



ROAD TEST 1959 CORVETTE

A pretty package with all the speed you need, and then some

CHEVROLET is now entering the sixth year of production on its famous and highly respected Corvette. Since its introduction as the 1954 model, the car has changed so much that it is hard to think of it as the same make.

Body configuration and general styling were the same for the 1954-55 models and for the 1956 and 57's. Now the 1959 version shares the body used on the 1958 Corvette.

The 1954 model was rather prosaic and had little to offer with the exception of being different from the other U.S.-built cars. Powered by a 6-cylinder engine that was essentially the same as the one introduced in the 1937 Chevrolet, the Corvette offered neither performance nor exceptional appearance. In 1955 the fiberglass-bodied car started to come alive when Chevrolet's new V-8 engine was offered as an option.

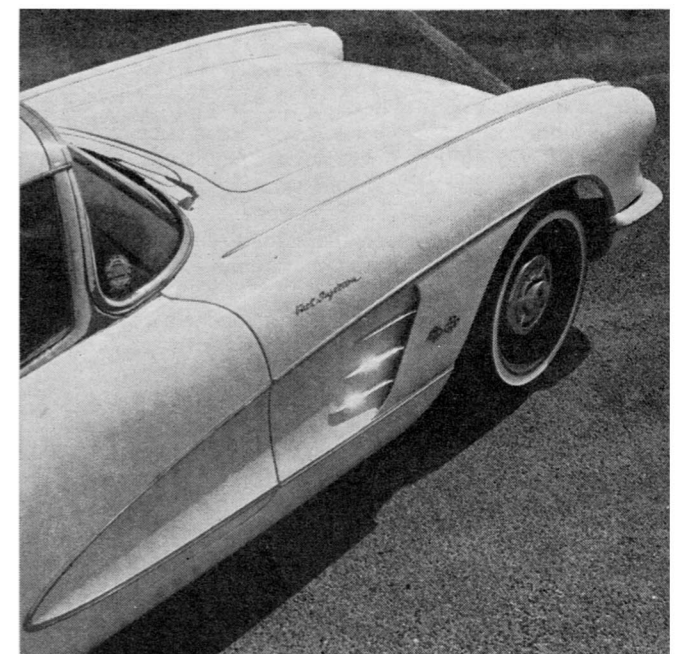
In 1957 the performance potential was given a real boost when fuel injection and a 4-speed, all-synchromesh transmission were made available. A heavy-duty suspension kit (developed at the request of competition-minded enthusiasts) included stiffer springs, dampers and improved brakes. These were all retained for 1958, and the commercial artists inflicted quad headlights and fake hood louvers on the only production sports car built in the U.S.

The new car will not necessarily make owners of the 1958 Corvette rush out to buy a new one, but a few worthwhile changes have been made.

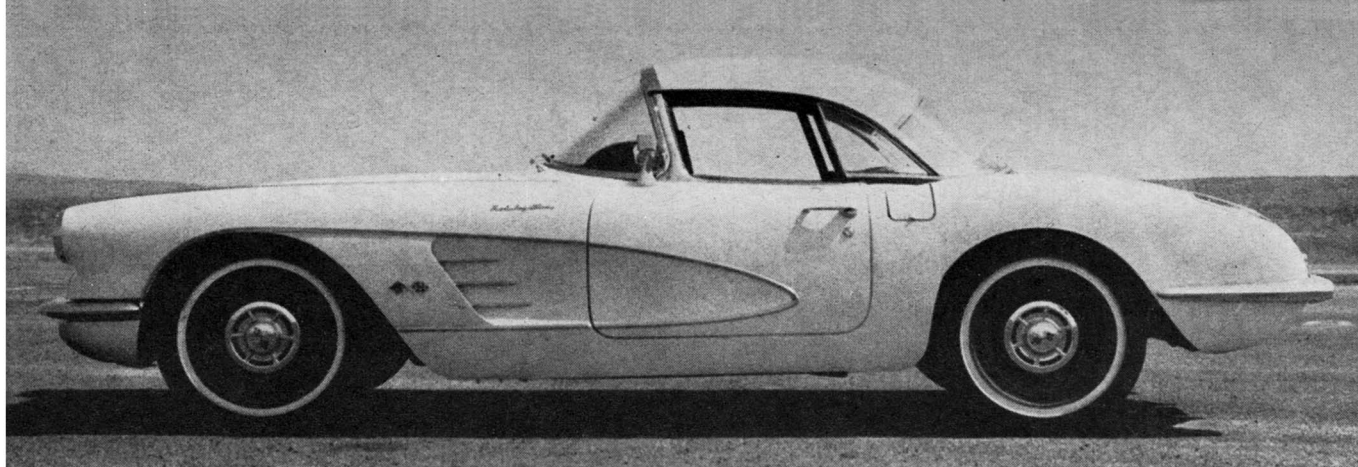
Looks, while not the most important factor to consider, are certainly the first thing noticed about any car. The appearance of the 1959 Corvette has been improved by the simple expedient of removing the phony hood louvers and the two useless chrome bars from the deck lid.

Inside, the most significant change, and one of the only two that are noticeable, is in the seats. These have been redesigned and are among the most comfortable seats in any car, sports or otherwise. They quite adequately do the job of holding driver and passenger comfortably in place during all but the most violent action. We do feel, though, that safety belts would be desirable if much hard driving is to be done.

The second obvious change in the interior is the addition of a fiberglass package tray under the passenger's "grab rail." This tray serves in the usual glove compartment capacity as a catch-all for odd bits of useless detritus and



Cleaner hood lines (from simply eliminating the fake hood louvers) have made a slight improvement in looks for the 1959 Corvette. Trim on Corvettes, like all GM cars, is extremely well executed whether it is functional or mere decoration.



Even if the Corvette does carry more embellishment than most sports cars, it is still a sleek-looking package.

in this case (if the top is down), leaves, dust and possibly rain water.

This package tray is the first item that should be removed from a Corvette, as this badly placed receptacle also presents a safety hazard to the passenger's knees. The second item to be removed would be the grab rail itself: the thinly padded bar would probably do more harm than good in most cases.

We were fortunate, through the efforts of Steve Mason, to be able to use the facilities of Riverside Raceway to conduct the Corvette test. Frank Milne of Harry Mann Chevrolet (who furnished the test car) accompanied our test crew to the site and assisted in assembling the data on page 25.

The first item on the check list, and one on which all results would hinge, was speedometer error. The mile-long straight at Riverside has a measured quarter and half mile which made this check simple and quick to perform. After taking the readings in 10-mile increments from 30 to 100 miles per hour we discovered the error to be about average for most cars tested, with the maximum error of 4 mph indicated at 100 mph.

Tapley readings, as can be seen in the data panel, were somewhat lower than those obtained with a similarly equipped 1957 Corvette (Road & Track, August 1957). The subsequent acceleration tests indicated the newer car to be somewhat slower getting off the starting line, but the figures improved as the upper speed ranges were reached. This could be explained by the additional weight of the 1959 model and by the newness of the car (it had less than 500 miles on the odometer) when we took it out for the test.

An extremely comfortable, though not very capacious, interior has new seat contours.

Starts were brisk but made with very little wheelspin, due to the efforts of the Positraction rear end, causing the engine to bog down just off the line. The first 20 yards were not very impressive as the engine struggled to overcome the lack of low-speed torque.

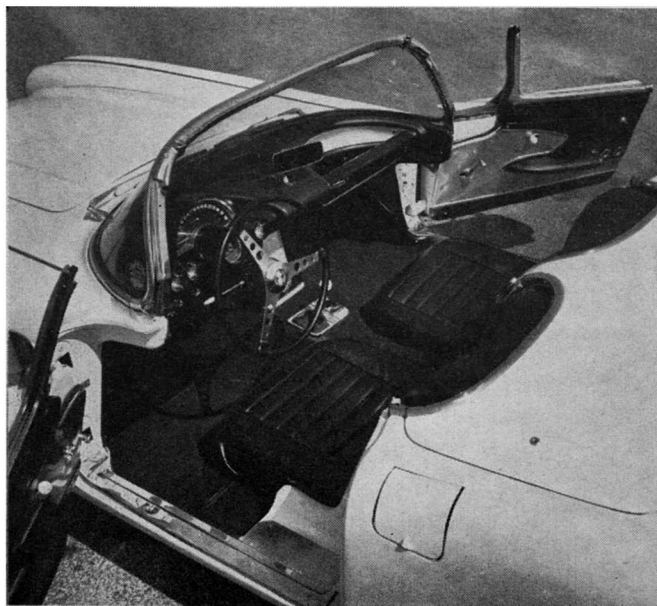
This is not to imply that the Corvette does not have torque. It does, but with a combination of peak torque at 4400 revolutions per minute and peak horsepower at 6200 rpm, it does have a lag before the engine really gets to work. This initial hesitation can be seen on the acceleration graph.

The 4-speed, all-synchromesh gearbox is still one of the smoothest-working units it has been our pleasure to use. (It is now optional on all Chevrolet V-8's.) The lever is placed at just the right location for driver convenience, and shifts, either up or down, can be made quickly and easily at any speed within engine limits. The main factor to consider in downshifting is the possibility of over-revving the engine in the process.

A new feature this year is a positive lock-out for reverse gear. This simple pull handle on the gearshift lever can be actuated by the first two fingers of the right hand as it rests on the shift knob.

Weight distribution of the car had shown 53% of the weight to be on the front wheels with one person in the car, but in spite of the nose-heavy attitude there was a marked tendency to oversteer. It was found with a little practice that a drift, once set up, could be maintained with little effort by dextrous manipulation of the throttle and steering wheel. The abundance of horsepower at the driver's command and adequately quick steering helped somewhat, too.

Heart of the Corvette is the fuel-injected, 290-horsepower, 283-cubic inch V-8 engine.



PHOTOGRAPHY: BATCHELOR

