



CORVETTE NEWS

CORVETTES IN COMPETITION

There were those who had the faith from the start, and there were those who had to be shown

BY JIM WRIGHT PHOTOS BY GORDON CHITTENDEN

IT'S TRUE! There are those who still firmly believe the Corvette *isn't* really a sports car. But they're getting fewer and farther between. There was a time when Corvette owners did have to offer up all sorts of excuses in defense of their chosen. But that was long ago.

Talk to a Corvette owner today and he may tell you that Corvette clubs are more plentiful than any other, with 142 groups located in 38 states, plus the District of Columbia and Canada,

and that 35 of these belong to the National Council of Corvette Clubs, Inc. They've got a bunch of members, too.

Corvettists are convinced they own dual-purpose machines and they meet to discuss the next club sponsored (theirs or somebody else's) competition event, which may be a rally or road race or slalom or simply Corvette day at the local dragstrip. Corvette clubs are as active as any anywhere.

Then there are the non-joiners. These owners far outnumber the orga-

nization men. They think like the joiners—they just don't dig it collectively.

All in all, Corvette owners probably are more active in all forms of automotive competition than any other single group of owners of any kind of car—foreign or domestic. True, at the drags spectators will see a greater number of GTOs and Mustangs than Corvettes, "but listen here, baby, don't you forget all them clubs with their rallies, slaloms and road races. We got the power."

IT'S LIKE this. Discount the early '54 and '55 models. The factory really wasn't aware of what it had in those days—like the '54 had a stovebolt Six in it. The new V-8 in '55 helped a little, but who noticed? In '56 and '57 it was a whole new ball game. The factories, including Chevrolet, were backing NASCAR stockers. Somebody talked Chevy into diverting some of those funds to a few Corvette owner/racer types and it paid off. The Mercedes 300 SL had been the hottest production sports car going 'til then. It took the '55 season to sort everything out. In '56 Corvettes started taking over and by '57 had the class sewed up. Blew Mercedes right out of U. S. racing; haven't been back since.

The factories got out of it in June of '57, but they kept on building and selling the "good" parts and their cars kept on winning.

Then there was 1960. This was the year Briggs Cunningham took a team of Corvettes to Le Mans for the 24-hour classic. One car finished in eighth place overall after averaging 97.92 mph for the distance. Another team car finished tenth. Both places were more than enough to establish the car

on the international scene. Pretty ducky, even to the die-hards.

This year at Le Mans the dealer-entered Dana Corvette, driven by Bob Bondurant, led the GT class to the 12-hour mark; then a piston pulled itself in half. His 172 mph down Mulsanne wasn't all that bad either.

On the home front it is becoming more and more difficult to beat the direct factory support that Ford is dishing out, but Corvettes slip through and win one every once in a while just to let everyone know they're still around.

On the Corvette scene, there are lots of guys who either just bought one, or are very seriously considering a buy. In any event, they're hot to get out there and go. But where . . .? Rallies? Slaloms? Road racing? The digs maybe? And how . . .? Man, the car weighs in the neighborhood of 3000 lb. Is the power there and can it be made to handle well enough to make it really competitive?

So, then the owner finds out the where of the question is up to him: How good a driver is he and how good does he want to be? How strong is the old killer instinct? Can he afford to turn his jewel into a single-purpose ma-

chine, or does it have to do dual-duty? The how is strictly a matter between owner and pocketbook. The factory builds and offers an option list a yard long that can turn the stock road Corvette into any kind of a competition machine.

COMPETITIVELY speaking, rallying probably is at the bottom of the heap—cost-wise and otherwise. Rallies are time-distance events run over public roads at legal speeds (heh, heh, just don't get too far behind). They can be anything from a short 2-3 hour jaunt up to 2-3 days. The competition is very keen, and while the competitor can have fun with just a simple stopwatch to keep track of his time, he won't finish anywhere near the top unless he's decked out like a rolling computer. About the only special automotive equipment a Corvette needs is a set of good, high-speed road tires. Also, a navigator is necessary to keep track of directions, time and distance. Happily married? Take the wife along as navigator and find out for sure.

A frustrated Fangio, either too young, too old, too chicken, or too poor to go road racing, can go the



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slalom route. Preparation and maintenance costs are decidedly lower than in road racing, the first two excuses (except in extreme cases) don't count here, and how can one fall back on the third excuse when he's the only one out on the slalom course? Slalom courses usually are laid out on large, flat parking lots, are seldom more than a half mile in length, usually less. The courses feature a variety of corners connected by a series of short straights. Usually a relatively long straight, where competitors can unwind it a bit, is included. These are a greater test of driving skill than they are a display of power. It doesn't hurt either to have a car that's set up to handle decently.

Classes usually are set up according

to engine size. In most classes, the only engine preparation required is a good tune with special attention paid to float levels. It's also a good idea to baffle the oil pan to ensure that there always is an adequate oil supply around the oil pump pick-up during acceleration, braking and cornering.

HEAVY-DUTY suspension (shock absorbers, springs, antiroll bar) should be installed. Tires are extremely important. Special slalom tires that require wider rims are available and are used by the hot dogs. The less serious get by with good sports car-type road tires. Sting Rays should be decambered 2-3° at the rear.

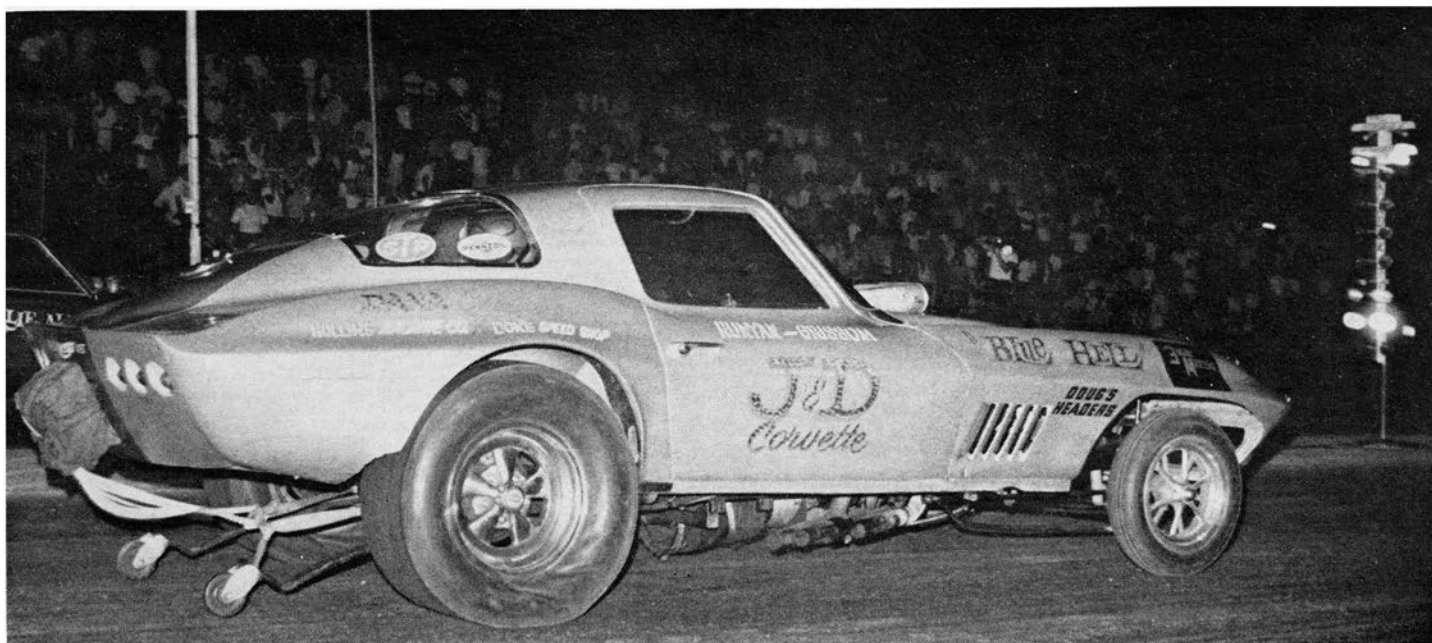
These short courses demand a lot of torque. Most slalomists wouldn't run with anything less than a 4.10:1 ratio Positraction rear axle. Because slalom events are run in lower gears and en-

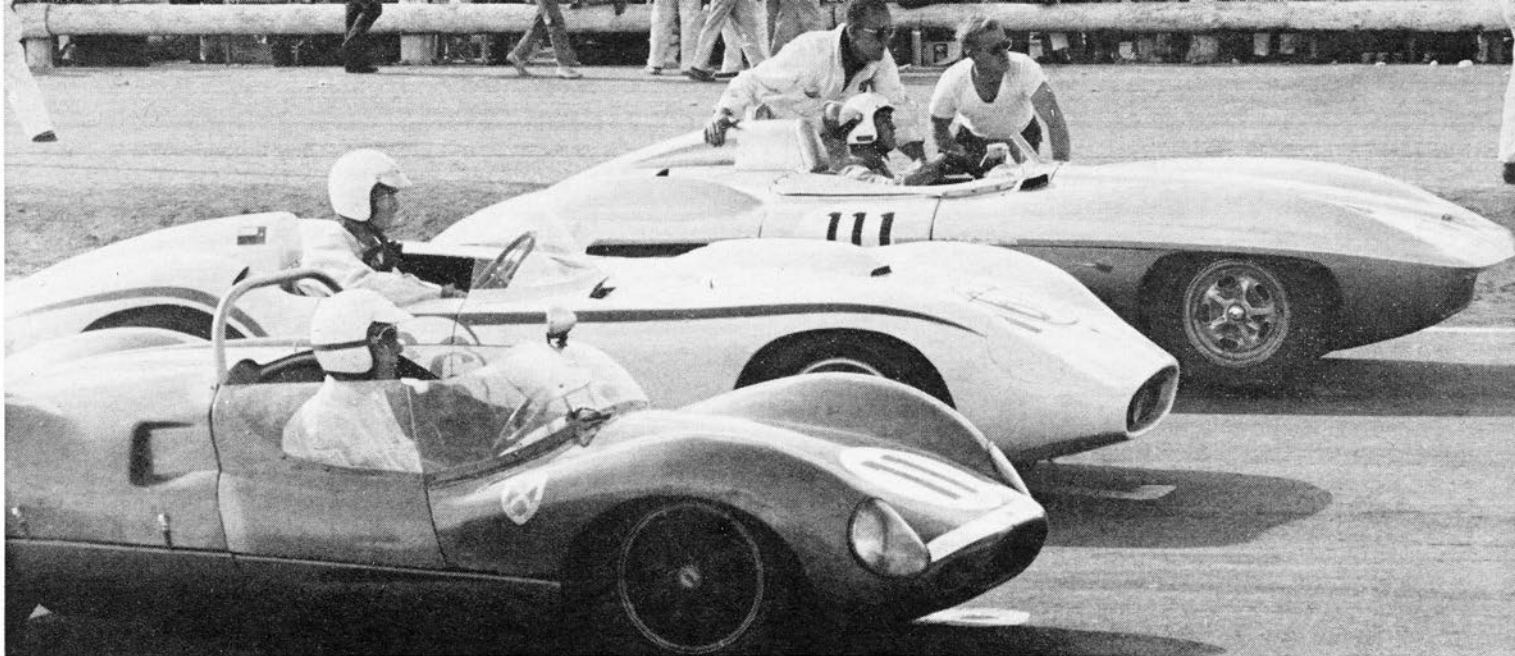
gines are wound tight, it is best to make sure the tachometer works well. A rollover bar is not a bad idea and neither is a crash helmet, though one might not be required for a particular slalom event.

Road racing is something else again. This requires an abundance of time, money, brains and guts (many have found talent to be a great help).

First, the would-be road racer should arm himself with a current copy of SCCA's rule book and not attempt or plan any of the necessary chassis and engine modifications until he has committed to memory what's allowable. This saves future trouble and needless embarrassment.

The 283- and 327-cid engined models run in B-Production Class. The 396- and 427-cid engines put Corvettes in A-Production. Either is a tough nut to crack. This goes for most club events





and all of those on a regional or national basis. The novice must take advantage of every modification rule right out to the limit. It's not so much those other independently run 'Vettes that are the problem. It's those factory-backed Mustangs.

Of course if it happened to be the Corvette driver's first year on the circuit no one would think badly of him if he showed up with nothing more than basic chassis modifications, good tires, and an expressed desire to stay out of everyone's way. He could putter along there at the rear of the pack, enjoying himself immensely, while inexpensively learning the intricacies of big time sporty car racing. A lot of good drivers have done it.

SOME KIND of racing is better than none at all, which brings up drag racing. On the surface this looks fairly

simple, but, of course, it isn't. It can get just as complex and just as expensive as road racing for those interested in winning. Don't forget to get the current rule book!

Stock classes are set up (NHRA) on a weight to horsepower ratio (advertised shipping weight divided by advertised horsepower). In stock classes, Corvettes run in B/S all the way down to D/S. The stock designation shouldn't lull the prospective drag racer to sleep. No one that's serious pulls up to the line with an engine that hasn't been "blueprinted"—torn down and gone completely through to make sure that all clearances, tolerances and fits are right on the money. It's good for a 10% power increase.

Then there's a class called modified sports. This is kind of an "anything goes almost" class with practically no limits on engine modifications and very

few on chassis and body modifications.

Above this are the 'Vette-bodied (in looks only) funnycars. These are almost always supercharged and run on healthy doses of nitromethane. They feature all-out, dragster-type engines, tube chassis, light-light 'glass bodies and a price tag of from \$7500—\$10,000. Why not buy two?

Then there's Bonneville. If a man wants to find out what his machine will *really* do, he can enter the Nationals and get the answer—with a dashplaque to prove it to all those doubters.

One more word of advice—beware if that Corvette owner/informant/historian and buyer-of-drinks ends up trying to sell the listener *his* Corvette—he is either drunk or crazy because no dyed-in-the-wool 'Vette owner would ever think of selling out—at least not unless he already had a new one on order! ■

