

1965 CORVETTE RACER



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Ah, the Corvette! This was a shock to the system....

In the early 1990s, my Lola T70 Mk. IIIB Coupe, SL76/138, crashed whilst I was racing it at Silverstone; the rear suspension broke just before the very fast Copse corner.

Whilst she was away being repaired, I found myself suffering withdrawal symptoms from racing and so bought a 1965 Corvette from California, which had been converted into a racecar. Nothing simple for me, like buying a car that was already in my own country!

When the Corvette arrived, I was pleasantly surprised by how well she had been modified. The rollcage that fitted the gutted interior was very nicely fabricated and she carried a set of much wider wheels than standard but she was still running a small block engine of 350 cubic inches although, as the exhaust exited through monstrous side pipes, she made a very satisfying bellow.



First race was at Spa. As you can see from the photos that accompany this piece, by now I was running a Ford Econoline as a tow truck, pulling the Corvette on an open trailer. Apart from the horrendous fuel consumption, the Econoline proved to be an excellent hauler. I used it once for a lap of the Nordschleife and, apart from very worn tires at the end of the lap, she handled extremely well!

On arrival at Spa, we unloaded and out I went for practice. That Corvette proved to be a rapid bus! I recall two things: One was the acceleration and the other was the lack of brakes when arriving at Les Combes for the first time. Aargh! Luckily, I'd braked way too early so was able to hang onto it through the corners. I remember that we placed seventh in the race, which I didn't think was bad for a first time out but she was misfiring over the last two laps...

From Spa, we drove down to Monza in Italy for the next weekend's race. I hadn't so much as touched the Corvette in the week following Spa and, surprise, surprise, she was still misfiring when we started her up in the paddock. A quick check showed nothing overtly wrong, oil pressure and water temperature were good, so out I went on 5-6 cylinders. We cantered around, qualified near the back of the grid, looked once more for whatever was causing the misfire, found nothing and so elected to start the race that afternoon.



I can still remember sitting on the grid with two minutes to go when my old friend Mauro Borella came up to me. "Don't be in a hurry to get to the first chicane", I can remember him saying, "A lot of cars will go off there." He was right! The first time I arrived at that chicane, I counted seven cars off in the gravel traps on either side of it. Smirking slightly, I carried on and the old Corvette didn't disappoint, despite the misfire. I remember a Jaguar E Type blowing by me on the straight, only to promptly blow its engine and scatter oil all over my windshield! We finished the ten lapper but quite where is lost in the mists of time.

So back to England and I gave the Corvette to Paul, my mechanic who reported back very quickly that I'd obviously over-revved it at Spa and broken two pushrods, which had wound up in the sump. We'd been lucky. Paul replaced them, the Chevy went back onto all eight cylinders and off we went to do a race at Brands Hatch.

I honestly can't remember anything about that race except that we finished and then, as the T70 was now repaired and ready to race, I sold the Corvette. Very easily to someone in Europe and I expect she's racing there still. Interesting car but heavy....



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