

Ted Trevor stuffs a small-block Chevy into the back seat of a Corvair — retains the four-speed and independent rear suspension, all with no reverse rotation problems. The result?

a MIND-BENDER



Text and photos by John Thawley ■ If General Motors does get around to producing the much-rumored mid-engine Corvette in a year or so, you could be the first guy on your block to meet one heads up with a homemade bomb. Nothing so startling in that until you figure out that the entire project could cost less than two grand, looks like the granddaddy of all sleepers and still provides reliable transportation.

All of this is a part of the world that Ted Trevor of Crown Manufacturing in Costa Mesa thrives in. The latest Trevor touch is manifested in a conversion kit which allows the mating of any V8 Chevrolet to a late model ('66 or newer) Corvair — placing the engine in the back seat, running through a four-speed box and retaining the fully independent rear suspension. The result is a low-priced, trouble-free, mid-engined wildcat which may retain the outward appearance of a stock Corvair.

Since Trevor is selling conversion kits and includes detailed instructions in each kit, we will not attempt to verbally tighten each nut and bolt in this story. However, this is basically what is involved.

The Corvair engine and transaxle are removed. You may sell the engine to a buddy if he wants to play "King of Volkswagen Hill," but save the transaxle. The seats are removed and holes cut into the floor for oil pan access, motor mounts and engine air. Holes are also sliced into the trunk for ducting of radiator air flow. You'll need an air chisel for all of this unless you want it to be a two-year project.

The drive train is a rather straightforward arrangement. Crown supplies an input shaft which fits in place of the Corvair clutch gear on a Crown transaxle mainshaft. An adapter plate goes from the nose of the Corvair transmission to the standard Chevy V8 bellhousing. The basic drive train is now complete and ready to run. Internally, the Corvair gearbox is the same as the full-size Chevy gearbox, so the apparent risk of shucking a gearbox is no more than in a hopped-up Chevelle.

The standard Corvair rear crossmember is used and bolts to the adapter plate to support the front of the transaxle assembly and the rear of the engine. Front mounting and engine location come in the form of stock Chevy mounts attached to a Crown crossmember and engine mount bracket. As a final touch in the mounting department, they supply a hanger bracket for the rear of the transaxle.

Clutch actuation comes from hydraulics — courtesy of GM trucks. Crown supplies an adapter for both master and slave cylinders. The alternator is tucked out of the way at the lower left front of the engine by an adapter. A wiring diagram is provided with each kit. There's not much to it, since the system remains 12 volts, rear-engined and Chevrolet.

Beefy gearshift linkage is supplied, which routes motion around the bottom side of the engine and into the gearbox. A radiator is mounted up front and pipes routed down through the shallow tunnel. Depending on how far you plan to carry the project, headers and a rollbar may be installed. Trevor supplies templates for an engine cover that may be constructed of plywood, insulated and carpeted. (The prototype vehicle was finished off in black, so the engine in the back seat is almost undetectable.)

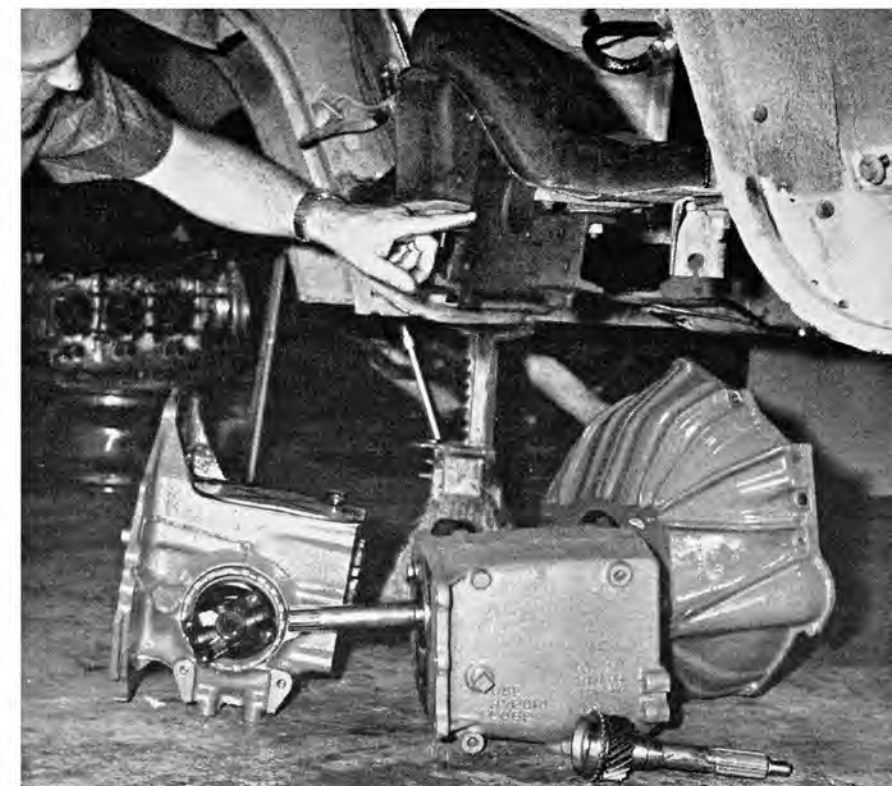
A choice of three stock rear gear ratios, 3.27:1, 3.56:1 and 3.89:1, puts the conversion in the ball park for economy or performance. Performance — the word takes on new meaning after a ride in this car. Foot flat on the floor in first gear produces no

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Underside shot of Trevor's trick car reveals stock Chevy pan hanging between Hooker headers which have been modified for street by way of a grafting job. Arrow points out the hefty shift arm that routes the motion around the pan and into the box. Item is made of 1 3/4-inch mild steel tube. Clutch cover can be fitted.

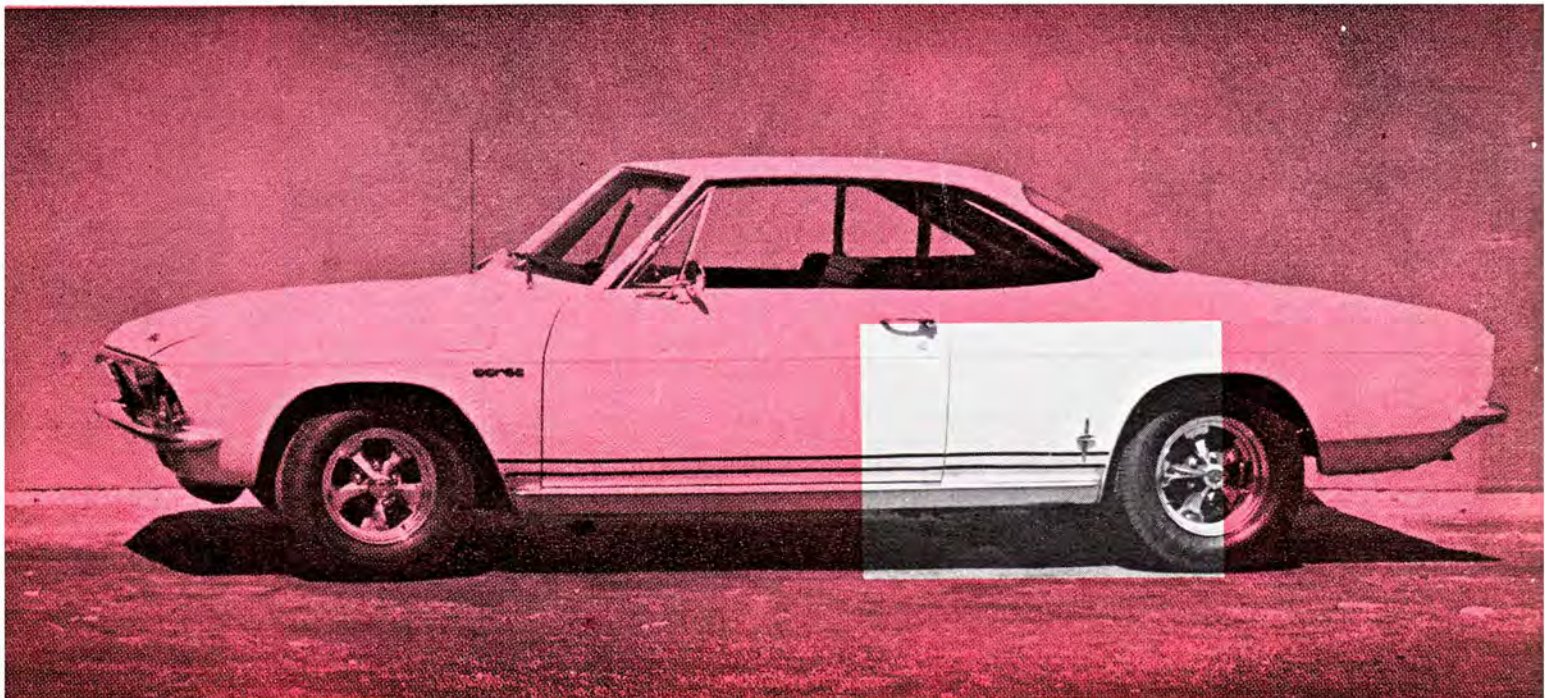
Chrysler radiator angled into the trunk cools the Chevy with no problems. Small fans are used only in heavy, slow-moving traffic. Air enters under bumper, exits through louvers in fender wells. Cooling seems to be adequate. Trevor points out adapter plate that mates bellhousing to trans — helps support drive assembly.





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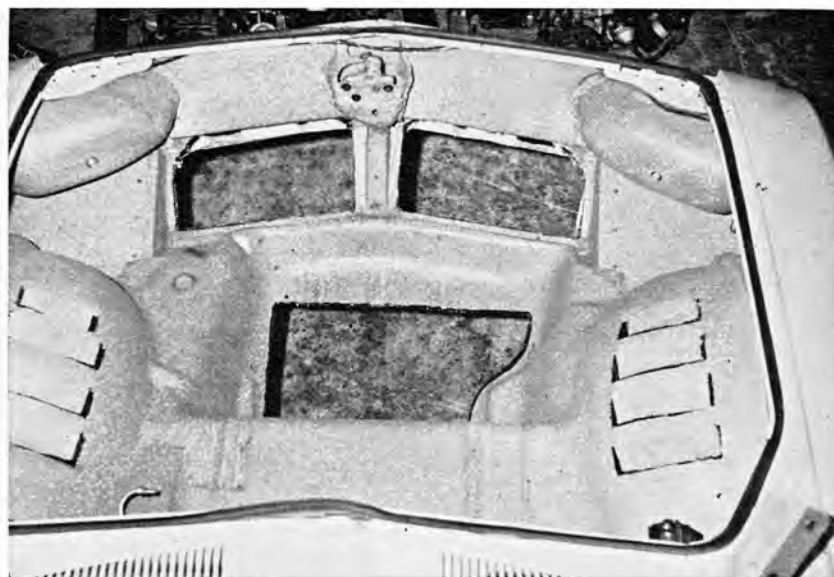
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Clutch actuation is handled by a Crown adapter which allows mounting of truck dual master cylinder — with one cylinder providing push for the clutch. Great evidence of missing metal in the trunk and back seat area is a warning to secure an air chisel before filling the garage with V8 parts and high hopes. The cutting can be done with a torch, but you'd better be good in order to eliminate warpage and the appearance of a hatchet job. Size of hole in floor pan does away with any thoughts of salvaging useful space on each side of the V8. Layout of most of the parts used for the swap includes the special Crown clutch gear and input shaft, bellhousing-to-transmission adapter plate, motor supports and loop which supports the rear of the transmission. Odd-shaped pipe routes water from engine to radiator.

wheel spin on dry pavement — just forward motion. (Sixty percent of the vehicle weight is carried by the rear wheels, remember?) The prototype of this conversion with a 350-horse, 327-inch engine runs low-twelves capped up, single carb, wide street tires and drive-it-out-of-the-gate attitude. Mid- to high-elevens should not be impossible to attain with a fresh engine, tuned and uncapped.

Cornering is of the "can't believe it" quality. Trevor used the heaviest Corvair springs available, stiffer shocks and wide tires to beat all hands and the cook in a recent West Coast slalom meet. Currently under development are some suspension components that should aid the cornering situation further — though the need escapes credibility.

The conversion should be finished off with an extra-thick layer of insulation on the engine cover to suppress noise, and a sheet metal box fashioned in the rear of the car to provide trunk space where the flat six once held forth.

You'd be protested out of the pits before putting a helmet strap in place, but we wonder how much quicker the car would be than the best of the Trans-Am sedan racers. A mind-bender? Believe it, friend; Crown plans production of completed cars. ■ ■