

Corvair 95 Styling

Bob Kirkman's wonderful plaster Corvair truck model opens up an area of Corvair development on which I think I can shed some light. The design of our 95's paralleled that of the Corvair passenger cars right from the very beginning.

Work on the XP-76 "Suburban", or "Holden Suburban" began in Ned Nickle's styling studio early in 1957 at the same time that the earliest sketches of the cars were being made. Originally the vehicle was intended to be more car-like and primarily function as a station wagon, using sedan-type bumpers, lights and trim.

Harley Earl, then GM's Vice President of Styling, had been greatly impressed by the earlier GMC L'Universelle show truck, and was primarily responsible for pushing the Corvair truck design to fruition. Early renderings done by Carl Renner, of Nomad wagon design fame, were even less like the final production design than the early full-size clay models that first appeared in October of 1957. The particular "buck" that Ken Krol keenly spotted in Special Interest Autos went through several facelifts, and photos #1 and #2 are of the model as it appeared in December.



PHOTO #1 12-19-57

The truck we know didn't take form until the Fall of 1958, and it would be

from that period that Bob's model comes.

Photos #3 and #4 are of the fiberglass mock-up at the final management presentation of the Corvair line. The sedan in one photo was actually much closer to production than the van, which you can see is half Greenbrier and half Corvan, like Bob's model, and which still had more design changes to be made: the rear bumper; separate taillight housings; air scoops and the rear door and windows.



PHOTO #2 12-19-57

This last feature was intended to be a swing-up wagon-type door from the very beginning, but it was a much taller gate than the VW's, and not as practical on a commercial van as two conventional doors. Ford's English import, the Thames van, had swing-out doors in the rear, and if you look close, you can see a Thames sitting behind the Corvair mock-up. There was also a VW in the same room for comparison.

The air inlets were originally conceived as scoops, but Chevy's Engineering Department had no trouble proving that better cooling could be had with flush louvers. As Bob says, they were tried in every location, and the lower position shown in the 1959 photos seemed to have favor. Even the Lakewood prototypes, built in near-final form by July of that

year, carried similar louvers just behind and above the rear wheel well openings. But engineers working on engine development found that too much dirt entered this way, and insisted that the openings be raised. A much more aesthetic design resulted!



PHOTO #3 2-19-59

I know of no "second generation" Corvair truck work either. There were some hideous facelifts proposed for 1962 and 1963 95's, so that they would parallel the "look" of the conventional truck line's styling theme, but no major redesigns.



PHOTO #4 2-19-59

Chevy needed a more conventional, cheaper van using more standard parts and the Chevy Van resulted, just as had the Chevy II been a re-

turn to cold, economical reality at Chevrolet in the face of the Falcon car. But this time the about face was brought on by the dull-witted but very successful Econoline.

The Corvair Van was probably the most ingenious truck of its type ever built, and probably no other manufacturer could have afforded to risk such an expensive design on a new market. The history of its development is as fascinating as the truck itself.

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