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KAISER PROTOTYPES  
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RADICAL RAMPAGE  
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# CORVAIR RARITY

GOODYEAR TEST CAR FOUND AND RESTORED



RESTORATION PROFILE  
CONCOURS REBUILD OF A  
HUDSON ITALIA COUPE



PORT



# Rarefied Air

*A former Goodyear test car, this 1969 Yenko Stinger now tests one man's skill at the race track*



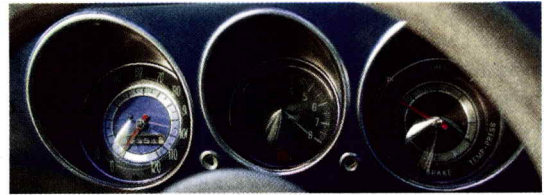
BY TERRY SHEA • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO

It's hard not to root for the Corvair. Perhaps no other American car embodies quite so purely the spirit of a true sports car in the European sense than Chevrolet's air-cooled, rear-engined beauty. As engineering exercises go, the lightweight, unit-body Corvair, with an engine largely made from aluminum and the first post-war American use of four-wheel independent suspension, blazed a trail well ahead of its time.

Everything about it remains unconventional, particularly when compared to contemporary American cars—and practically every other model on the planet, really. Bob Dunahugh of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is one of those forward-thinking souls who first saw the light in 1967. "We had just purchased a Chevelle in the summer of 1967," Bob says, "when I saw an ad for a 1964 turbocharged Corvair Spyder convertible. I took it for a test drive and loved how the car handled. I was able to trade a 1961 Triumph that I wanted to sell straight up for it."

At the time, Bob, a fan of drag racing, also owned a 1957 Chevrolet with a 327-cu.in. V-8 and a four-speed. The Chevelle and Corvair became his regular cars to take down the strip, but driving a quarter-mile at a time didn't hold his





interest for too long. "Drag racing is cutting a good light and shifting at the right time," he tells us. "That was just totally boring to me. You would spend all day at the track and then you would spend, what, under a minute actually racing? If you were making 15-second runs and you made four of them during the day, that's a minute." Instead, lured by its promise of a lot more track time, Bob turned to road racing, a challenge most suited to the lightweight, low-slung Corvair.

Bob started autocrossing—and loved it. Going to college and raising a family stalled his amateur racing career, but autocross kept its hooks in him. In 1985, he started racing again and, soon after, began looking for a Yenko Stinger, a car literally made for the track. With only a few more than a hundred made, and none after 1969, it wasn't going to be easy finding one. On top of that rarity, Stinger owners seem to really want to hold onto their cars—finding one is still easier than acquiring it.

To Chevrolet fans, the name Don Yenko mostly conjures up the Camaros, Chevelles and Novas that wore the Yenko Super Car badges. But before the big-block COPO cars, Yenko Sportscars, operating in a small shop out of the Yenko Chevrolet dealership in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, produced a handful of potent Stingers, Corvair-based sports cars built with the singular purpose of going racing.

Yenko achieved success at the track, winning two Sports Car Club of America production-class titles in a Corvette, along with helping manage several other title winners in addition to selling and preparing cars for other competitors. But Carroll Shelby's Cobra and Mustang G.T. 350 arrived and brought their winning ways to the party. A fierce competitor, Don Yenko wasn't happy about that at all.

In the June 1966 issue of *Sports Car* magazine, Yenko wrote, "Towards the end of the 1965 season, after repeatedly looking at the rear bumper of Mark Donohue's Mustang, I decided the only way I could stay loyal to Chevrolet (they put the food on my

table) was to build my own car. When SCCA classified Shelby's version of the Mustang and turned down the Corvair, this seemed to leave an opening for me. We bought a 1965 Corvair Corsa and started playing with it."

And play with it, he did. Satisfied that he could make a proper, decent-handling and quick sports car out of the Corvair, Yenko set to work. Yenko Sportscars had just a few weeks to build 100 complete cars before the SCCA's January 1, 1966, deadline for homologation for the season. GM delivered the bare Corvair Corsa coupes over a short span in mid-December. Yenko and company, working long hours (and every day but Christmas), completed the task on time, getting the SCCA's stamp of approval to race the newly minted Stinger, which had nary a Chevrolet emblem on it. The car was competitive out of the box, and in 1967, drivers in Yenko Stingers claimed not only the SCCA D Production national title, but also no less than 10 SCCA divisional titles. It may have been unconventional, but it was a star.

Chevrolet drastically restyled the Corvair for 1965, giving it a remarkably fresh and balanced design and an overall elegance that made the previous cars look dowdy in comparison. Although the grilleless Corvair shared virtually no parts with any other Chevrolet, the 1965 redesign gave the car's rear haunches a family resemblance to the full-size Impala, another car given a restyled body for 1965. Despite the undeniable good looks of the pillarless Corsa coupe, the Yenko team still saw fit to transform the car's appearance. They fattened up the C-pillars with fiberglass sail panels, created a fiberglass rear decklid with a built-in duckbill spoiler and functional, adjustable scoops, removed all chrome trim and painted stripes down the center of the car.

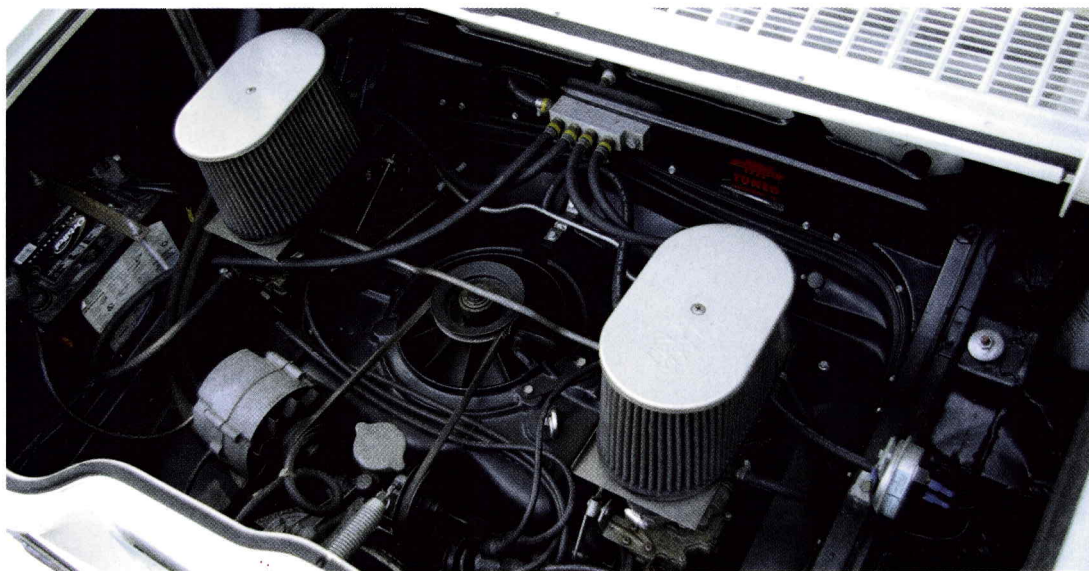
The transformation also involved body, suspension, interior and engine modifications. They tossed the rear seats, because that was part of the definition of a sports car at the time, per the SCCA.

**While Stage IV Stingers were stripped down for racing, Goodyear wanted a car with the normal roadgoing weight for tire testing. They still got the harnesses, a roll bar, full gauges and big gas tank.**

*Yenko wrote, 'Towards the end of the 1965 season, after repeatedly looking at the rear bumper of Mark Donohue's Mustang, I decided the only way I could stay loyal to Chevrolet... was to build my own car.'*



**Stage IV engine tune includes .040-over pistons, 10.5:1 compression ratio, ported and polished cylinder heads, forged pistons, exhaust headers, Tufftrided crankshaft, high-performance camshaft, heavy-duty valve springs and heavily modified carburetors to make 240hp.**



**Collector Bob Dunahugh has been bitten hard by the Yenko Corvair bug; he owns four of them and at one time owned as many as six. And he still road races two of them, just as Don Yenko intended.**



Stiffer rear springs, Monroe double-action shocks and heavy-duty brakes with a dual master cylinder sourced from the Cadillac parts bin all pointed to improving performance on the track.

Back behind that rear axle, the base Yenko engine made 160hp, a bump of 20 over the stock 164-cu.in. engine. Yenko modified the four Rochester one-barrel carburetors, fitted a seven-quart, finned aluminum oil pan from Cragar, Tufftrided the crankshaft, used Moraine connecting rods and bearings and included a fan-belt tensioner, addressing a notorious Corvair weak point. Known as the Stage I, this base model Stinger sold at a list price of \$3,520. For an additional \$500, customers could get the 190hp Stage II, with the addition of a high-performance camshaft, heavy-duty valve springs, modified pistons with notched crowns, a polished crankshaft, a bump in compression to 10.0:1 and a lightweight flywheel, along with gauges for oil pressure and temperature and an ammeter.

Stage III, "for the customer who wants all-out street performance" and was willing to pay another \$400 bump over Stage II, meant a further boost to 10.5 compression, porting and polishing the cylinder heads, forged pistons, adding a high-performance distributor and honing cylinder walls "to racing clearances," plus a boost to an impressive 220hp.

Full Stage IV for racing meant bored-out carburetors and a few other changes not suitable for a

road car, giving the car a legitimate 240hp—enough to make the stripped-down, 2,000-pound Stinger a legitimate contender against Shelby Mustangs and Triumph TR4s, the previously dominant cars in the class. Prices varied on the race-spec cars depending on the options chosen. Customers could also buy individual components from the different stages to build up the Stinger the way they wanted it. Yenko even offered an extensive catalog of Corvair parts for people building up their own cars.

Yenko built approximately 115 Stingers between 1966 and 1969, an even 100 of them in 1966. A handful of customer cars converted to Stingers also received Yenko three-digit serial numbers. These so-called "tag cars" were SCCA eligible. The last Stinger made in 1969 was a dedicated track car that was never intended to race.

Under contract by Ford, of all companies, The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company needed a high-speed testing platform for 13-inch tires—a vehicle that Ford simply didn't have, but Yenko did. In a rather unique set of circumstances, Goodyear purchased a Stinger outright, a Chevrolet in all but name, to test tires for Ford at their proving grounds in San Angelo, Texas. Although prepared as a Stage IV track car, complete with SCCA-approved roll bar, the Goodyear Stinger was not lightened and stripped. After all, Goodyear was interested in testing tires under load, not setting fast lap times. Goodyear took advantage of Yenko's ability to build a car



to their exact specifications, including fitting a rather tall 3.27 final-drive ratio as well as an auxiliary 24-gallon fuel tank from the Corvette. A heavy-duty, front-mounted oil cooler with "armored" oil lines to the engine compartment along with an extra-heavy-duty clutch, high-flow carbs, and special heavy-duty valve guides completed the package for Goodyear.

The Goodyear engineers and technicians put a little over 2,000 miles on the car before it made its way to Southern California, where a budding racer covered the original white with a Cadillac pearl white over blue, two-tone paint scheme. But he never raced the car, and it ended up in Wisconsin, awaiting a restoration alongside that owner's two other unrestored Stingers.

Enter Bob Dunahugh. Having already found, bought, restored and modified several Stingers, including a "tag" car that became an 1,800-pound track missile at road courses throughout the Midwest, Bob saw the Goodyear car as the Holy Grail of Corvairs, and certainly the most unique Stinger. After two years of coaxing and cajoling the owner, Bob acquired the unrestored and very well preserved Goodyear Corvair in 2000, though it still wore the pearl and blue paint.

Fortunately, the restoration was rather straightforward. Bob even found the Goodyear signage still intact under the layer of pearl paint, giving him a good template to correctly reproduce it. The Corvair's body was in excellent shape, with no signs of weather exposure, and with just over 2,000 miles on the odometer, all the mechanical bits were intact—two important conditions that made the restoration that much easier.

Once complete, Bob didn't stick the car in a museum; he went to the track. With its somewhat tall 3.27 gears, aimed at getting the car over 130 MPH, the Goodyear car is not ideal for a road

course, but Bob still takes it out for his beloved road races. Of course, he shares the car with spectators at car shows, too, though some remain skeptical of his choice to run a machine of such historical significance at speeds regularly over 100 MPH, wheel-to-wheel with other drivers. "Some guy told me, 'You can't take a car and go road-race it and then put it in a concours,'" Bob recounts. "So I put it in a national concours and it got 961 points, and then put it in the Chevrolet Hall of Fame in Decatur, Illinois. It's on loan to them. Right now, it's driving me crazy, because I know he doesn't want to give it up, but I gotta go road race in it. I'm really a terrible caretaker of that Goodyear car in a way. To get ready for the concours, I had to vacuum all of the grass out from inside the engine compartment."

It's heartening to know that not only is this car driven hard, but also that it's worth sharing in a museum. Bob remains smitten by the Corvair, even some 45 years after his first exposure to it. "It's the handling characteristics of the Corvair that I like. It seems like when I drive Corvettes or Camaros, it's like you're in the car, but not a part of it. These things—Corvairs—have really good road feel. Once in a while on a track day, I can take someone for a ride, and I can guess within 15 pounds of what they weigh by how they feel in the car. I can tell if my tank is half empty or whatever. And the car just has a tremendous amount of feedback and I don't know why. It's basically constructed just like any other American unibody car, but it has a lot of feel to it. You get on a road course and you can feel what the tires are doing.

"It was always an economy car, and when you run with some of these guys with the Porsches and BMWs, you don't have to beat them to hurt their feelings. Just run with them, stay with them. And if you beat 'em, it's all the more fun." 🐾

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When Goodyear ordered the last Yenko Stinger in full race spec for tire testing, they insisted on a white exterior with blue interior and a taller 3.27:1 rear-axle ratio.