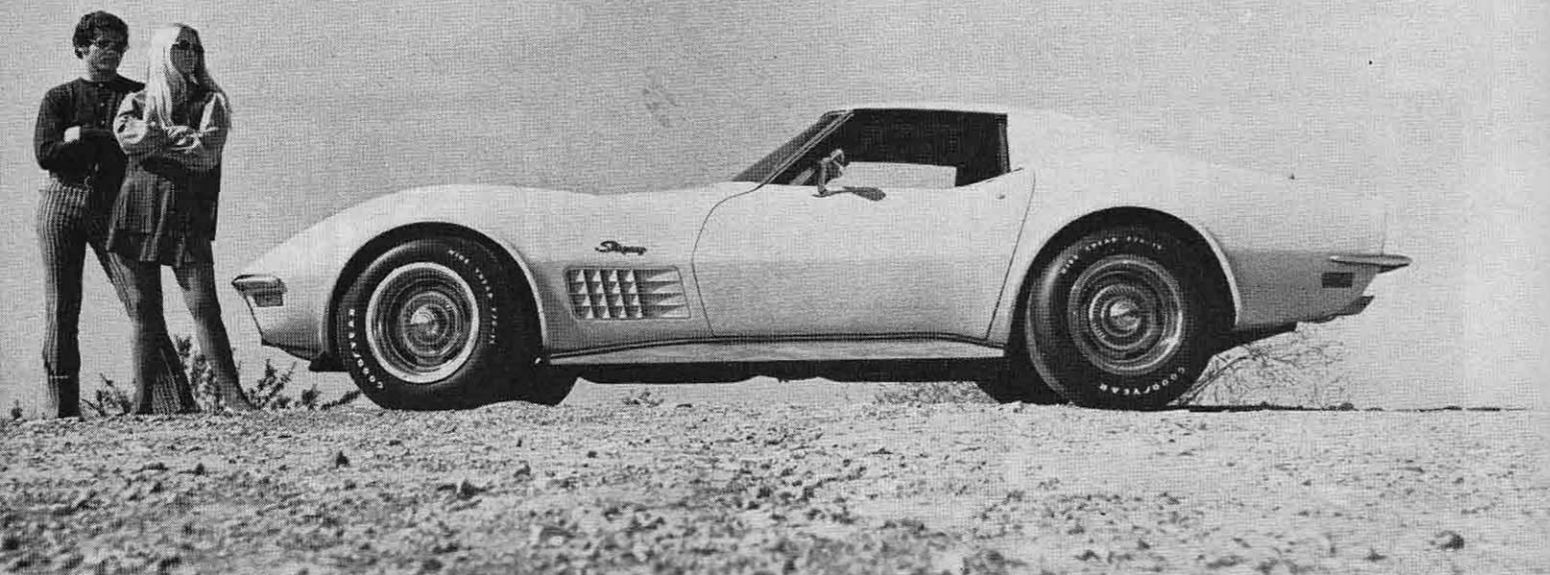


# The Great Corvette - Porsche Controversy



There is Corvette and there is Porsche. One is the best engineering effort of America, the other of Germany. The difference in machines is not as great as the disparity in price. **By Chuck Koch**

*special photography by Fred Enke*

**S**ports car owners are a breed apart. They own a car not merely for transportation but for the fun of driving. Their cars are functional rather than superfluous; an automobile is made to corner fast, accelerate quickly, and maneuver easily.

Among sports car owners there are fierce rivalries. From the road to the track, drivers of different makes associate with owners of similar automobiles in a multitude of sports car clubs in the United States. They look upon every rallye, slalom, and SCCA production race as a personal battle between their car and its competitors.

These personal rivalries reach the proportions of pitting country against country in professional racing. Winning a Formula I event is a matter of national pride in Europe. Because of

this, national rivalries arose in international racing, mostly, along already historic patterns. Germany versus France. England against Italy. Auto racing was a sporting way to decide who had the best machines and the most courageous men.

In all this, America was left out. American drivers were considered inferior and, until the 1960's, no American-made racing car reached the pinnacle of international success. Still, rivalries between Old and New World machines developed. Duesenberg versus Mercedes and Auto Union. Ferrari and Porsche against Ford. The Gurney/Eagle against all comers. Now, the Duesenbergs and Auto Unions are gone. Mercedes, Ford, and the Eagle have disappeared from international racing, and Ferrari's fortunes have declined

over the past few years. That leaves Porsche.

While the Porsche has no equal in international competition, the German marque does have an American rival on the road, Chevrolet's Corvette. Purists notwithstanding, of course. Both cars represent the finest road machines of their respective countries. Both show a pride in design and engineering fostered by their founders, Ferdinand Porsche and Zora Duntov. Both appeal to people who want performance, handling, and status all in one car.

Each car has a personality which overwhelms the driver, making him blend into the automobile and stamping its approval on him. Both motor cars have a playboy mystique with the Corvette being flamboyant while the Porsche bespeaks a more subtle cultured attitude. Whatever, with the simple act of sliding behind the wheel you become what the car is, the driver is only an extension of the car's personality. Just taking a quiet Sunday afternoon cruise can be a traumatic experience. You are besieged with glances, stares, smiles, and comments. Passersby stop, look at you and say, "Wow, what a wild car," or "That's a great automobile." Even the local lawmen get in the act, trailing the cars,

just waiting for you to exhibit the machine's fabled performance characteristics. It can lead to a definite ego problem. But, through it all, you are only basking in the light of the car's personality. For a moment you have become, in the eyes of someone else, what the car says you are.

Although Porsche and Corvette have the same basic ego, one question remains: which is the better car, or are they really comparable at all?

It is difficult to enter a test of this nature without some preconceived notions. The Corvette will have superior acceleration and look sexier, while the Porsche will handle better and have higher quality workmanship. For the most part these notions proved correct, but both cars held surprises which came out during 2,000 miles of testing.

For the test, we chose what one could call the "intermediate" models of both cars. The Corvette was the new LT-1 version, a 350 c.i. engine rated at 370 hp with 380 lbs.-ft. of torque at 4,000 rpm, mechanical lifters, 11.0:1 compression ratio, and a four-barrel Holley carburetor. It had a close-ratio four-speed, 4.11:1 rear axle, 98-inch wheelbase, 182.5-inch overall length, and a curb weight of 3,337 pounds. The Porsche was a 911E coupe with hori-

zontally opposed six cylinder, 2195cc engine putting out 175 hp at 6,200 rpm, with 9.11 compression and Bosch electronic fuel injection. Torque was 160 lbs.-ft. at 4,500 revs. It sported a standard five-speed transmission and 4.429:1 rear axle. Measurements: 89.5-inch wheelbase, 163.9-inch overall length, and a 2,250-pound curb weight.

Both cars have full independent suspension both front and rear. Front suspension on the Porsche is composed of transverse control arms, telescopic hydraulic dampers, and leveling hydro-pneumatic springs and dampers. The rear suspension includes longitudinal control arms, drive through half axles and transversely mounted round section torsion bars. The Corvette's independent front suspension is unequal length A arms with coil springs, concentric shocks, front stabilizer bar, and spherically jointed steering knuckles. Rear suspension components are transverse multi-leaf springs, lateral struts, universally jointed axle shafts, and a fixed differential.

Four-wheel disc brakes are standard on both the Corvette and Porsche. Our Corvette was equipped with a power assist unit and this, combined with 11.75-inch diameter discs, brought the car to a sure, straight halt. Although

not equipped with power discs, the Porsche's front disc diameter of 11.1 inches and rear 11.42 inches created a good, firm sensation and stopped the car quickly with maximum stability.

As tested, the two cars had a wide discrepancy in price. The Corvette, based at \$5,192, with options, ran \$6,333 and the Porsche, with a West Coast P.O.E. sticker of \$7,995 priced out in our test form at \$8,360.

When one compares two superb sports cars like Corvette and Porsche, there is a tendency to wax long and vociferously on the qualities of both. In this case, it is unnecessary to toot either car's horn. Both are finely built machines and only ticky-tack details separate them. On the track, the near equality of the cars is even more apparent.

As expected, the Corvette, with more than double the horsepower and torque rating of the Porsche, out-accelerated its German adversary. With a quarter-mile time of 14.36 seconds and 101.69 mph, the 'Vette easily out-distanced the smaller-engined Porsche's 15.9 e.t. and 93.36 mph.

What was more surprising, perhaps, was the Corvette's more flexible torque range and power train. It was possible

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**Handling ideas, like the cars, differ. Porsche had considerable body roll and refused to drift, while Corvette cornered quite flat and drifted nicely.**



to lope along in fourth gear at 2,000 rpm in the 'Vette, and still get neck-snapping acceleration when the throttle was floored, while the Porsche tended to bog under 2,000 revs in any gear except first. The Corvette transmission was also easier to shift than the Porsche's and there was a greater range in each gear. Shifting into low was a real chore in the Porsche, but, five-speed gear boxes are like that.

Off the strip and onto the road course, this is where the Porsche should reign supreme. For years now the words *Porsche* and *handling* have been synonymous. When sports car buffs get together, the talk always turns to cornering and one guy will always say, "Man, that Porsche. It really corners."

Here is where we experienced the biggest surprise of the test. The Corvette was *just as fast if not faster* through the corners as the Porsche. Think about that, purists.

Both cars exhibited neutral, responsive steering, although the Porsche is, admittedly, much more sensitive to steering wheel movement.

There is but one word to describe the Corvette's handling: superb. It corners quite flat and exudes a confidence-inspiring glued-to-the-road feel. When pushed hard into a turn, the 'Vette will gracefully slide into a fully controllable drift, making the car extremely maneuverable in tight corners since you know it's going right. The drift is so controllable that it would make even the most inexperienced road course driver feel like a pro. On the other hand, the Porsche, while it also sticks to the road, has a considerable amount of body roll when pushed through a corner. When you go beyond its point of neutral steering, the Porsche refuses to drift, it has no oversteer. After reaching the limit of adhesion, the car just breaks loose and that's all she wrote. In racing the two cars around Orange County Raceway's road course, it was apparent that the 'Vette could pass 'most anywhere it chose.

On a 450-mile test drive through the desert and mountains of Southern California, both cars exhibited weaknesses in handling. The Porsche was buffeted about in wind and tended to jump from bump-to-bump, probably due to its

shorter wheelbase and lighter weight, while the Corvette, because of a Position-traction rear axle, could not corner hard in rain.

The passenger comfort and convenience prize goes to Porsche on quality control and detail appointments. The European craftsmanship and thoughtfulness shows through once you're inside the car. The Porsche has more leg, head, and luggage room than the much larger Corvette. It can be classed as a performance sedan while the 'Vette is a two-seat sports car with room for little else.

The Porsche will seat two huge people in front and still have room for two babies, dogs, or grocery bags in the rear. The Corvette, with its Group 7 racer design, has room for two people, a piece of luggage, and the owner's manual. Porsche seats are comfortable, especially on long trips. They are firm without being hard but do not give enough lateral stability under hard cornering. The seats in the Corvette are semi-race style and also comfortable, but not to the point of the Porsche. Somehow, they seem to be harder than on the 1969 car.

One thing must be mentioned about the Corvette seats; that is, the seat belt shoulder harness arrangement. It's one of the best around. The belt is attached to the floorboard and reaches across the occupant's lap to a point next to the console. The harness comes through the seat back and attaches onto the belt. It is inertia-controlled so that the wearer can move about with it on. When not in use, the harness rolls into a receptacle behind the seat. No hanging above the window and no rattle.

Instrument packages on both cars are functional and straightforward but the Corvette is more flashy. Sliding behind the wheel at night and turning on the flip-up headlamps reveals a dashboard full of flowing red, green, yellow, and blue lights. It gives you the impression that you're the pilot of a Boeing 747.

The Porsche dash is typically German, extremely efficient. It is dominated by a huge tachometer placed directly in front of the driver, right where it should be. The speedometer,

*continued on page 116*

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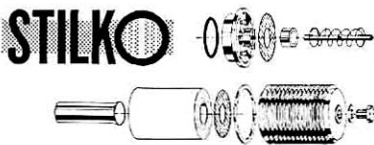


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## CORVETTE VS. PORSCHE

*continued*

oil pressure, fuel level, ammeter, and engine temperature gauges are arrayed on either side of the tach. A quick glimpse gives you an accurate barometer on engine functions.

Corvette has taken a different approach with both speedo and tach in front of the driver. Gauges measuring temperature, oil pressure, fuel, and battery charge are placed over the center console, all in good view although necessitating removing your gaze from the road to read them.

One surprising feature of the Porsche was the absence of leather interior. For a price of \$8,300, you would expect more than mere vinyl. The Corvette was equipped with a \$158 optional custom interior which included leather seats and cutpile carpeting, giving the car a plush, luxury feeling.

Noise in both cars is apparent, although from different sources. The Corvette is mostly engine noise with little wind sound while the Porsche is all wind howl at high speeds with only a gentle hum emanating from the engine compartment. One feature of the Corvette which compensated a little for the engine noise was an AM/FM stereo radio. Flip on the knob and you are enshrouded in total stereo which drowns out objectionable engine murmurings.

Although so-called purists may blanch at the statement, the Corvette is really very comparable to the Porsche.

Maybe we should have listened more carefully to Zora Duntov. It performs better and handles at least as well as the Porsche. The Corvette is much closer to its German competitor than most Porsche owners care to admit.

Styling of both automobiles is exceptional. Something about the Corvette seems to induce young females to slip into the passenger's seat at every stoplight. Perhaps it's that long hood, short rear deck and compact cockpit which combine to give the 'Vette the appearance of a racer. The Porsche's looks aren't slack either, although they couldn't be called sexy. Clean lines, excellent visibility and just the right amount of chrome highlight a distinctive design.

However, discarding such things as styling, performance and handling, fancies which pass with age, one basic fact remains, *Porsche quality*. Just listening to the firm slam of a door and the quiet hum of the air-cooled engine gives one the impression the Porsche will last forever. We would wager that 10 years from now the 1970 LT-1 won't be as mechanically or structurally tight as the 911E.

No matter what we say, though, there will always be Corvette and Porsche owners. Neither will acknowledge the other's presence. Both will think they have the better car. The rivalry will continue. For the moment, Porsche has the upper hand, with a price of \$8,300. But, the Corvette is nearing equality, and doing it rapidly. /MT

## THE AUDI

*continued*

a multiplicity of registers in any floor/dashboard combination you might want, completely exhausting the interior every 15 seconds. Zabinski's Point in Death Valley is the only place where mere ambient volume wouldn't be enough. The sole negative consideration is that for some reason, engine noise escalates into the cabin with the fresh-air outlets open.

An Audi's ability to cover ground is only limited by your skill and willingness to accept the occasional speeding citation. At 60 mph the car cruises effortlessly as it does almost up to its top velocity of 105. It is truly a machine to drive fast hour upon hour, eating up the miles in the peculiar kind of flat-out *Autobahn* rhythm good German cars possess. Betrayal of the front-wheel-drive comes only in the really tight curves when you push it hard and that old understeering forces itself to the surface. The only redeeming characteristic of the thing is that it's an easy way to scrub off speed in a hurry.

As a total vehicle, the Audi leaves almost nothing to be improved. It has the kind of trim fit and paint quality that Volkswagen people have held for years as a standard and there is no reason to believe the thing will be any less reliable. Most of all, your neighbors will know you have arrived when they see that familiar back section in your garage. There couldn't be two cars that look like that, could there? /MT

### SPECIFICATIONS

Engine ..... 4-cyl. in-line  
Bore & Stroke ..... 3.21 ins. x 3.32 ins.  
Displacement ..... 107.5 cu. in.  
Max. horsepower ..... 115 @ 5500 rpm  
Max. torque ..... 119.3 lbs.ft. @ 3200 rpm  
Compression ratio ..... 10.2:1  
Carburetion ..... 1 dual throat,  
2-stage carb

Transmission ..... 4-speed manual  
Final drive ratio ..... 3.89:1  
Steering type ..... Rack & pinion  
Ratio ..... 1:21.6  
Turning diameter ..... 35.8 ft.  
Tires ..... 165 SR x 14  
Brakes ..... Disc front, drum rear  
Front suspension ..... Independent  
upper and lower control arms,  
stabilizer

Rear suspension ..... Torsion crank axle,  
panhard rod, stabilizer  
Body/frame construction ..... Welded,  
pressed steel, unitized

### Dimensions, Weights, Capacities

Overall length ..... 182.6 ins.  
Overall width ..... 68.1 ins.  
Overall height ..... 56.1 ins.  
Wheelbase ..... 105 ins.  
Front track ..... 56.0 ins.  
Rear track ..... 56.1 ins.  
Curb weight ..... 2380 lbs.  
Fuel capacity ..... 15.3 gals.  
Oil capacity ..... 8.5 pints

### PERFORMANCE

#### Acceleration (2 Aboard)

0-30 mph ..... 4.0 secs.  
0-45 mph ..... 7.8 secs.  
0-60 mph ..... 12.7 secs.  
0-75 mph ..... 20.6 secs.  
Standing start  
1/4-mile ..... .73 mph  
18.43-secs.

#### Passing speeds (3rd gear)

40-60 mph ..... 6.15 secs.  
50-70 mph ..... 9.15 secs.

#### Speeds in gears at rpm

1st ..... 30 mph @ 5500 rpm  
2nd ..... 52 mph @ 5500 rpm  
3rd ..... 73 mph @ 5500 rpm  
4th ..... 73 mph @ 4000 rpm

MPH per 1000 RPM ..... 18.2 mph

#### Stopping distances

from 30 mph ..... 26' 0" ft.  
from 60 mph ..... 145.6 ft.

#### Mileage

Range ..... 19-21 mpg  
Average ..... 20 mpg