

## The 2025 Great Western Fan Belt Toss & Swap Meet

By Val Doppenberg

Photos by Greg Vargas, Phil Spate, Dean Mejia, Sasha Doppenberg and the author



After years of the hot, dusty Palm Springs park, with attendance slipping and spirits fading, the Great Western Fan Belt Toss needed a comeback. And it got one.

Thanks to Brad Reihl of the Vintage Corsa Corvair Club, a new venue was found, reigniting the magic. With a fresh vision, Sasha and Val Doppenberg of Valvair Works breathed new life into the event, transforming it into a vibrant celebration of Corvairs. Their on-site photoshoot and dynamic marketing, brought to life by designer Scott Howey of FlatSixGraphics,



set the tone, generating excitement that spread across the Corvair community. California clubs teamed up with others from Arizona and Utah to deliver what many are calling the best Fan Belt Toss in decades.

### **A Weekend of Corvairs, Camaraderie, and Comebacks**

This year's event drew enthusiasts from across the country for a full weekend of cars, community, and competition. The new venue was ideal, with everything in one location and the swap meet seamlessly flowing into the show field. Families and gearheads could browse vendor booths, check out over 100 Corvairs gleaming on green grass framed by palm trees and the San Jacinto Mountains, or



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cool off in the pool between events.

## Friday:

### Revvng Up the Weekend

Friday kicked off with the swap

meet in full swing, featuring 84 vendor spaces packed with rare parts, collectibles, and Corvair treasures.

The MCE Racing mobile dyno, sponsored by the Inland Empire

Corvair Club, drew a crowd as 11 Corvairs went head-to-head, putting their engines to the test. The competition was exciting, and the following took home the trophies:

**Top Naturally Aspirated:** Christian Mejia's Yenko Stinger, featuring a 3.4L triple Weber, angle exhaust, Safe Guard ignition, and Nash fan, produced 182 hp and 214 lb-ft of torque.

**Top Turbo:** Anthony Ngo's last-minute entry, a modified 1962 coupe with a DIY fuel-injected 140 turbo running 10 psi of boost, roared to an impressive 186 hp and 238 lb-ft of torque.



**Top Non-Corvair Engine:** Chuck Rust's wicked custom V-8 put down a healthy 278 hp and 286 lb-ft of torque, with still room for more.

As the dyno wound down, around 50 Corvairs cruised through downtown Palm Springs, a picture-perfect procession captured by Dean Mejia. As they rolled back in, the Friday night welcome party was just getting started.

The theme was "Time to Toss it Back" through the decades of the Fan Belt Toss. Two hundred guests mingled over Corvair Bingo, memorabilia displays from Corsa West put together by Bill Winkelmann, and contributions by San Diego Corvair Club and long-time attendee Linda Eastburn. To close out the night, Mike Evans told the story of how it all began with Lew Rishel nearly half a century ago.

### Saturday:

#### Show Day & Friendly Rivalries

Saturday morning shone brightly over the field with 89 registered Corvairs and more than 100 on display, beautifully organized by Byron Linford of the Corvair Secret Society. New exhibits added extra flair, including Tom Hicks' in-progress restoration of a 1964 Monza convertible, Paolo Galli's billet cylinder heads, and Matt's famous Morrvoir, a 1961 Lakewood turned into a recovery rig for Matt's Off-Road Recovery.

The classic Fan Belt Toss games, dating back to 1978, kept the tradition alive. Coordinated by Scott



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Lubell and the South Coast Corsa Club, the competition ended in an exciting final where Walker Lee and Kristin Bennes of “Dune Buggies” took home \$50 each and custom trophies crafted by Chuck Rust of Rust Creations.

Another crowd favorite made its long-awaited return: the Valve Cover Races. Fourteen racers competed in fast-paced heats organized by Dave Wenzlick and Chuck Rust, with the Cactus Corvair Club even providing racers for kids to decorate and race. Dave Wenzlick himself took the win, with trophies for first through third place handcrafted by Rust Creations. Meanwhile, Greg Petersen of Corvair Specialties shared his extensive knowledge with a live tune-up demo on a beautiful Corsa 140. The V-8 club met at Denny’s across the street for their annual meeting.

When it came time for awards, Byron Linford’s custom trophies made from repurposed Corvair parts honored the best in each class and some truly special stand-outs. Highlights included:

**Best of Show:** Donn Lopez (left) and his stunning silver on burgundy 1965 Corsa 140 four-speed convertible, a 23-year labor of love.

**People’s Choice:** Robin and John Hurley with their red 1962 Spyder convertible.

**Ladies’ Choice:** Dave Thompson



and his turquoise 1964 Greenbrier Deluxe.

**You can visit [gwfbt.com](http://gwfbt.com) for the full list of winners.**

The field raffle, organized by Mike Evans, got an exciting twist this year with a club raffle basket competition. Eight clubs competed for the chance to claim half the pot, and with the most tickets in the mix, the Cactus Corvair Club came out on top. Their tool-filled roller bag went to lucky winner Phil Spate, who later flew all the way back home to Calgary!

### **Evening Banquet: Stories, Awards, and the Major Raffle**

Saturday evening, 200 attendees gathered for the banquet, where Matt from Matt's Off-Road Recovery shared stories from his Corvair roots to his YouTube fame. Matt's passion for Corvairs, his storytelling energy, and his humble appreciation for the community reminded everyone why he has become such a beloved ambassador for the Corvair world. The Corvair community is truly fortunate to have someone like Matt championing its history and keeping its spirit alive.

Awards for furthest traveled, eldest attendee, and the "hard luck" recipient honored the long-standing traditions of the Fan Belt Toss, while a new award celebrated the newest Corvair owner and the next generation of enthusiasts. Each of the four awards included a \$20



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Clark's gift card and free entry for the owner and their Corvair to the 2026 Great Western Fan Belt Toss.

To cap off the night, the banquet raffle delivered plenty of excitement with amazing prizes, including a rebuilt transmission, a custom Corvair neon sign, a two-night resort stay, a brand-new TV, and the grand prize, a \$500 Clark's Corvair Parts gift card. Five lucky attendees walked away with something truly special, making the finale a perfect end to an unforgettable weekend.



## Sunday: A Smooth Rollout

Sunday brought a laid-back finale as attendees soaked in one last look at the show field, wrapped up deals at the swap meet, and even visited the Palm Springs Air Museum before heading home.

Photographer Greg "Goyo" Vargas captured every moment of the weekend in stunning detail, while Scott Howey of



FlatSixGraphics brought the event to life with top-notch artwork, selling over 100 shirts.

The 47th Annual Great Western Fan Belt Toss was not just a revival; it was a rebirth. The energy, passion, and people proved that this long-running tradition still has plenty of miles left to go.

Follow the Great Western Fan Belt Toss on Facebook and Instagram for more photos, recaps, and updates on next year's event. See you next year!

