1967 Piranha. Changes

from the original CRV design included an extended roofline, small hinged hatches in the side windows, and optional "Gurney bubbles" in the roof for more head room. AMT had planned to offer the Piranha for sale to the public for around \$5,000.

Unfortunately, due to the high cost of building each car by hand and obtaining the Corvair engines and parts from GM, it cost AMT well over that amount to finish each car. After about four street-cars were completed, and GM announced they were dropping the Corvair very soon, the arrangement between AMT and Marbon broke down. AMT turned over the four unsold Piranha coupes and all the extra parts to Marbon and they parted ways.

Apparently, Marbon stripped the AMT I.D. plates off the finished Piranhas, added CRV logos to the bodies, and distributed them for display at various company facilities, including their home office in Washington, West Virginia. Some of these cars eventually found their way into private hands. It is also possible that another car or two was assembled from the extra parts returned from AMT.

Marbon did find another customer for the CRV in a kit car company located in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Cycloc bodies were sold as bolt-ons for the VW chassis. They were available in both coupes and roadsters with Marbon furnishing the bodies to the kit car company. Eventually, the company made molds of the body and produced a modified version in fiberglass.

Centaur Engineering went on to design and produce chairs, boats, campers, and other items made from Cycloc, but Marbon eventually changed their focus

and closed the doors of their Concepts division and the assets and fixtures were auctioned off. Rumor has it that CRV parts and/or cars were sold at the auction.

At least 12 CRV's and Piranha's were built. A total of seven cars are known to still exist. One of them is located in Pennsylvania. Rumors persist that either Toyota or Honda have a CRV in a museum in Japan.

You can read more about these special cars at author Nick Whitlow's website: <http://www.c-we.com/piranha>

## **GET YOUR CORVAIRS OUT!** *by LVCC Prez Bill Remaly*

Winter is nearly over, and I'm glad it's gone. I hope to see all of you at our meetings, now that the weather is improving. Soon it will be time to drive our Corvairs again!

## **LVCC WELCOMES...**

Our newest member, Timothy Turner of Fogelsville, PA! Tim joined us at the beginning of February and we hope to meet him soon!

## **LVCC MEETING NOTES**

LVCC held its regular monthly meeting on February 23, 2011. President Bill Remaly chaired the meeting. Here are notes on the topics of discussion:

Craigs list. Dennis Stamm and Fred Scherzer talked about their experiences in selling cars and parts on Ebay and Craigs list. Fred relies on Ebay. Dennis said he has sold three or four cars on Craigs list. Both of them said that, if you are careful in picking your counterparties, Ebay and Craigs list can be used as to buy and sell without much risk.

Atlantic City Car Show. Keith Koehler and Fred Scherzer attended the Atlantic City Car Show in February. They



**Corvair-powered Piranha owned by Dick Carbajal. This is one of the cars built by AMT. Note the 1965 Corvair tail-light lenses, headers, and deep-sump oil pan.**

talked about a number of the cars they saw, including some very high-price restorations for sale. For example, one 1960 Chevy Impala was priced at \$60,000, and although it was billed as factory-stock, many engine compartment parts were aftermarket replacements, not factory original.

**Corvair Tires.** Although 13 inch tires are widely available, 185/80x13 tires are becoming very rare. This particular size is close match to the 6.50x13 tires Chevy installed on Corvairs at the factory back in the 1960s. Until recently, Firestone offered 185/80x13s, but they have been discontinued. Dennis Stamm said reproductions are available from Coker Tire, but they are extremely expensive. Fred Scherzer mentioned that Clarks is offering new 185/80x13s in their latest 2011 catalog supplement. Al Lacki thinks they are manufactured by Maxxis.

**LVCC Events for 2011.** Dennis Stamm offered to investigate the possibility of a club trip to the Biglerville car museum and oval race track near Gettysburg. The museum has a number of historic sprint cars on display. There was also talk about a plant tour of the Harley Davidson manufacturing plant in York, PA.

### **GABRIELLE GIFFORDS**

Certainly you are aware of the heinous attack on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and numerous bystanders that

took place in Arizona recently .

What you may not know is that Congresswoman Giffords is a Corvair owner. As late as 2008, she owned not one but two Corvairs, a '63 and a '64 along with other antique cars and motorcycles.

The entire Corvair community is hoping for her full and speedy recovery.

### **HEMMINGS IS LOOKING FOR CORVAIRS...**

Richard Lentinello of Hemmings Motor News is preparing a photo book about Corvairs.

It will feature original, unrestored Corvairs and Richard Lentinello is trying to find and include as many as possible.

The cars don't have to be perfect, the only criteria is that they are "survivors". This means that they must wear the same paint that was applied at the factory, and still have the factory-installed upholstery.

If you have a Corvair or Corvairs that fit this description, you should reach out to Richard. His email address is [rlentinello@hemmings.com](mailto:rlentinello@hemmings.com)

Richard promises that, as soon as better weather arrives, which probably won't be until mid-April or May, he will drive down to eastern Pennsylvania and pho-

tograph all the cars the same day.

The book will be published sometime in the later part of 2012. And everyone's whose car is included will get a complementary copy of the book.

Wouldn't it be nice to have your Corvair included in a book published by Hemmings?

### **NECC UPDATE**

Northeast Corvair Council (NECC) held a meeting on February 26th for the 2012 CORSA Convention. To-do lists were prepared for various Convention activities and Rodolfo Garcia presented sketches for the Convention logo.

**Open Positions:** Although folks have volunteered to chair many of the activities, there are still some openings. NECC needs volunteers to coordinate the following convention activities:

- a. Car Display
- b. Clam Bake
- c. CORSA Membership Meeting
- d. Ice Cream Social
- e. Ladies Events
- f. Indoors vendors
- g. Outdoor Vendors.

Interested? Call or write Brian O'Neill. at 973-729-5586 or [bmoneill@juno.com](mailto:bmoneill@juno.com).

LVCC is an NECC member club.

### **CLASSIFIED ADS**

*Two Corvairs for the Price of One!* 1963 Corvair Monza convertible. White exterior with black top. Powerglide. 1965 Corvair Monza convertible. Maroon exterior with black top. Powerglide. \$3,500 buys the pair. Contact Keith Koehler. (215) 703-0644. [kpissant@verizon.net](mailto:kpissant@verizon.net)

*1964 Corvair Spyder Convertible* 164 cu. in, 150 h.p. 4 Speed, Maroon with Black Manual Top, Restored in 1992 Trophy Winner, comes with extra block, crank, cam, and many Spyder-related parts. Has Electronic Ignition, one year old Battery. White Wall tires, Wire Wheel covers. Aftermarket AM-FM-Cassette Radio. \$14,500.00 Call Fred at 215.234.4458

*Corvair Model Kits* I have 3- 69 Monzas, 140 cubic inch engine with different options for the engine all in the plastic, one was opened and the inside of the roof was painted blue other that they are complete I would like \$8.00 each (firm). I no longer work because of a spinal cord disease so I can meet at any time. Thanks, Jim [sportsmans58@hotmail.com](mailto:sportsmans58@hotmail.com)





## ***Lehigh Valley Corvair Club Membership List***

**NAME                      STREET                      TOWN      STATE ZIP      PHONE                      EMAIL**

Sorry internet readers! We redact our members personal information from newsletters published on the web.

**Legend:**

- (1) President
- (2) Vice President
- (3) Secretary / Treasurer
- (4) Newsletter Editor
- (5) Interim Editor and NECC Club Rep
- (6) NECC Club Rep

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### ***Our Postal Address:***

Lehigh Valley Corvair Club  
2304 Main Street  
Northampton, PA 18067

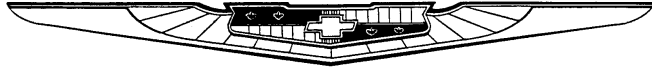
### ***Club Officers:***

President: William Remaly  
Vice President: Dennis Stamm  
Secr-Treasurer: Richard Weidner



## Next LVCC Meeting

**Date:** Wednesday, March 23, 2011 at 7:30 PM.  
**Place:** LANTA Community Center  
 2nd Floor Meeting Room  
 1060 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103



**U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords with her vintage BMW motorcycle. Read about her interest in Corvairs in this issue of *The Fifth Wheel*.**

## LVCC Calendar of Events

### March 23, 2011 at 7:30 PM ::: LVCC Monthly Club Meeting.

Regular LVCC Club Meeting. 7:30 PM at the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) office building in Allentown Pennsylvania. The LANTA building is located at: 1060 Lehigh Street Allentown, Pa 18103.

### March 25-27, 2011 ::: NorthEast Rod & Custom Car Show.

At the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, 100 Station Avenue, Oaks, PA 19456 e-mail: NEcarshow@comcast.net or <http://www.northeastcustomcarshow.com/> Or call 215-896-2923.

### March 26, 2011 ::: SLMS 3rd Annual Craft Fair & Auto Show.

At the Southern Lehigh Middle School in Pennsburg, PA. Rain or Shine. Show 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. judging begins at 12:00 noon awards presented at 2:00 pm Pre-Registration \$8.00 by March 18, after and day of show \$10.00. 05/50 raffle, cars are requested not to leave spaces until 3:00 pm. Mail registration with check or money order made payable to the "Southern Lehigh Middle School to SLMS Auto Show & Craft Fair, 327 Seminary Street Pennsburg, PA 18073. Sue MacIntyre e-mail: [macintyres@slds.org](mailto:macintyres@slds.org) or <http://www.slds.org/MiddleSchool.cfm?subpage=181831> Or call Sue MacIntyre on 215-541-0390.

### March 26, 2011 ::: 25th Annual AACA Consignment Parts Auction and Car Corral.

In Hershey, PA. Sponsored by Pennsylvania Dutch Region of the AACA. The event will be held behind the AACA Museum on Route 39. Norman Brown e-mail: [nbrown200@comcast.net](mailto:nbrown200@comcast.net) or <http://www.padutchregion.com/> or <http://www.aaca.org/> Or call Tom on 717-832-1116

### March 31-April 1, 2011 ::: Bethlehem PA - 14th Annual The Greater Lehigh Valley Auto Show.

Held at the Stabler Arena, Rauch Fieldhouse & West Pavilion. Event hours: Thursday - Saturday 10:00 am - 10:00 pm, Sun 10:00 am - 6:00 pm <http://glvautoshow.org> Or call 610-758-9691.

### June 16, 17 & 18, 2011 ::: Corvair Olympics at Indianapolis.

Corvair Olympics, in Indianapolis, Indiana. Three days of time trials, autocross and drag-racing. Visit [www.neccmotorsports.com](http://www.neccmotorsports.com) for latest information.

### July 26th-30th, 2011 ::: CORSA International Convention

Denver, Colorado. <http://rockymountaincorsa.com/denvaireleven.html>

### September 9-11, 2011 ::: Annual Corvair Camping Weekend.

At the Pioneer Campground in LaPorte, PA. Ray and Kathy Coker, Pioneer Campground's new owners, are Corvair enthusiasts. This will be their fourth annual Corvair Camping Weekend. You can visit their website at <http://www.pioneer-campground.com>. Or call Ray and Kathy by phone on (570) 946-9971.