

# THE ONE AND ONLY



**The '59 Corvette—for the price—is more than**

**a "good" car. It's one fabulous hunk of iron.**

**By AL BERGER**

**T**HE Chevrolet Corvette is, as we all know, the only production sports car made in the United States. Fortunately, it is more than adequate to uphold our reputation in the field—in sports-car racing the Corvette dominates Class B Production as thoroughly as the Porsche Carrera dominates F Production. As a matter of fact, it is so fierce in competition that the Sports Car Club of America had to place it arbitrarily in Class B (at 4639cc, it really belongs in the three-to-five-liter Class C) in order to give smaller-engined cars like the production Jaguars a chance in their own class.

Naturally, it's a pleasure to take a Corvette out for road-testing. The model which was made available to us by Chevrolet Public Relations was the 245-hp model with twin four-barrel carburetors, the four-speed, all-synchromesh, close-ratio transmission and a hard top. This is not, of course, the all-out competition model but, it turned out, as much car as anyone but a very serious competition driver could ask for.

In appearance, the '59 Corvette has changed barely enough for model-year identification purposes. The phony louvers have been removed from the hood, and the longitudinal chrome strips have been stripped from the deck lid, making the car look somewhat cleaner both fore and aft. As in this year's Chevrolet sedans, the wheel discs are slotted for better brake cooling. The bug-eyed dual headlamps have, unfortunately, been retained. All the American manufacturers insist that their quad lights are an important safety device—be that as it may, they look out of place on a Corvette.

The interior looks unchanged, but the seats and armrests have been reworked for greater comfort and a European-style package shelf has been added below the passenger's grab rail, making an open glove compartment to supplement the vertical, locking storage nook between the seat backs. Collectors of Detroitese, incidentally, will be fascinated to know that this is officially referred to as an "anodized aluminum cove insert."

The Corvette has come a long way since the first six-cylinder glass-fiber bathtub appeared in 1953, and it has developed along strictly American lines. What we have now is unquestionably the hottest mass-production sports car on earth, and at the same time the most luxurious. The single possible exception, if you can call it a mass-production car, is the Mercedes-Benz 300SL, which costs just three times as much.

(There are, of course, other cars that are both hotter and more luxurious, but they are machines of very limited production in the \$15,000-and up category.)

Those cars, of course, are practically one-off models, and by the time they are delivered they are just about custom-built for the purchaser. But you can say the same thing for the Corvette—it comes in just about as many optional versions as are available in any U.S. production car—practically limitless in total combinations. You can get it with any of three

different transmissions (Powerglide, three-speed manual or four-speed, close-ratio, all-synchromesh manual), five different horsepower ratings, four different rear axle ratios, three different kinds of brake linings, standard or heavy-duty suspension.

And, far from having to struggle with the traditional sports roadster's side curtains, the Corvette owner can have not merely roll-up windows (they're standard) but power-operated ones. The recent Corvette ad which showed a foreign sports-car type complaining, "I was turning 7,000 rpm

and he went by me with the radio playing, yet!" is no idle boast; it happens regularly and frequently. What's more, when you buy a radio in your Corvette, it's a factory-installed option which looks like part of the design, not like something that was picked up used and hung under the dash by a home handyman, as most sports-car radios do.

Last, and best, when the Corvette needs service or repair it doesn't have to be taken into the rarefied atmosphere of a foreign-car salon whose haughty proprietor cables the Con-

tinent for the part you need, and whose imported mechanics are touchy artistic geniuses. Instead you take it to your Chevrolet dealer, who can replace its standard Chevy parts from his stock, and it's serviced by mechanics who are ordinary working men earning only twice what you do instead of five times.

All this is by way of saying that by 1959, the Corvette's seventh model year, Chevrolet has thoroughly rubbed into the dirt the twin notions that sports cars have to be 1) European and 2) stark and uncomfortable.



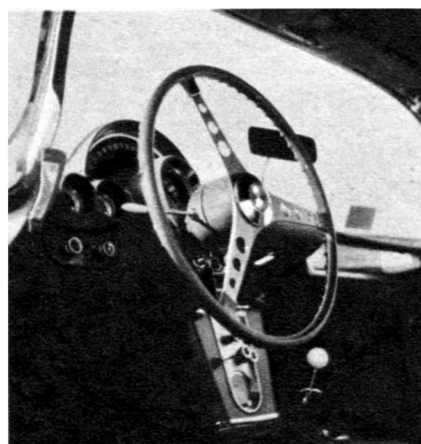
Throwing the Corvette into a panic stop at 85 mph showed very little dive, no swerve and no brake fade. Brake linings were not competition, but optional, special heavy duty type.

# 1959 CORVETTE

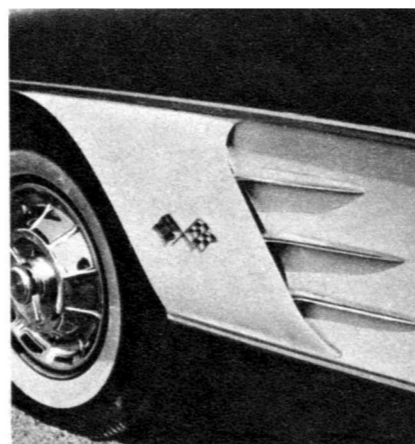
With the speedo at 50 mph, tester took Corvette around tight right corner at Lime Rock track. The car showed just a mild amount of drift and good control despite slow steering.



High front and rear views show slight changes over '58 model. New Corvette dropped sad, phony louvers on hood and do-nothing chrome blades on trunk lid. Happy addition on '59 edition is slotted wheel discs for cooling.



Uncluttered interior shows right-at-hand position of stick shift, easily readable panel with tach up front.



The dummy air slots are unchanged from '58 model. Note the new brake cooling slots on the wheel discs.

Now the Corvette can be the "soft" kind of sports car that European aficionados look down on, if the owner wants it to be. With the standard 230-hp engine, single four-barrel carburetor, Powerglide transmission and the full assortment of extra-cost creature comforts, it is a docile, luxurious machine, though it can produce robust performance on demand.

But at the other end of the order blank, with the full array of competition equipment checked off, lurks a growling tiger of a competition machine.

When you unleash this one, a full-race, 290-hp competition engine inhales great gulps of fuel-air mixture through the Ramjet fuel injection system, nylon-cord racing tires scream as the Positraction rear axle bites them evenly into the asphalt, and she's off the line like a rocket, the gear lever snicking sweetly through its gates as the speedometer shows successively the 55-, 78- and 98-mph shift points, the tachometer needle sweeping

Silhouette view of 1959 Corvette clearly shows the sleek lines which have made the car America's first and greatest production sports car.



smoothly across the dial as the special cam and valve train keep the breathing even.

Approaching the hairpin, you stab the nearly fade-proof, Cerametalix-lined brakes, rap smartly down through the gears into second, rack her across the apex under steady throttle and stand on it as you come out, heading for the Esses.

That is, you do all this if your name is, say, Jim Jeffords or Dick Thompson, who have made racing reputations herding high-powered Corvettes around the sports-car tracks. I found that at Lime Rock, a good Corvette course, the fairly sedate model we were testing was as much as I could handle. Coming down the backstretch into the right-hander that leads up the hill, I twice in succession stood on it to climb the hill. Each time, the Corvette's fervently enthusiastic response hauled me around the turn and nearly into the trees before I could correct and get the nose pointed back up the hill.

Mild as our vehicle was, it took us through the standing quarter, with 28 lbs. tire pressure and two big men aboard, in 15.5 seconds. This was done in gears, 1, 2 and 3, shifting at the 5,500-rpm redline. The speed dial read 95 as we passed the second pair of pylons. On the other acceleration runs, low gear took us to 30 in an average 2.8 seconds, to 40 in 3.6, to 50 in 4.6. Shifting at the redline, about 56 mph, we reached 60 in 6.4 seconds, 70 in 8.9, 80 in 11.1 and, shifting again at about 98 mph, were doing 100 in 17.6 seconds after leaving the starting pylons.

Running the revs past the redline before shifting proved pointless, incidentally, since the power peaks out there and acceleration falls off. The shifts were effortless (both up and down, as a few brisk laps around the track showed), the synchromesh proving itself impossible to beat. The four-speed Corvette transmission is the smoothest I have ever used by far. A new feature this year, by the way, is a

lock-out for reverse, which is released by finger-grips that can easily be worked with one finger while shifting.

In all our acceleration runs and panic-stops, we experienced no brake fade at all. The combination of sintered metal linings, the cooling slots in the wheels and the flared drums to admit the air that comes through the slots, is more than enough to handle all heat-dissipation chores short of a long race on a tough course, in which case the Cerametalix linings would be required.

Conditions precluded top-speed runs, but the test car should have been good for around 125 mph. Theoretical top speed for a Corvette, with the optimum speed combination of the 290-hp engine and the 3.70 rear axle, works out to some 142 mph at 6,500 rpm. Since horsepower peaks at 6,200 on that option, the car should come pretty close to that theoretical top.

All this eager power becomes something of a drawback in traffic. First gear easily handles speeds up to 55 or so. This is fine for racing, or for making a fast entrance into turnpike traffic, getting up to speed before the oncoming stream of cars swallows you up. But in stop-and-go city driving, the response to either pressure or release of the throttle pedal is so abrupt in low gear that you find yourself constantly lurching backward or forward in the seat.

Happily, the superb 283-cu. in. V-8 has so much reserve power that in this kind of driving you can use any gear that feels comfortable to you. Fourth-gear starts are perfectly possible. First and fourth have been suggested as a good traffic combination—I'll do just the opposite and suggest second and third.

All in all, I fail to see why anyone would prefer any foreign sports car, priced under \$10,000, to a Corvette. And it will give many of the higher-priced foreigners a run for their money, too, in every department except sheer snob appeal.



## SPECIFICATIONS: 1959 CORVETTE

### ENGINE AND CHASSIS

ENGINE TYPE	.....90° V-8
BORE	.....3.88 IN.
STROKE	.....3.0 IN.
DISPLACEMENT	.....283 CU. IN.
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....9.5:1
VALVES	.....OH PUSHROD
CARBURETION	.....TWIN QUAD
TRANSMISSION	.....FOUR-SPEED MANUAL, ALL SYNCHRO-MESH

### OVERALL RATIOS

1st	.....8.14:1
2nd	.....6.14:1
3rd	.....4.85:1
4th	.....3.70:1
REAR AXLE RATIO	.....3.70:1
STEERING: TYPE	.....WORM AND BALL-BEARING SECTOR

WHEEL TURNS	.....3.7
TURNING DIAMETER	.....37 FEET
BRAKE LINING AREA	.....157 SQ. IN.
SUSPENSION: FRONT	.....IND. COIL
SUSPENSION: REAR	.....LEAF, SEMI- ELLIPTIC
WEIGHT	.....2,975 LBS.
FUEL CAPACITY	.....16.4 GALLONS

### DIMENSIONS

OVERALL LENGTH	.....177.2 INCHES
OVERALL WIDTH	.....72.8 INCHES
OVERALL HEIGHT	.....51.6 INCHES
WHEELBASE	.....102.0 INCHES
TREAD: FRONT	.....57.0 INCHES
TREAD: REAR	.....59.0 INCHES
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.9 INCHES

### PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION THROUGH GEARS	
0-30 MPH	.....2.9 SECONDS
0-40 MPH	.....3.8 SECONDS
0-50 MPH	.....5.0 SECONDS
0-60 MPH	.....6.7 SECONDS
0-70 MPH	.....8.8 SECONDS
0-80 MPH	.....11.6 SECONDS
0-90 MPH	.....14.4 SECONDS
0-100 MPH	.....17.8 SECONDS
STANDING 1/4-MILE	.....15.6 SECONDS
SPEED AT END OF 1/4	.....95 MPH
MAXIMUM IND. SPEED	.....124 MPH
MAXIMUM OUTPUT	.....245 @ 5000
(BHP @ RPM)	
MAXIMUM TORQUE	.....300 @ 3800
(LBS/FT @ RPM)	
BHP PER CU. IN.	......87
LBS. PER BHP	.....12.1

