

► No one knows Corvettes like Zora Arkus-Duntov, the highly practical driver-designer who's project engineer for Chevrolet's sports car. His views on the development of the latest Corvettes are of great import: "Originally, our plan was to develop the car along separate touring and racing lines, as Jaguar did with the XK series on one hand and the C-Type and D-Type on the other. With this in mind we first introduced racing options, then the SR2, finally the SS, which was intended to be our 'prototype' competition car. When this project was cut off, we realized we had to approach the Corvette in some other way. Since we could no longer build two kinds of Corvettes with different characteristics, we decided to give the Corvette buyer as much of *both* worlds as we could — to use our racing experience to combine in one automobile the comfort of a tourer and the ability of a racer. A big order, yes, but an interesting and worthwhile one. The 1960 Corvette was the first to reflect this thinking; the 1961 car is very similar."

Before talking to Mr. Duntov about the 1961 Corvette, SCI had formed this strong general impres-

sion of it: one of the most remarkable marriages of touring comfort and violent performance we have ever enjoyed, especially at the price. That our impression matched Chevy's intention so exactly is a tribute to the job done by Duntov and his crew. We had ample time to sample the latest Corvette and get to know its virtues and vices, yet could complete the rigorous R.R.R. routine in time to publish this report scant weeks after its introduction. Unique dispensation by Chevrolet made this possible. In mid-August, well before official release, we picked up production Corvette number three in Detroit, drove it to New York for testing at Lime Rock Park and our other test areas, and returned it to the Motor City. Altogether SCI drove this automobile almost 1900 miles.

PLENTY OF POWER

Since this red and cream machine was equipped with the hottest engine on the long list of Corvette options, it's no surprise that we were stunned — as in earlier Corvette tests — by its terrific performance. It was equipped with the Duntov cam and Rochester fuel injection, the latter always being accompanied by

special cylinder heads. Therein lies a tale. As is well-known, last year Chevrolet introduced aluminum cylinder heads for the fuel-injected engines. In addition to the change in material, there were important design alterations which accounted for the gain of 25 bhp over the previous 290 bhp rating. For better breathing the



intake valve head size was increased from 1.72 inches to 1.94 inches, which was helpful but which couldn't boost power unless matching improvements were made in the intake port. It couldn't be enlarged all the way through because the pushrods pass close to the ports near their outer ends, so the port was necked down to

a venturi shape adjacent to the pushrod holes, then allowed to expand smoothly on its way to the combustion chamber. It works very well.

The alloy used for these 1960 heads contained a high percentage of silicon, an amount not specified by GM but certainly in the 16 to 20 percent bracket — sufficient, anyway, to make inserted valve seats unnecessary. The casting method used was the same low-pressure system now used for the Corvair heads and other parts, in which the molten alloy flows up into the mold from below, under moderate pressure. The casting is an intricate one, and the high-silicon alloys tend to be difficult to handle, with the unfortunate result in Chevy's case that there were frequent faults in the castings and consequently a high rate of rejection. It did happen that an occasional head managed to conceal a flaw through all the inspections and smuggle it aboard a Corvette; this was one of the two prime causes of the field failures that gave these heads a poor reputation. The other cause was overheating. If for some reason a Corvette's cooling system failed or lost water, the aluminum heads, with their lower melting point,



Road Research Report: CHEVROLET Corvette

were much more likely to be damaged than were iron heads.

If you had a set of sound aluminum heads, then, and kept your cooling system in good order, you had absolutely nothing to worry about. Many Corvette owners racing with aluminum heads today will bear this out. But that high rejection rate, plus the frequency of field failure, led Chevy to decide to stop supplying the heads in 1961, and to replace them with cast iron heads that incorporate the same refinements to the intake tracts. These iron heads were given their baptism on the Cunningham Corvettes at Le Mans last June, and are now supplied on the 1961 fuel injection engines.

INJECTION REFINEMENTS

To get those added horses at the top end, this engine obviously has to breathe more air, which could be supplied by increasing the area of the intake venturi. Doing this, however, would weaken the metering signal at low and medium speeds, much the way a large carb venturi brings on low-speed metering problems. Duntov says that the extra air was needed for short periods only at very high engine speeds so Chevy built in a reserve supply by increasing the height of the "dog house" of the fuel injection unit. The fins were trimmed off the top, which was raised almost an inch to increase the volume of the plenum chamber inside. (The cross-section on page 46 shows the 1957 engine with the finned manifold, drawings of later engines being unavailable.) The ram pipes keep their original 12-inch length in the course of this change, which was made in 1960. Another important change in the engine department is the use on *all* 1961 Corvettes of the Harrison aluminum radiator fitted only with the Duntov-cam engines last year.

Once you know how, starting the fuel-injected Chev engine is a snap either cold or warm. In the former case you leave your foot off the gas; in the latter you press the pedal to the floor. A fast-idle setting is in effect when the engine's cold, and, like any good injected engine, it runs smoothly and regularly right from the start. As smoothly and regularly as it ever will, in this case, for the warmed-up 850-rpm idle is definitely rough. With solid tappets and 66 degrees of overlap this is hardly surprising, and Duntov points out that the post-1960 increase in intake valve size had the effect of aggravating the slight roughness that existed earlier. It also makes the unit a little easier to stall if you don't apply enough gas. Throttle response is excellent — instant, proportional to pedal position, and cutting off power effectively on the over-run.

Above we're talking about response in terms of control. Response in terms of a kick in the back is sudden and convincing. The broad range of power offered by this remarkable V8 is extremely impressive; credit must be given the big valving at the top end and the injection over the rest of the range. No matter what gear you're in or what speed you're going, you can step down

hard and get the same surging lunge forward. As the Engine Flexibility graph shows, the powerplant pulls smoothly and strongly from idle right on out to the red line, which is marked on the tach at 6500. We used 6500 for our acceleration runs, though Duntov feels you get equally good results by shifting at 6000. So well are these special-cam engines assembled and balanced that you can, if necessary, look at 7000 or even 7500, something we didn't try and Chevrolet didn't encourage.

SOUND AND FURY

Appropriately for a sports car, this engine is exciting to listen to. Along with the new back end shape, the twin tail pipes have been redirected so they angle outward just behind the rear wheels. They rumble with a truly musical motorboat tone and beat a tattoo on the sides of the cars you (frequently) pass. As the revs rise, the tone ranges up through several octaves to a musical moan that emanates more from the engine than from the exhaust. In short: a hard, solid, machine-like sound that inspires confidence. At or near idle speed, especially with the top up, a vibration period materialized on our test Corvette that set up a "thrumming" within the cockpit. The new, more forward location of the exhaust outlets also seemed to make the exhaust more audible in the cockpit than on earlier versions, something that makes you think the engine is revving faster than it should at cruising speeds. The sound can become as tiring on a long trip as it is fun on a short one.

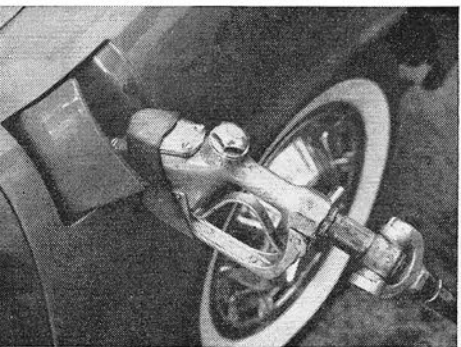
By any standard at all, the Corvette we tested is a sensational performer. Right up to 60 mph, in fact, its curve traces an arc much like that of the 250/GT Ferrari (The Corvette took 6.7 seconds against the Ferrari's 6.6). Unlike the Ferrari, the Corvette goes all the way to 60 in first gear, then after the shift to second the curves begin to diverge as the Ferrari's lighter weight and superior aerodynamics make their effect felt. Yet the Ferrari had a vibrant, restless air about it that was constantly urging you to put your right foot down and *go*. Not so the Corvette, which is just as happy pottering along byways at more sedate velocities. On this car, there were four speeds available but it never seemed to matter which one we were in. Our trips back and forth to Detroit could have been made all in first gear or all in fourth gear, for example, still keeping up with the traffic. Just for amusement, we took some rough acceleration times to sixty in each of the gears, using one gear only each time. In second it took about 8 seconds, in third about 10, and in fourth gear only a little less than 15!

BOX AND BRAKES

It is certainly not the intent of Chevrolet that you should not shift this transmission, however. It's one of the quickest, slickest shifts available today on any automobile. Its short, plastic-knobbed lever is spring-loaded to the right side of its very narrow gate, and the
(Text continued on page 102, data overleaf)



Dechromed headlights and a thin-line grille give the front a new look too. Push on front edge opens lid, below. We had to try it every 160 miles or so.

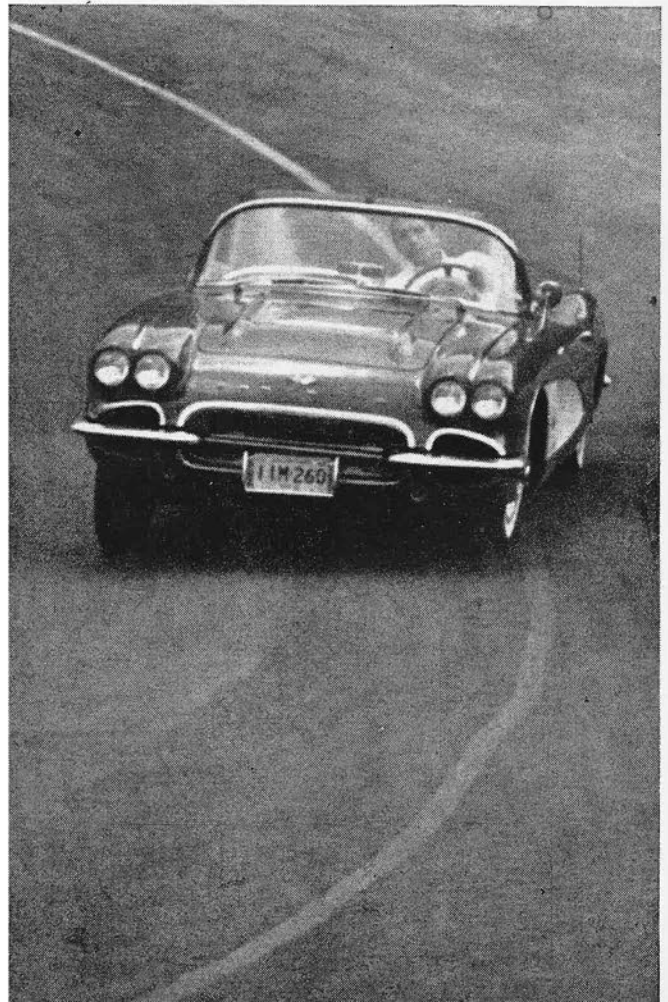


Cockpit continues emphasis on high style. Subtle changes over the years have brought more leg room, improvements in driving position. Seats look more buckety than they are, offering little side support.

Corvette requires meaningful coordination of steering and throttle on corners. Limited-slip rear end lets you use power to hold it on line.

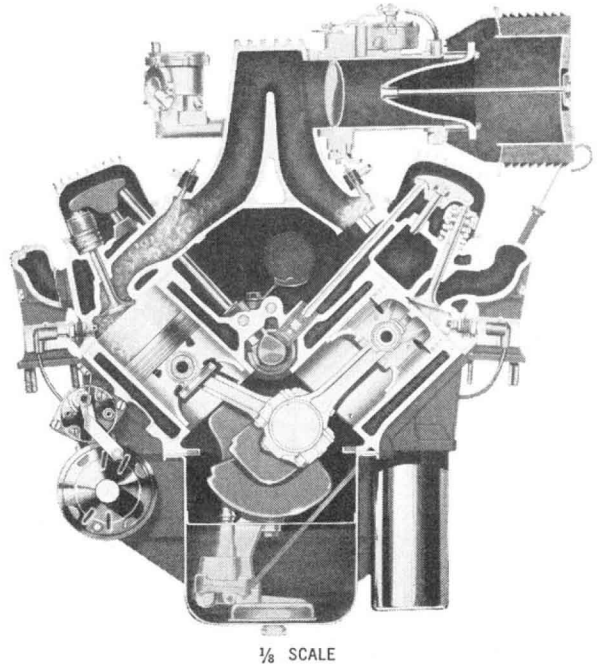


Upswept tail resembles XP-700, ties design to Corvair styling. Exhaust pipes end behind wheels, shouldn't get bent on steep driveways or curbs.



Road Research Report: CHEVROLET Corvette

Price as tested	1000	\$4886	7000
Displacement	20	283 cu in	320
Power (SAE)	20	315 bhp	
Curb Weight	1000	3065 lbs	4000
Swept Braking Area	100	276 sq in	400
Weight on Driving Wheels	35	48%	65
Wheelbase	70	102 in	130
Piston Speed, "corrected"	1000	3520 fpm	4000
Speed @ 1000 rpm in Top Gear	10	21.4 mph	25
Mileage	10	14 mpg	40
Manufacturer:	Chevrolet Motor Division General Motors Building Detroit 2, Michigan		



ENGINE:

Displacement283 cu in, 4640 cc
 DimensionsEight cyl, 3.875 x 3.00 in
 Compression Ratio11.0 to one
 Power (SAE)315 bhp @ 6200 rpm
 Torque295 lb-ft @ 4900 rpm
 Usable rpm Range850-6500 rpm
 Piston Speed $\rightarrow \sqrt{s/b}$
 @ rated power3520 ft/min
 Fuel recommendedPremium
 Mileage10-18 mpg
 Range165-290 miles

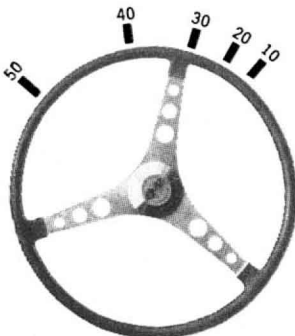
CHASSIS:

Wheelbase102 in
 Tread, F,R57, 59 in
 Length178 in
 Suspension: F, ind., coil, wishbones, anti-roll bar;
 R, rigid axle, leaves, radius rods, anti-roll bar.
 Turns to Full Lock1.9
 Tire Size6.70 x 15
 Swept Braking Area276 sq in
 Curb Weight (full tank)3065 lbs
 Percentage on Driving Wheels48%
 Test Weight3390 lbs

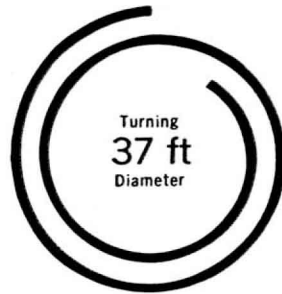
DRIVE TRAIN:

Gear	Rev	Synchro?	Ratio	Step	Overall	Mph per 1000 rpm
		No	2.26		8.36	9.5
1st		Yes	2.20	33%	8.14	9.7
2nd		Yes	1.66	27%	6.15	12.9
3rd		Yes	1.31	31%	4.84	16.3
4th		Yes	1.00		3.70	21.4

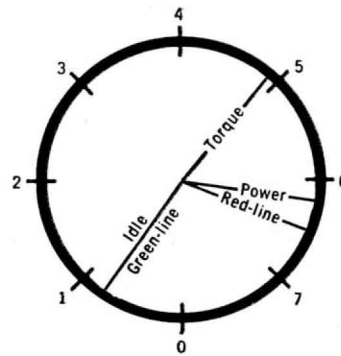
Final Drive Ratios: 3.70 to one standard; 3.36, 3.55, 4.11 and 4.56 optional.



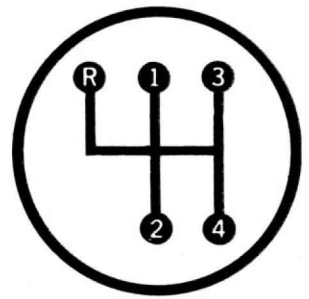
30 psi
Steering Behavior



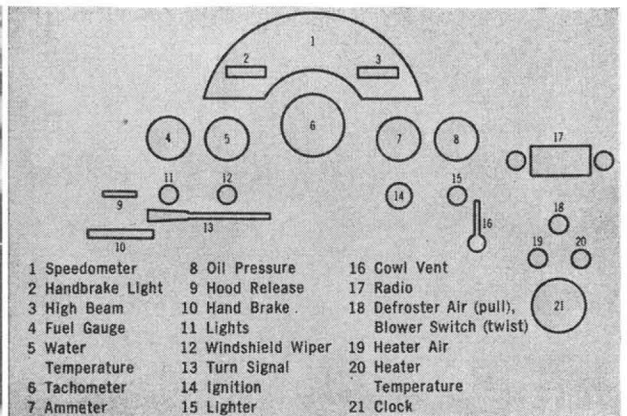
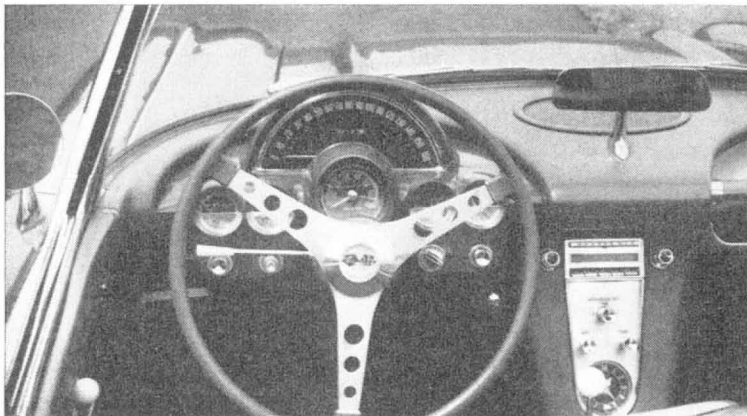
Turns to Full Lock

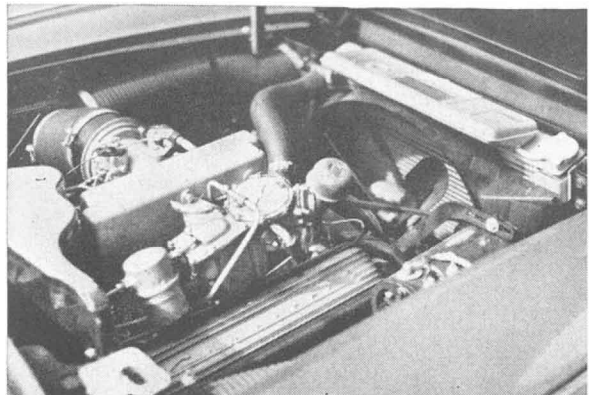
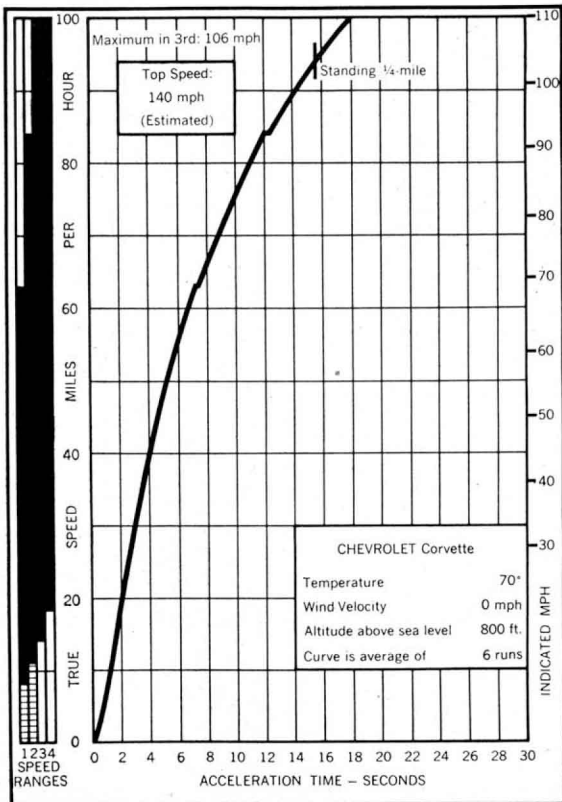
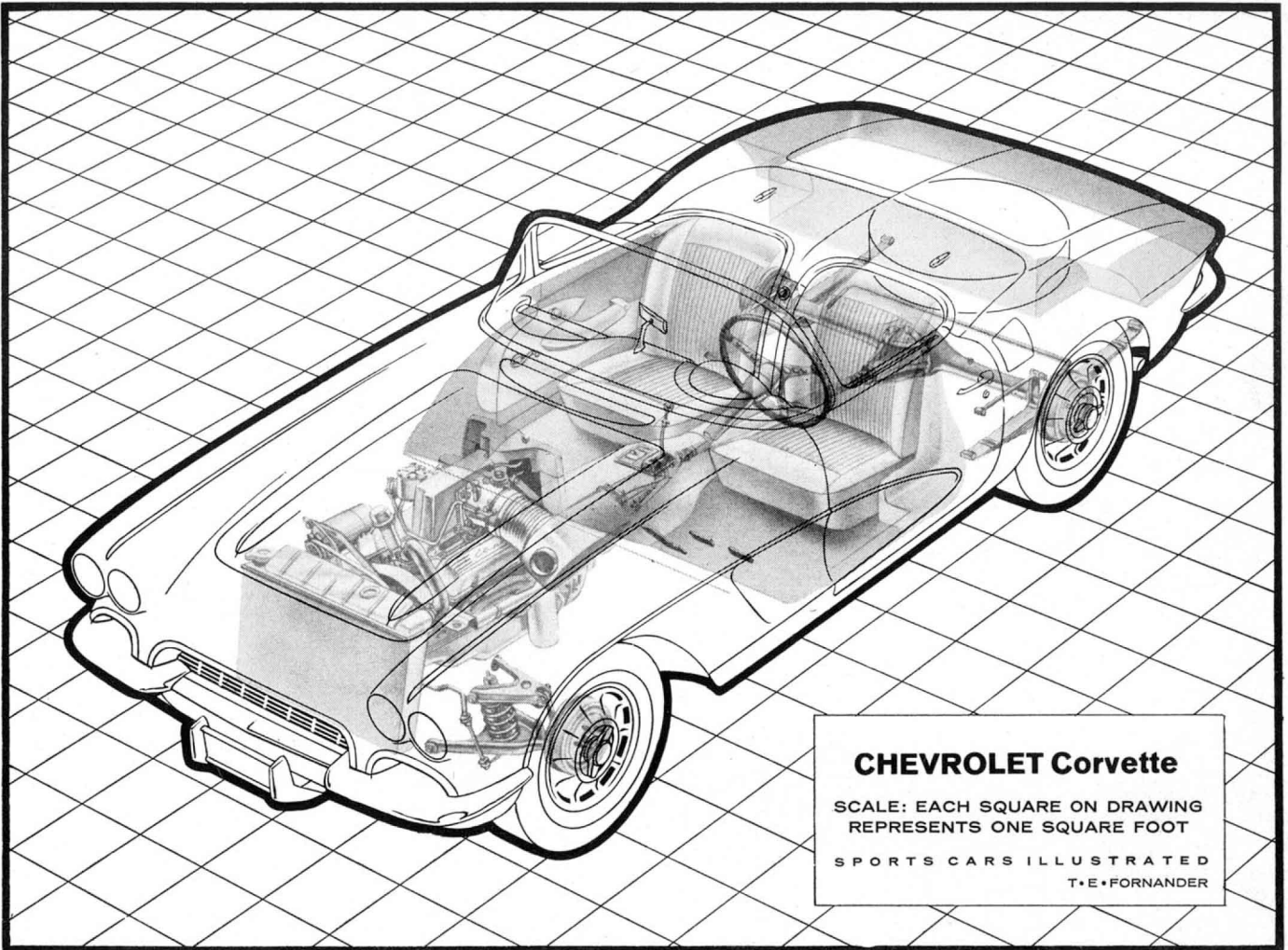


Engine Flexibility



Shift Pattern







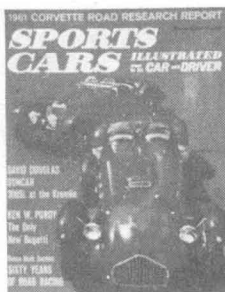
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ROAD RESEARCH REPORT: CHEVROLET CORVETTE

(Continued
from page 44)

movement of lever and linkage is light and easy. If you're really forcing shifts through in a hurry, though, you'll find that you'll be hung up for just an instant as the very positive synchromesh does its job. This is in contrast to Porsche-type synchro, for example, which allows you to push your way past the synchronizing mechanism to save fractions of a second in competition. The ratios are high and close, as the step percentages show, and all the indirect gears emit the same, just-audible gear whine. An excellent feature is the T-handled lockout for reverse gear.

A major gearbox improvement for 1961 is the use, finally, of the aluminum case for the four-speed unit that was first tried on the SS back in 1957. The new case pares off 15 pounds, and is bolted up against the aluminum bell housing that is now supplied with all manual-shift Corvettes. Within the housing is a clutch that performed smoothly and reliably through all our testing. Its pedal travel is long and light, and its engagement was always clean and solid. It's reassuring to know that a clutch redesign program back in early 1957 produced a unit that's safe up to 10,000 rpm — in emergencies. During our acceleration runs the optional Positraction differential proved its worth by leaving twin black streaks of equal length on Lime Rock's asphalt. It also greatly aids control by power when cornering.

This Corvette was equipped as a hot "boulevard" machine, having the most potent engine but with standard brakes and tubeless whitewall tires. Bringing the car to a halt after a few of those scalding 0-100 runs quickly induced fade that was marked enough to cause alarm. Fortunately, the brakes recovered very quickly, with no grabbing, pulling or other signs of damage. But they are definitely not nearly up to the car's performance. To get suitable brakes, you'd select Regular Production Option 686, which combines sintered iron linings with the standard drums. RPO 687 goes all the way with a finned, fan-equipped drum and scoops in the backing plates, still using the sintered iron linings. The grabby, unpredictable ceramic-metallic linings are now a thing of the past, having served their purpose as a stopgap until Moraine could design sufficient life and consistency into the sintered iron type.

IMPROVED HANDLING

Finally, at the end of its development life, the original Corvette has been endowed with handling that allows its ample power to be used for control, in both street and race track trim. How? By making street and race chassis trim identical! This policy began in the 1960 model year, when the optional stiff suspension kits were discontinued, and the standard suspension was stiffened in roll by removing the original kink in the 13/16-inch front anti-roll bar and by fitting a 5/8-inch anti-roll bar at the rear. This trim is unchanged for '61. The only suspension change that Duntov

would recommend for a competition Corvette is exceedingly subtle: take out the stock rubber bushings in the front anti-roll bar mountings and linkage, and insert bushings of harder rubber. This will reduce lost motion in the anti-roll bar's action, effectively increasing the front-end roll resistance and biasing the Corvette's handling toward harder, faster cornering.

The result of this basic change is a real improvement in Corvette handling. It sits flatter, making entering and leaving corners a less tricky maneuver than before. As the Steering Behavior graph shows, the Corvette understeers, requiring more and more steering lock as speed increases, but it's by no means as gross an understeerer as earlier versions, which (in street trim) would simply plow right off the road as power was applied. Now power can be used to bring the tail end out when cornering fast, reflecting a much better balance between front and rear suspensions.

When either end of the Corvette does swing out in a corner, it swings pretty quickly and without much warning, so some vigilance is required. Properly set up on the right line, the '61 Corvette can get through a corner with impressive speed. The kicker is "properly". If you select a conventional line, applying power in the usual way, you'll find that the car will plow out very wide at the exit and you'll be wondering if you have strength enough to haul it into line. Under these conditions it can be a real handful. To get through easily, it's necessary to set up for the corner earlier, steer hard into the bend earlier — much as if the bend were tighter than it actually is, and apply power sooner. Done right, this will bring the Corvette out fast and clean, with much less effort.

This willingness to work well on one line but not so well on others means that the fast Corvette driver does not have many choices of position, in or near a corner. He's either on the proper line or very slow or in trouble. The suspension changes have made the car much more susceptible to power control, giving the driver another dimension in which to operate, but this new realm is still very strictly bounded.

BEHIND THE WHEEL

During our handling tests, we found that the steering now transmits a small but useful amount of information to the driver regarding the adhesion at the front wheels, and has a minimum of lost motion. Without a doubt, the slightly faster steering ratio, supplied with RPO 687, would be just right for fast cornering. The stock ratio is slow for sporting driving but fine for touring. It's a basically better car to drive now, also, because Chevrolet has steadily improved the driving position over the years. No longer must the steering wheel be placed right under the chin. Progressive improvements in seat design and travel have given the driver a lot more room, if not a continental arm's-length position.

Trimly upholstered with a new narrow ribbing, the Corvette seats are easy to get into and out of, over a wide door sill, but offer (as a corollary) very little lateral support to the occupants. We felt that the seats were placed more "flat" than they might be for maximum thigh and back support, but we realize that any more rearward angle would cause interference be-

tween thighs and steering wheel. The arm rests on the elaborately-trimmed doors are placed so they don't interfere with the driver's movements; in general there's a lot more room where it counts than in early Corvettes.

Far too decorative in design, the dashboard still manages to convey some useful information. The big 160-mph speedometer carries no resettable trip odometer, surprisingly for a car that's so popular for rallies, and suffers from a needle that wavers uncertainly and lags substantially under hard acceleration.

GAS ON THE MIND

The fuel gauge, and functions connected with it, annoyed us considerably. To begin with, the Corvette's standard tank holds only 16.4 gallons. You can get a 24-gallon fiberglass tank, but it fills up the top well and makes a hardtop mandatory. At a cruising mileage of 16 miles per gallon, the stock tank would allow a range of 260 miles — none too generous. The fuel gauge indicates "empty" with about 4 gallons remaining, though, which makes the brow break out with sweat after only 200 miles. Speaking practically, we found we filled up about every 160 miles during our test, an inconveniently short interval for a car designed for long-distance fast touring. In addition, the fuel tank is not easy to fill, and near the top the gauge isn't proportional in its readings, causing the needle to drop to a $\frac{3}{4}$ reading after you drive around the block from the gas station. We're not upset about the mileage, which is as good as one can expect from a car of this performance. It's just that the car does everything it can to keep your thoughts on gasoline at least 50 percent of the time. This includes a gas tank vent that percolated in hot weather and wafted fumes into the nearby cockpit.

On a car as fast as this one, or even a machine approaching its speed, nothing is more important to safety and stability than controls that work smoothly and effectively. For this reason we took a dim view when the accelerator pedal started doing tricks — namely staying about $\frac{3}{4}$ on when we backed off. Investigation showed that the pedal is held to the floor by two rounded studs which snap into holes in its rubber surface, these studs doing double-duty as guides and hinge points. On this car one of these studs would snap out when we tromped down hard, as when starting a warm engine, leaving a flopping pedal which would stick "on". When it worked properly, the accelerator gave smooth and proportional control, but this kind of sloppy assembly of such an important component was inexcusable. Long-legged drivers will appreciate the extra inch of seat travel that can be supplied on order.

EFFECTIVE RESTYLING

Our Corvette had only the soft top, which folds so neatly into its covered compartment behind the seats. When putting the top up, we found it works best to clamp the two front latches first, then the two on the back deck. The latter engage with surprisingly fragile loops from the rear top rail, which doesn't exactly mate tightly with the rear deck. We weren't able to check the top's rain-resistance, but there were a few stray breezes with the windows rolled up tight. Vision with the top

(Continued on page 104)

SCALEXTRIC

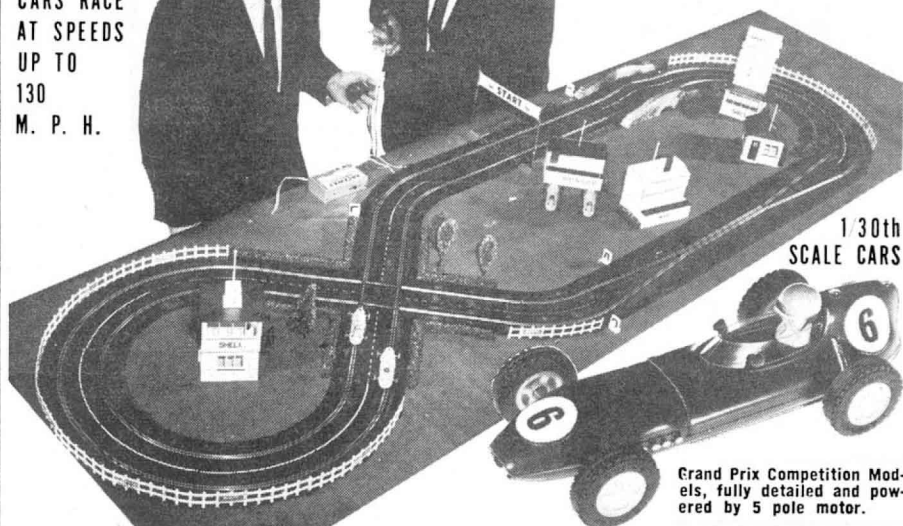
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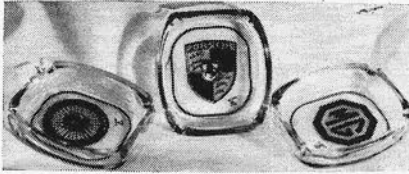
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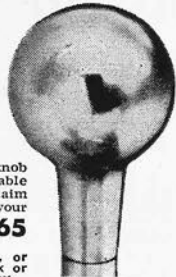
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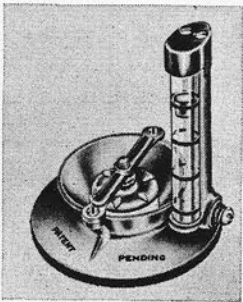
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ILLUSTRATED

(Continued from page 103)

up is blocked off in a big way in the two rear quarter areas, and the plastic rear window has the usual ripples. Draft-free ventilation is practically impossible to arrange, since there are no quarter-windows next to the "old-fashioned" wraparound windshield. The cowl vent lets in lots of air, which beats down on the shins at speed in a way that can become tiring. Fitted with a two-speed fan, the heating and defrosting system has more than enough power for this small interior.

The only major styling change for 1961 is the new tail, which most observers approved heartily. Its tucked-in lines mate well with the original shape, and even seem to increase the usable luggage volume.

Comparing the 1961 Corvette with a 1957-vintage car, one is surprised at how complete a change has been effected over the years. When the dual headlight treatment arrived, for example, the width of the hood opening was radically reduced, making work on the engine—especially spark plug changing—much more difficult. Buried down on the right side, the battery is hard to reach too. Generally, Chevy is happy with the way the fiberglass construction has worked out, one important advantage being the absolute absence of rust and the resulting high value of a used Corvette. Studies have also confirmed that integral construction (the only alternative now being considered by our industry) isn't as effective for an open car as the present frame and body layout, especially on a weight basis. So it appears that future Corvettes will stay with the present method of construction.

DETAILS AREN'T EVERYTHING

Like most General Motors cars, the Corvette boasts remarkably good detail finish, an approach that can be an asset to a sports machine. Control handles like the hand brake and hood release have handsome lettering with an impressive burnished chrome finish; other details are dealt with just as deftly. But the styling, in spite of the renovated tail, dates from an era when design effort was concentrated on the simulation of devices and effects that were mechanical in appearance but not necessarily automotive or operational: phony louvers, scoops, jet pods here and there, dashboards that sought to confuse rather than clarify.

Aerodynamics are important, certainly on a car this fast, but we realize more and more that in the automotive speed ranges there's ample room for styling within an aerodynamic area. We're glad to observe a general trend in our industry toward styling idioms that are automotive, once again, and relatively restrained in nature. The Valiant and Corvair are two excellent examples of this trend away from airplane and rocket ship orientation. Now that Chevrolet has completed its family of Corvairs, we expect the next project will be a new Corvette. With the experience they've gained with this car, and in view of the trend toward sensible styling and sensational engineering, the next Corvette should be a hum-dinger. All they have to do is put the same emphasis on doing things that they have in the past on seeming to do things. Since this 1961 Corvette already does more than most drivers can handle, that's an exciting prospect. —SCI

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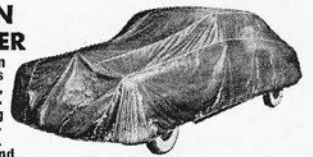
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