



Why the Chevrolet Corvair Corsa Is Collectable



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Photography by Josh Clason for Petrolicious

The Collector is a weekly series produced in association with [Gear Patrol](#), where we discuss the car, and Gear Patrol discusses the essential gear inspired by the car.

It seems you can't mention the Chevrolet Corvair without mentioning Mr. Ralph Nader. Yes, his consumer safety campaign effectively killed the car and yes, there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the car. So, now that we've mentioned him, let's move on and discuss the Corvair. Simply put, it was revolutionary for an American car in that era.

Detroit effectively had one kind of car in the early sixties, the kind that was so massive it generated its own gravitational field. But the Corvair was conceived to

compete with the silly, little imports that some confused Americans were intent on buying. Not only that, but the engine was rear-mounted allowing a completely flat floor pan and an improved interior package. Introduced in 1960 to an eager public, the Corvair soldiered on through 1969 facing stiff competition from all of GM's rivals as well as some of General Motors own products (such as the Camaro). And none of those cars had any negative press surrounding them



But whether you believe that the criticism was warranted or that people simply didn't know how to safely operate a rear-engined car with a swing-axle suspension there was one special edition particularly worth noting: the Corvair Corsa. It debuted as a special edition when the second generation Corvair bowed, in 1965.

The base Corvair had a 95hp powerplant and there was an optional 110hp engine too. But the Corsa was fitted with a 140hp engine (with four single barrel carbs). If this *still* wasn't enough, Chevy offered an optional 180hp (!) turbocharged mill. And there was also an optional four-speed manual transmission when the turbocharged engine was selected.

As an aside, the Corvair has more in common with the Porsche 911 than many people know. Besides sharing a basic rear-engine, rear-wheel drive architecture, they were both powered by a flat-six engine and had a swing-axle suspension in the rear (the Corvair eventually shifted to an independent rear). In fact, the Corvair was frequently marketed and reviewed as the 'Poor-man's Porsche' (despite initially having two extra cylinders).

Not only could the Corsa pack 180hp, but it also included larger brakes borrowed from the Chevelle, a stronger differential ring gear, a Delcotron alternator (replacing the generator), and significant chassis refinements were made. In addition, a Special Purpose Chassis Equipment ("Z17") handling package, consisting of a special performance suspension and quick ratio steering box, was an interesting new option for 1965.

Sadly, the Corsa was short-lived, remaining in production for only two years. But a relatively short production run coupled with the most powerful engine for the model means that it is the most collectable model and will easily remain so.

If you'd like to check current values on Chevy Corvair Corsas, or other cars, click [here](#).

Thank you to owner Mike Fiscus for allowing us to photograph his 1965 Corvair.



KILLED BY THE CAMARO

The Corvair Corsa lasted only two short years, but in that time it won accolades for its great driving dynamics in the face of competitors like the Ford Mustang and the Plymouth Barracuda. It was the first American car with a monocoque chassis. Plus, it had full independent suspension like a sophisticated European car. Sadly, when the far more in-your-face Camaro was born, the Corsa was killed by Chevy as the top of the line Corvair. And though the '67 Camaro was American badassness, the Corvair Corsa was easily the classier ride.

Written by Amos Kwon of [Gear Patrol](#)

