



the fifth wheel

JULY 2012

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CORVAIR of JAPAN?

A rear-engine Japanese car that looks like a Corvair, styled by Michelotti of Italy, and raced by Cobra designer Peter Brock?

This is the strange and wonderful story of the Hino Contessa 1300, a compact Japanese car that preceded the Toyotas and Datsuns that came to our shores in the early 1970s. Have you ever wondered why the Japanese did not make a modern rear-engine car and sell it in America? Well, they almost did.

Hino has roots that stem back to 1910, when it emerged as a parts supplier for a Tokyo utility company selling natural gas for lighting. Before World War II, it morphed into a manufacturer of heavy-duty diesel engines for marine applications.

Hino and Rear Engine Cars. By the end of World War II, the Japanese homeland was in ruins and their industrial base had been destroyed. To get the economy going, the Japanese government and American administrators



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 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, Allan Lacki for details.

LVCC is one of the many regional chapters of the Corvair Society of America (CORSAs), 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.

encouraged local companies to engage in partnerships with foreigners to establish a local automotive industry. And so, between 1952 and 1953, Nissan entered into a partnership with Austin, Isuzu with Rootes, Mitsubishi with Willys, and Hino with Renault. The close cooperation in these arrangements resulted in Japanese designs that closely resembled their foreign counterparts.

Renault 4CV. Hino began to build knock-offs of the most popular Renault in production at that time, the rear-engine water-cooled Renault 4CV. Production of these WWII vintage mini cars continued until 1961, when Hino updated the body design with home-grown styling that looked vaguely Russian. But that unattractive situation was not to last very long. In April 1961, Hino commissioned the Michelotti styling studio in Italy to redesign an upgraded version of their rear engine car, which was to become the Contessa 1300.

The Michelotti Inspiration. Like many styling studios in Europe, Michelotti drew inspiration from the first generation Corvair, with its clean lines, generous greenhouse, quad headlights, and flying-wing roofline. The evidence is shown in several Michelotti designs, including the BMW 700, Triumph 2000 sedan, and others, including of course, the Hino Contessa 1300.

Mechanical Features. The four-door Contessa was introduced in September 1964 and was followed up with a coupe version in April 1965, just a few months after the second generation Corvair. Mechanically, the Contessa is quite like a Renault R8, with a 1300 cc inline four cylinder engine mounted longitudinally behind the rear axle. The engine was a five main bearing slant-four overhead valve water-cooled unit. Unlike Renault rear-engine cars, which had the radiator positioned alongside the engine, the radiator in the Contessa was

mounted behind the engine, right next to the rear grille of the car, which probably enhanced engine cooling somewhat. Suspension was conventional for a rear-engine car; upper and lower A-frames in the front and a swing axle in the back. The coupe was equipped with an upgraded engine with twin carburetors and slightly higher compression, which raised the output to about 65 horsepower, which was quite fine for touring in Japan at that time.

Pete Brock Connection. Hino thought it had a winner, and exported the Contessa to Australia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In addition, Hino assembled Contessas in New Zealand and Israel.

But Hino also had plans to introduce the Contessa to the US market. To establish brand recognition, Hino hired Pete Brock and his BRE Racing team prepare two Contessa sedans for competition on the West Coast. Pete had just left Shelby-American where he had designed the Shelby Daytona Cobra coupe, which won the FIA World GT Champion in 1965.

Pete Brock's first success at the wheel of the 1300cc Japanese Hino Coupe was at the Mission Bell 100 held before the 1966 Times-Mirror event in front of 100,000 spectators at Riverside Raceway. Pete and Bob Dunham placed the BRE Hinos 1st and 2nd, which was certainly unexpected for an unknown Japanese car. This was well before Nissan or Toyota ever thought about entering racing in the USA.

Toyota Takeover. Sadly, Hino's plan to export Contessa's to the United States were put aside when Toyota began merger talks with the company in February, 1966. It quickly became evident that Toyota, not Hino, would be the car-manufacturing branch of the business. Hino was to concentrate on

HINO CONTESSA 1300



Flying wing roofline.



Dual carb slant-four water-cooled engine.



Instrument panel with Nardi steering wheel.



Nose treatment evokes Corvair styling theme.

trucks and buses.

Mass production of the Contessa 1300 ended in April 1967, just two years and seven months after it began in the summer of 1964. Assembly of existing body shells and parts continued at a slow pace into the summer of 1968. A further 175 Contessas were built in October 1969 as part of a final disposal of stock.

Hino Today. Although this Japanese Corvair was never imported to the American shores, Hino did eventually establish a foothold here in the USA. Hino Motors, Ltd. is now the fastest growing truck manufacturer in the U.S., with local manufacturing, a centrally located service parts operation in Mississippi, and a dealership/service network with over 175 locations. It's quite likely that you have seen several Hino trucks in the Lehigh Valley area.

Sources:

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ABOVE: Bright grill on a Contessa coupe.

BELOW: Peter Brock on the way to victory at Riverside, 1966 .



LVCC Classified Ads!

FOR SALE: Windshield for 1960-1964 Corvair Coupes and Sedans. Clear, with tinted band on top. This relatively rare windshield, recovered from a 1961 Corvair, has no chips and no delaminations. Price: \$100. Call Scott Oberholzer at (610) 867-2846. *Note: Last month, we published an incorrect phone number for Scott. This month's number is correct!*

FOR SALE: Windshield for 1961-1965 Forward Control Corvair. Tinted throughout. Another relatively rare windshield, recovered from a Greenbrier, has no chips and no delaminations. Price: \$100. Call Scott Oberholzer at (610) 867-2846. *Note: Last month, we published an incorrect phone number for Scott. This month's number is correct!*

FOR SALE: 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.



Fred Scherzer 's Spyder.

JUNE MEETING NOTES

The air was warm and the skies were clear, so a number of our club members brought out their Corvairs for the June monthly meeting of the LVCC.

Members in attendance included Dennis Stamm, Dick Weidner, Jerry Moyer, Scott Oberholzer, Larry Lewis, Keith Kohler, Fred Scherzer, and Allan Lacki. Dennis chaired the meeting for us. Secretary / Treasurer Dick Weidner reported that the club's current checking account has a balance of \$1,383.96.

Scott Oberholzer shared photos from recent Corvair events he attended, including the "Pottstown Under the Lights" show and Central Pennsylvania Corvair Club's trip to the Corvair Ranch. Scott reported that he also showed his Corvair at the Tobyhanna Armory show this month.

You may recall that, a few months back, Keith Kohler listed his '63 Monza convertible in our classified ads. The ads caught the eye of another Corvair enthusiast, who bought the car from Keith. The new owner is currently in the process of giving it a mild restoration, including a nice new paint job which showed well in photos that Keith brought to the meeting.

Dennis Stamm engaged everybody in a

discussion about courtesy cards that local gasoline stations are now offering to their customers. Sheetz, Giant, and Turkey Hill all offer such cards, which provide a few cents off on every gallon of gasoline you purchase.

The gas stations basically use the cards to encourage customers to come inside to purchase food, magazines, and other high-markup items. But Fred Scherzer pointed out that, if you pay for your gas with a credit or debit card, you don't have to enter the store at all, and so you can enjoy the savings without purchasing anything but gasoline. And the stores do not charge a fee for the cards, so it makes sense to sign up for a card and use it.

Next meeting: Everybody agreed that, with the CORSA Convention scheduled for the last week in July, it would be better to postpone our next meeting until Das Awkscht Fescht. And so, our next meeting will take place at the LVCC EZ-Up tent at the Das Awkscht Fescht show.

TECH TIPS by DICK & FRED

Dick Weidner entertained everybody at our meeting with a story about a recent repair he made to his '64 Monza coupe. It was acting up, spitting, sputtering, and losing power. Dick naturally thought it was a case of fuel starvation,

so he replaced the fuel filters, swapped the fuel pump, and cleaned the carburetor bowls. Nothing seemed to work! Then, he turned to the ignition system. When he took off the distributor cap, he immediately identified the problem: the cap and rotor were shot. And so, he replaced them, and his '64 Monza coupe is running fine once more.

Fred Scherzer agreed that it's often difficult to distinguish between fuel system problems and ignition problems. He ran into a similar situation with his '64 Spyder. His initial reaction was to blame hesitation problems on bad gas, but his problems were solved when he replaced his Pertronix ignition unit.

Dick and Fred also gave tips on how to install valve cover and oil pan gaskets. Fred pointed out that the gaskets and gasket surfaces should be perfectly dry before assembly. A shot or two of brake cleaner can be used to wipe any oil off the surfaces. Dick also suggested that, if the oil pan is not original to the engine, it is often helpful to give it a test-fit, without the gasket, to identify dimples which need to be pressed-out of the sheet metal pan before final assembly.

Both Dick and Fred have many years of experience in the care and maintenance of Corvairs. It is always a pleasure to hear and learn from them at our meetings.



LVCC Members Dennis Stamm and Carl Moore pose for a photo at Fleetwood PA Show on July 4.



LVCC Member Carl Moore's pristine 1965 Corvair Monza Convertible at Fleetwood PA Show on July 4.

LVCC Calendar of Events!



Friday, July 20, 2012 :::: St. Philip Neri Church 10th Annual Car Show in Pennsburg.

Place: St. Philip Neri Church grounds at 1325 Klinerd Road, Pennsburg, PA. Time: 6 PM to 10 PM, rain or shine. Registration begins at 5 PM. Food, door prizes, live music, people's choice awards. Contact Shirley Misiak at (215) 679-9275 (10 am-3pm) or Peter Frank at (215) 679-6942. Pre-register by June 30, 2012 for \$10.00. Day of Show \$12.00.

Saturday, July 21, 2012 :::: Cruise Night at Cegee's Drive-In in Blandon.

4 PM to 8 PM. Cegee's Drive-In, Blandon. 833 Park Rd (Fleetwood-Blandon Road), Blandon, PA 19510. Door prizes and music. This is one in a continuing series of cruise events at Cegees. Additional dates and times are: August 4, 18 4-8 pm; September 1, 15, 29 4-8 pm; October 13 2-6 pm; Schedules can also be picked up at Cegee's.

Saturday July 21, 2012 :::: Doylestown Classic Car Show.

A relaxing Saturday evening along the beautiful downtown streets of Doylestown. Open to all types of cars, trucks and motorcycles – antique, classic, street rod, street machine, custom, new and old. The date for this years show is Saturday July 21st, 2012. Live entertainment starts at 5:00 PM and the awards presentation will start at 9:30 PM. General admission is Free and car pre registration will increase from \$10.00 to \$15.00, day of show registration will increase from \$15.00 to \$20.00. Day of show registration will still start at 4:00 PM and pre-registered advanced check in will start at 3:00 PM.

Saturday, July 21, 2012 :::: Boyertown Cruise Night.

Boyertown, Pennsylvania. The event is from 4 PM to 9 PM. Registration starts at 3 PM. See our Facebook page for more information, or www.boyertownpa.org. Rain date July 28th. Day of Show Registration: \$15.

Sunday, July 22, 2012 :::: Summer Wine Festival at Calvaresi Winery.

Street rodders welcome. 1 PM to 5 PM. Rain or Shine. The 'Fabulous Tom Miller' & Family - Tom Jr. and his wife Joanna, will be singing the songs of Elvis and other great oldies! Bring your dancing shoes and shake the rafters!! Bring a lawn chair but please NO PETS! Location: Calvaresi Winery. 107 Shartlesville Rd . Bernville, PA. Entertainment and wine tastings are complimentary, however, alcoholic beverages consumed at event must be purchased on site. Your purchases allow us to continue this fun event. http://www.calvaresiwinery.com/upcoming_events.htm

Wednesday through Saturday, July 25-July 28 2012 :::: 2012 CORSA Convention.

Location: Sturbridge Host Hotel, Sturbridge, Massachusetts. The dates are July 25, 2012 thru July 28, 2012. Plan on being in colonial Sturbridge, Massachusetts, in July of 2012! See the convention website for details: <http://www.corvair.org/chapters/necc/convention>

Friday, July 27, 2012 :::: Cruise Night at Jimbo's Steaks in Reading.

Reading, PA. 6 PM to 10 PM. This is one in a continuing series of cruise nights that take place on the 2nd and 4th Friday night of every month between now and September inclusive. Additional dates are Aug. 10, Aug. 24, Sept. 8, and Sept. 21. Location: Jimbo's Steaks. Bellevue Plaza Court between Routes 61 and 222, Reading, PA. <http://www.jimbossteaks.com/plazahall>

Saturday, July 28, 2012 :::: Cruise Nights at Salvatore's Pizza in Easton.

Cruise Night at Salvatore's Pizza. 302 Towne Center Blvd, Rt 115 Easton, PA. 5:00 PM - 9:00 PM. This is one in a continuing series of cruise nights at Salvatore's. Additional dates and times are: Saturday, August 25 from 5 to 9 PM and Saturday, September 29 from 4 to 8 PM.

Saturday, July 28, 2012 :::: Roebbling Museum Annual Car Show in Florence, NJ.

Located near the PA Turnpike extension bridge over the Delaware River. Show on the ground of the Roebbling Museum 100 First Ave. zip: 08554, Rain Date: July 29. Event open to All Years makes and Models of Foreign and Domestic Cars. Registration 9:00 am - 11:30 am vehicles admitted after 12:00 noon WILL NOT BE JUDGED Show 10:00 am - 3:00 pm. Pre-Registration \$15.00/vehicle by July 8. Fire Extinguishers are highly suggested in each vehicle. Checks payable to the Roebbling Museum PO Box 9 Roebbling NJ 08554. <http://www.roebblingmuseum.org/> or registration form: <http://www.roebblingmuseum.org/pdf/CarShowFlyerRegistration%20Form2012.pdf>

(Continued on page 6)

Even More Events!

(Continued from page 5)

Friday through Sunday, August 3-5, 2012 ::: Das Awkscht Fescht in Macungie

Macungie, PA - 49th Annual Das Awkscht Fescht Car Show Flea Market & Car Corral at the Memorial Park along Route 100M 6 miles South of I-78. This year's featured car is the Crosley. You MUST be pre-Registered by July 1, to show at this event!!!! Show hosted by the Ontelaunee Region AACA. Friday August 3: Street Rods, Street Machines, Custom/Modified/Race Cars, Cars, Trucks, Sports Cars, 1895-1991, Antique Engines Tractors & Equipment 1895-1991. Saturday August 4: NO: Street Rods - Street Machines - Custom Modified, NO cars newer than 1987. Sunday August 5: Individual Car Clubs shows listed on page 4 listed or the registration form (Need not be a Club Member) with year restrictions for each Clubs mini shows. info@awkscht.com or <http://www.awkscht.com/>



Sunday, August 5, 2012 :::: LVCC Membership Meeting.

Come to our next club meeting, scheduled for Sunday, August 5th at Das Awkscht Fescht! Time: 2:00 PM. Place: The LVCC EZ-Up tent on the show field. Look for our club banner in the Corvair section! Even if you don't enter your Corvair in the show, you can walk-in as a spectator, see the cars, and attend our meeting. 'See you there!

Thursday August 16, 2012 ::: Cruise at Widow's Tavern in Stockertown, PA.

4:00 PM - 8:00 PM. In cooperation with the Lehigh Valley Antique Automobile Club. Location: Widow's Tavern & Grille. 200 Main St. Stockertown, Pa. Rain date: September 20.

Sunday, August 19, 2012 :::: 13th Annual Sticks Reunion Car Show in Wind Gap.

Wind Gap PA - 13th Annual Sticks Reunion, Car Show at the Old Mt. View Drag Strip, E. Mountain Road 512 North of Bath, PA South of Wind Gap zip: 18091. Show open to all Muscle Cars, Street Rods, Antiques, Classics, Trucks, 4x4's, Motorcycles. Hosted by the Hi-Winders Car Club & The Slate Belt Mighty Mopars Vintage Drag Cars Featuring Ken Kull's Red Baron. Time: 10:00 am - 3:00 pm, trophies awarded at 2:30 pm to the top 20 plus Best of Show. There will be a D.J. Music, Great food & Ice Cream, Photos, 50/50 drawing, Trophies, Door Prizes, Dash Plaques to the first 100 show cars. Pre-Registration \$7.00 by August 10, Day of Show \$10.00, Spectators \$3.00 vendors \$25.00. Pro Zito e-mail: zitospeedshop@rcn.com or <http://www.hi-winderscarclub.org/>

Saturday, September 1, 2012 :::: Duryea Day in Boyertown.

Mark your calendar Labor Day weekend Saturday September 1, 2012 for the 47th annual Duryea Day antique and classic car show and flea market in the scenic Boyertown Community Park. 9 AM to 4 PM. Day of show registration: \$12. <http://boyertownmuseum.org/category/duryeaday>

Next Membership Meeting: Sunday, August 5, 2012

Come to our next club meeting, scheduled for Sunday, August 5th at Das Awkscht Fescht! Time: 2:00 PM. Place: The LVCC EZ-Up tent on the show field. Look for our club banner in the Corvair section! Even if you don't enter your Corvair in the show, you can walk-in as a spectator, see the cars, and attend our meeting. 'See you there!

Annual Membership Dues are NOW DUE~!

LVCC membership remains a bargain! Only \$10 for CORSA members, and \$15 for non-CORSA members. You can pay-up at our August 5th meeting at Das Awkscht Fescht, or mail your payment to the LVCC Secretary Treasurer, Dick Weidner, at the address below.

Mail Dues to:

Lehigh Valley Corvair Club
c/o Richard Weidner
2304 Main Street
Northampton, PA 18067

LVCC Club Officers:

President: William Remaly (570) 386-3578
Vice Pres: Dennis Stamm Phone: (610) 926-4723 Email: dmstamm at comcast dot net
Secr-Treasurer: Richard Weidner. Phone: (610) 502-1414 Email: rcwvair at rcn dot com
Newsletter Editor: Allan Lacki. Phone: (610) 927-1583 Email: redbat01 at verizon dot net