



the fifth wheel

SEPTEMBER 2013

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Clark's Corvair Parts steers through 40th year !

By DIANE BRONCACCIO

This article was published in print in the Recorder newspaper of Greenfield, Massachusetts on Saturday, August 10, 2013. You'll get an insider's view of the Clark's operation.

SHELBURNE — The last of the Chevrolet Corvairs rolled off the assembly line in 1969 — about two years before Joan and Cal Clark Jr. found a \$50 car that would change their lives: It was a 1964 Corvair Spyder Coupe — black with a red interior — buried under a snow mound behind the Greenfield Sunoco service station.

“The body was in excellent condition,” says Mrs. Clark, “but the engine was in pieces. Somebody had started to work on it, but the owner never came back.”

“We’ve still got it,” adds her husband.

By August 1972, that Spyder Coupe was fully restored, the Clarks — hooked on the fun of restoring it — had found a Corvair convertible in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., for just \$200 — including delivery.

The Clarks had amassed extra Corvair parts for the first vehicle, and were surprised when the man who delivered their second fixer-upper wanted to buy some of their extra parts.

“We also knew from our experience that it



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 (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.

would take three weeks to get (Corvair) parts delivered,” said Mrs. Clark. “The dealers did not keep Corvair parts in stock. We thought, if we could sell some parts, we could use the money for more parts to restore our convertible,” she said.

“It was pure luck,” said Mr. Clark. “That’s all it was.”

Forty years later, the Clarks still have both cars, eight Quonset hut buildings that house several thousand Corvair car parts, and 22 full-time employees to take and ship orders, rebuild engines and carburetors, stitch car seat upholstery (including with 50-year-old vinyl fabric), and coach car owners through their own Corvair repair jobs.

“Nobody ever thought this would still be a business after 40 years,” Mrs. Clark said. “The banks didn’t take us seriously. Nothing was easy.”

“We were pretty scared ourselves — for the first 20 years,” added Mr. Clark.

“Now it’s getting the respect it deserves,” Mr. Clark said.

In December 1972, Cal Clark, a teacher at the Mohawk Trail Regional School, made up a list of 150 Corvair parts that he had for sale, and the Clarks started selling them out of a small ranch-style home in Buckland. They found themselves staying up until 1 a.m., filling orders.

By 1975, Mrs. Clark had quit her “day job,” and Mr. Clark gave up his teaching position to take care of the car parts business.

“There were car batteries in the bathroom closet and car parts everywhere we had room,” she said. “We had 12 employees by the time we moved out of that ranch house. It took nine of the largest-size U-Haul trucks to move everything.

Now the company keeps roughly 16,000 to 17,000 Corvair parts in stock. This doesn’t include the used parts they

also carry, when available, the original 50-year-old components they have, and the parts that are made or fabricated right at Clark’s Corvair. All their business is done through catalog sales, by phone or through online sales.

The Clarks say they ship out from 90 to 175 packages a day to Corvair car owners all over the world.

“We never understood how so many Corvairs got so many places,” said Mrs. Clark. “We were told that military people would take their cars with them, and then leave them behind when they bought another car.”

Mr. Clark said there weren’t as many car companies world-wide at the time the Corvair was made.

Chevrolet first introduced the Corvair in October 1959. There were only two models, and both were four-door sedans. “The American car buyer ... was beginning to think small,” says an illustrated history, “The Corvair Decade,”



by Tony Fiore. “The decade of the ’60s was going to be the decade of the compact cars. But it didn’t turn out that way.”

Fiore wrote only 250,000 Corvairs were manufactured in 1960, and less than 4 percent of that year’s car buyers chose the Corvair (compared to the Ford Falcon, which sold 435,000 cars in its first year).

The six-cylinder car had an air-cooled, rear-mounted engine, like the VW Beetle, and had a swing-axle rear suspension. They were said to be fun to drive, about 20 percent smaller than the standard-size car of the time and got more miles per gallon of gasoline than standard size cars.

Corvair came under a cloud when it was faulted for its early swing-axle suspension and the lack of an anti-roll bar in Ralph Nader’s “Unsafe at Any Speed” in 1965.

Mr. Clark said that Nader “didn’t help” Corvair sales, but “there’s some information that (Chevrolet) was already interested in stopping production of the Corvair sooner, because of the production of the Camaro in 1967.” But they

kept the Corvair longer,” he said, because people would have believed that Nader’s book caused production to cease.

In 1972, a Texas A&M University safety commission report on the Corvair for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that the 1960–1963 Corvairs possessed no greater potential for loss of control than other cars from the 1960s.

“It took 10 years to reach that conclusion,” said Mr. Clark, “but economy cars by then had died, and everybody wanted ‘muscle cars’ — the Mustangs, the Camaros and the GTOs.”

Mr. Clark said it was too bad that the Corvairs didn’t survive long enough for when the first oil crisis of 1973 struck. When gas prices started going up, during an international oil embargo, that’s when the prices for Corvair car parts started rising, he said.

About 1.7 million Corvairs were made from 1960 to 1969, and Mr. Clark estimates that between 50,000 to 100,000 Corvairs still exist. “We do have 23 to 24 employees full-time, and we keep them busy year-round.”

Cathy Newton, a 36-year employee and manager of Clark’s Corvair, led a recent tour of the eight-building premises. The main building consists of three levels, and the Clarks thought the one building would provide “more than enough” space at the time. But more buildings were added as the business grew. There is an upholstery department with three to four sewers stitching vinyl car upholstery, which is later heat-stamped using tooling made by Calvin Clark Sr., a former Millers Falls Tool Co. engineer who worked for his son and daughter-in-law’s company for about five years, after retirement.

In the fabrication area, there are original spools of vinyl upholstery, reproduction fabrics and other options for the car owners. Clark’s Corvair Parts makes block kits for engines, with rubber and metal seals and cork and paper gaskets. There are specialists who can rebuild customers’ turbo chargers and then test them on an old Corvair on the premises, before sending them to the customers.

And there are three full-time technicians who answer Corvair owners’ automotive questions free of charge.



Photo by Jonathan Rintels: Here is a photo of the Clark’s Corvair facilities in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts. In December 2012, Jonathan wrote, “Cal has installed new solar panels that when the switch is thrown should provide more than enough power for his entire operation – and more! The cutting edge of modern tech – solar energy – meets the cutting edge (well, sort of, kinda) of 1960 s auto technology, the Corvair.

“We’ve had customers ask, ‘My car is making this noise. What’s wrong with it?’ and literally hold their phones up to the cars. Unfortunately,” she continued, “there aren’t as many mechanics around that know the car. It keeps us quite busy.”

The Clarks say many of the restored cars were eventually used as “everyday” cars, but those left are now mainly show cars.

When asked what they think about the future of their business, Mr. Clark said, “I think it’s something that’s going to continue, probably forever, but I don’t expect it to grow any further.”

“We approach every year expecting it to get smaller, and it never does.”

Mrs. Clark added: “A lot of our clientele is getting older, but if their children aren’t interested in the Corvair, their grandchildren are.”

“It’s still a car you can work on without hooking it up to a computer or bringing it to a garage,” she continued. “It’s just basic, simple mechanics.”

You can reach Diane Broncaccio at: dbronc@recorder.com or 413-772-0261, ext. 277

50th Annual Das Awkscht Fescht, by Randy Kohler

What started as a local car show to benefit the Macungie Memorial Park has flourished and grown into a nationally recognized show. Lehigh Valley Corvair is proud to have been a part of the show since the early 1970's. The Saturday show August 3rd was pretty much a wash-out, although most owners braved the rain and brought out their cars in spite of the weather! The biggest problem was mud in the flea market area which sent many vendors packing early.

Sunday was much nicer and brought out 43 Corvairs for the "Club Day" display. We were placed near the ball



field (not on it!) next to the Corvettes. Down in center court was the Buick feature display put together by the Free Spirit chapter. There was music, crafts, food and pretty much something for everyone. It is always nice to see many friends that we only get to talk to at this show as well as former LVCC members Jerry and Kathy Lopez that make the trek north this time of year! Thanks to Dennis Weaver for the use of his tent which was a nice place for all to gather.

A model break-down of cars was: 5 early open, 10 early closed (which included 2 wagons), 11 late open, 14 late closed and 3 forward controls. Forty-one owners were from Pennsylvania, one from New Jersey and one from Delaware. Along the main road was a display of each model year car since the festival started and two of those 50 were Corvairs.

A big thank-you goes to my parking people, Dennis Weaver and Gary Ganssle. Also a giant thanks to Clarks Corvair Parts who always sends us a great "goodie box" filled with gift certificates, fan belts, silicone valve cover gaskets, oil filters and catalogs. Thanks also to Dick Weidner and Dennis Stamm who contributed items for the 50/50 drawing.

All participants received an anniversary serving tray Friday and Saturday, and an engraved set of mugs on Sunday along with their dash plaque. Next year the feature car tent will be manned by the Dodge Brothers club featuring their marques from 1914 to 1938. Hope to see you there on August 1-4, 2014!

Dennis Weaver, In the Headlights!

The Corvair high-beams are shining on LVCC member Dennis Weaver this month. Dennis has been a club member since 1977, shortly after the Philadelphia CORSA convention, where he just may have contracted the Corvair bug. CORSA is the only other auto organization (besides LVCC) where he maintains membership.

A '63 Spyder convertible purchased in the mid '70s was the start of it all for Dennis. He still drives that one around, but has added quite an inventory since then. The list would make some used car lot owners envious. It includes: '65 Corsa racer, '69 140 4-speed, '67 4-door 500, '63 van, '62 Rampside, '63 coupe, '65 Evening Orchid coupe, '65 brown convertible, plus 1/2 of a '68, and a van and late convertible parts cars.

Dennis's show activity is focused on the annual Das Awkscht Fescht in Macungie where he show his '67 hardtop sedan. A number of years ago, his Corvan won an award at a smaller show.

One summer in his early Corvair years, Dennis and his then girlfriend, now wife Cathy, headed for the shore in his '63 Spyder convertible. The weather was sunny and warm, and the top was down. Just one problem: They forgot to take into account the sun! By the time they arrived at their shore destination, both were so sunburned they couldn't go to the beach!

Dennis drives his Vairs only about 100 miles a year, but he especially enjoys driving his Paxton-supercharged racer on the road. Blowing away your run-of-the-mill V-8's and leaving them in the dust does his heart good. He likes unusual Corvairs, and even has a spare Paxton kit squirreled away in his attic just in case.

An Ultra Van is one unusual Corvair Dennis has on his mind for the future, but it has been pushed off a few years. 'Seems Dennis wanted a new Harley, and Cathy wanted a dog, so a deal was made - one dog and one Harley!. No, Dennis didn't fall for the gambit, "let's get a dog and name him Harley". Cathy's boxer welcomes Dennis when he returns from his Harley run.

Big AI Test Drives a Brand New Corsa!

This summer, Allan and Joan Lacki rented a new Corsa and drove it all around the west coast of Ireland for a week. A new Corsa? Yep, an *Opel* Corsa.

General Motors' latter-day aversion to all things Corvair did not seem to affect its Opel division so much, for the 1971 Opel Manta coupe was a near copy of the late-series Corvair in the styling department. And in 1982, Opel made use of the Corsa model name for its own small cars. The "Corsa" name has been alive and well ever since.

There is a bit of irony here. The word "corsa" means "race" in Italian-a fitting moniker for the Corvair Corsa. But there is nothing racy about the Opel version of the Corsa. It's a utilitarian hatchback grocery-getter.

AI and Joan's Opel Corsa served it's function well for them, for it was cheap to rent, just the right size for those narrow Irish country lanes, got great fuel mileage, and had plenty of room inside for oversize luggage bags. But it took some getting used-to.

Driving on the left-hand side of the road is always a treat, especially with a manual transmission like the one in Allan and Joan's rental car.



LVCC's has two members named Dennis: At the left is Dennis Weaver, who is featured in this month's "In the Headlights" article. To the right is Dennis Stamm, who was featured in our June "In the Headlights" article. Who will be our next featured member? It could be you!

But the real kicker came when Big Al encountered a lorry (that's "truck" in Irish) coming at him at full chat while he was pulling out of the rental car parking lot at Limerick Airport. Al explained, "Quickly, I tried to slam the car into reverse gear to get out of his way. But try as I might, I couldn't find the gate for reverse! At the same time, the truck driver panicked and went into a sideways skid aiming for our car. At the last moment, it came to me that the stick shift was equipped with a reverse lockout. I was finally able to snap the gear shift lever into reverse gear, thereby avoiding a deadly crash on our first day of vacation!"

Al offered these additional comments about the car. "It had about 10,000 kilometers on the odometer, so it was nearly new. The engine clattered a bit and sounded rough. I thought it was a diesel, so I shifted the engine at relatively low RPM. Acceleration was leisurely at best. It took me a couple of days to determine it had a gasoline engine! After that, I shifted the transmission at higher RPM and found the acceleration to be much improved. The car was very maneuverable and handled well, too. But on the downside, the 5-speed shift pattern was vague and the clutch was grabby. Maybe it had been abused by prior renters."

In Europe, the Opel Corsa competes against the Ford Fiesta, Fiat Punto, Hyundai i20 (a.k.a Accent) and other super-minis. In terms of engineering, it's completely conventional, with a twin-cam transverse four-cylinder engine, MacPherson strut front suspension, and twist-beam rear axle. Engine choices range from a 1-liter gasoline engine up to a 1.7 liter diesel. (Al and Joan's rental car had a 1.4 liter "EcoTec" engine).

English auto journalists rate the car slightly below average in comparison to its competitors in terms of overall performance and resale value, but high in terms of riding comfort and safety. Dealers offer big discounts on pricing, which makes them attractive to fleet and rental car companies. Which is why the rental car agency at Limerick Airport served-up an Opel Corsa to Allan and Joan.

Corsa, a name first applied to the top-of-the-line Corvair in 1965, still lives on nearly fifty years later.

Our Next LVCC Meeting!

Bill Remaly has been our club president for a number of years and has been hanging in their longer than any of us had a right to expect. We will always remain thankful to him for his service to LVCC! But time moves on. A few months ago, Bill sold off his collection of Corvairs and is on to new things.

Dennis Stamm, who has been presiding over our meet-



Above: Today's Corsa. Allan and Joan Lacki's drove this Opel Corsa rental car for a week.



Above: A 1.4 liter twin-cam gasoline engine mated to a 5-speed manual transaxle. An amazingly compact engine, the cylinder head is only a foot long! By the way, that closed-end black plastic tube above the exhaust manifold is a Helmholtz resonator, intended to silence air cleaner drone.

ings this year, has volunteered to move up from VP status to President of the club. And Fred Scherzer has agreed to fill the VP spot. This is wonderful news.

Of course, Robert's Rule of Order must prevail for the transfer of power to become official! So come on our to our next LVCC meeting and help us ring in the new by officially voting Dennis and Fred into their new positions of leadership.

Our next meeting will take place at the LANTA Community Center, (our usual place) on Wednesday, September 25, 7:30 PM.

LVCC Calendar of Events!



Saturday-Sunday, September 14-15, 2013 :::: Central Pennsylvania Corvair Days.

Hershey, PA. Hosted by Central PA Corvair Club. Location: AACA Museum, 161 Museum Drive, Hershey, PA. Rally, show, scavenger hunt, social hour, and banquet. Phone: 717/991-7341. Email: earlzgames@comcast.net Website: <http://www.centralpacorvairclub.org/>

Friday-Sunday, September 13-15, 2013 :::: NECC Caravan to Clark's Classic Corvair Show.

The Northeast Corvair Council is conducting a Corvair Caravan to the Clark's Fall Classic Car Show. This is a great show hosted every two years by Bay State Corvairs of Massachusetts. The caravan which will have meeting places for Corvair owners coming from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The plan is for anyone coming from any of the Pennsylvania Corvair clubs, such as the Lehigh Valley Corvair Club or Blue Mountain Corvairs, to meet folks from the New Jersey Association of Corvair Enthusiasts, and drive up together to Clark's on the day before the show. Visit the NECC website for full details! www.neccmotorsports.com

Wednesday, September 25 2013 :::: LVCC Membership 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. Directions: From I-78: Take Exit 57, Lehigh Street. At the end of the exit ramp, go east toward the City of Allentown. Follow Lehigh Street of approximately 2 miles - past the Parkway Shopping Center on the right and Faulkner Volkswagen on the left - until you reach the LANTA entrance on your left. It is at the intersection of Lehigh and South Howard Streets, right across from a Hess service station. Drive around to the auto parking lot and enter through the office entrance. Our meeting room is on the second floor.

Saturday, September 28, 2013 :::: 14th Annual Roslyn Valley Car Show.

Location: On Easton Road, Roslyn Valley, PA. Beginning at the intersection of Easton Road and Woodland Road. Time: 2 PM to 8:30 PM. Registration from 1:30 PM to 3 PM. Judging begins at 4 PM. Rain date: Sunday, September 29 between 12 PM and 5:30 PM. Proceeds benefit the Roslyn Boys & Girls Club. Day-of-show registration: \$20. The Philadelphia Corvair Club will be attending this event.

Saturday, September 28, 2013 :::: Car Show and Festival at America on Wheels.

America on Wheels Museum, 5 N. Front Street, Allentown, PA. This event will include a cruise beginning at 12:30 pm between the Allentown Fairgrounds to the America on Wheels Museum, following by a outdoor car show at the Museum. The car show is scheduled to last from 1 PM to 6 PM.

Saturday, October 5, 2013 :::: Hatfield's Rocktoberfest Car Show.

Location: Sequoia Outback in Snyder Square, 1700 Cowpath Road, Hatfield, PA. Show on paved surfaces. Vehicle check in 8:30-11 a.m. Judging between 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. Awards Ceremony at 2:45 p.m. Top 25 People's Choice awards. Registration fee: \$13 is pre-registered, \$16 for day-of-show registration. The Philadelphia Corvair Club will be attending this event. Rain or shine. <http://www.hatfieldtownship.org/featured-news/58-general/362-be-part-of-the-fun-at-the-13th-rocktoberfest>

October 9-12, 2013 :::: AACA 2013 Eastern Division National Fall Meet in Hershey.

Hershey, Pa. 7:00am to 9:00pm each day. The meet is located in beautiful Hershey, PA on the grounds and parking lots surrounding Hersheypark and The Giant Center. Hershey is considered one of the largest antique automobile shows and flea markets in the United States. It consists of over 9,000 flea market spaces, over 1,000 car corral spaces, and approximately 1,500 show cars. Car show registration is now CLOSED, but spectators can walk in for free.

October 12, 2013 :::: 4th Annual Macungie Cool Down Car Show.

Macungie Memorial Park, Macungie, PA. Time: 9 AM to 3 PM. Registration closes at Noon. All cars, trucks, makes and models welcome. No classes. People's choice judging for top 3 cars. \$10 day-of-show registration fee. <http://www.macungiepark.com/uploads/1/1/5/9/11597028/mac-cooldowncarshow-2013-color.pdf>

October 19, 2013 :::: Touched By Cancer Car Show.

Location: Lehigh Valley Hospital Muhlenberg, 2545 Schoenersville Rd, Bethlehem, PA 18017. Time: 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM. Food, prizes, trophies and a "finality bell" commemoration. Rain date: October 20. Day-of-show registration fee: \$10. Proceeds benefit the Lehigh Valley Health Network's Hackerman Patz House. Come out and be part of something meaningful! <http://www.lonewolf-freespirits.com/CancerCenterCarShow.jpg>

LVCC Classified Ads!

FOR SALE: 1964 Chevy Corvair Convertible (red with black interior). 4-speed, 110 engine. Runs and drives OK. Body patched, paint and top OK. Interior rough. Good project car. \$2,800.00 OBO. Located in Doylestown, PA. Please contact Jack Herman. 267-664-4745.

FOR SALE: 1965 Corvair coupe. This car is almost mint and belong to a Long Island Corvair Association (LICA) member that lost his storage space. This is a 110 2-carb Powerglide. Over \$11000 invested in engine, exterior and interior. A "jewel" at \$6000. Text Matt at 631 748-1159. The car is available on Long Island, NY.



FOR SALE: Four Michelin X Metric 185/70R13 tires mounted on 5.5x13 5-bolt Corvair rims. DOT date code indicates the tires were manufactured in 2001. Used, but plenty of tread remaining. No punctures, no plugs, no patches. Never run flat. No dents in the rims. No rust on the rims. \$100 for all four. Call or email to arrange pickup. Contact Allan Lacki. Phone: (610) 927-1583. Email: redbat01@verizon.net.

FOR SALE: Two Winterhandler Ice & Snow 205/65R15 snow tires. DOT date code indicates the tires were manufactured in 2002. Used only one season. Plenty of tread remaining. No punctures, no plugs, no patches. Never run flat. \$10 for the pair. Call or email to arrange pickup. Contact Allan Lacki. Phone: (610) 927-1583. Email: redbat01@verizon.net.

LVCC Merchandise for Sale!



LVCC license plates and hat pins: \$3.00 each. LVCC T-Shirts: \$6.00 each.

Call or email LVCC Secretary/Treasurer Richard Weidner at 610) 502-1414 rcwvair@rcn.com

Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 25, 2013
Club Dues Are Due: \$15. (\$10 for CORSA Members).

Mail Dues to:

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

LVCC Club Officers:

President: William Remaly (484) 809-1081 (New phone number).
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