



Super STING RAYS!

Werner Meier has a love affair with some very exotic Corvettes

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It started in 1979, a simple outing by Corvette enthusiast Werner Meier to look at a fully optioned '64 coupe. It ended up a love affair with some of the most exotic cars ever produced by Chevrolet — Shop Order and Styling Cars.

"I didn't even know what an SO car was or meant," explained Meier. "But when I saw the side exhaust, original paint and special trim plate, I decided to take a chance."

Meier, of Farmington Hills, Michigan, owns no less than three of these incredible cars. His first is the Bill Mit-

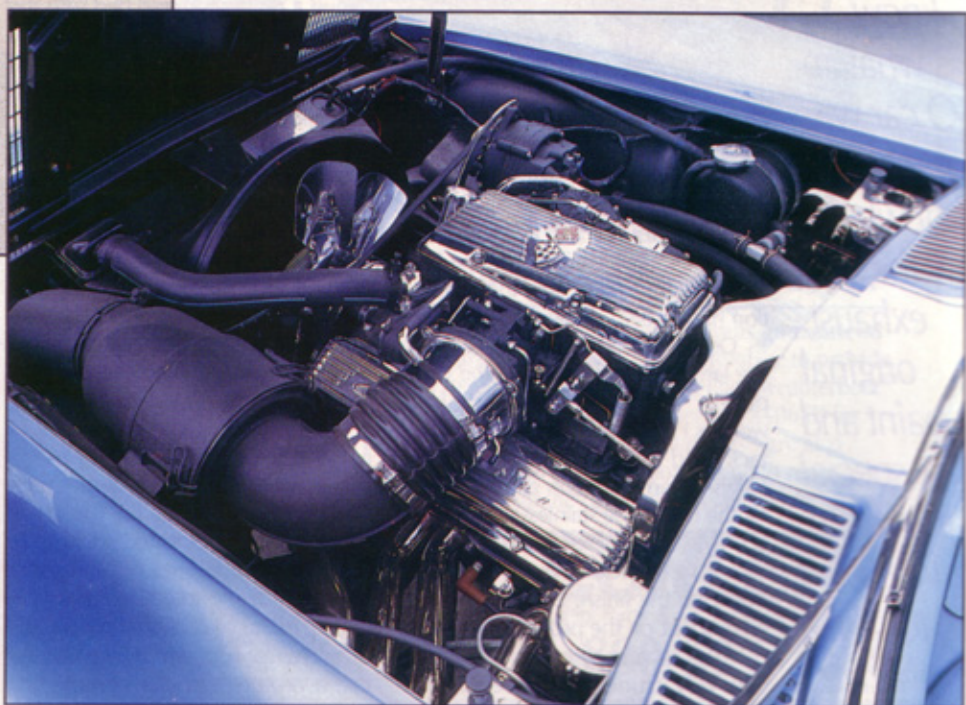
hell/Ozzie Olson 1963 coupe Styling Car; the second, "Bunkie" Knudsen's 1963 Styling Car done to look like SO 10300; and his most recent project, SO 10300 itself — a 1963 convertible. He also owned a pink on pink 1964 coupe done for Knudsen's wife.

But what are these Corvettes, and what it is like to own and restore one?

It could be said these were the toys of the "big boys." Knudsen became head of Chevrolet in 1961 and was a known performance zealot. Mitchell, who championed numerous Corvette efforts in the mid-Fifties, became the

head of GM's styling staff in 1958. Mitchell, too, was geared toward performance. These two GM giants made Corvette dreams become reality.

Meier estimates that at least 20 of these fascinating cars may have been produced, but records are extremely sketchy. As Knudsen once explained, "It wasn't uncommon for some of the execs in GM to simply write on the back of a matchbook what they wanted, and it was done." Speculation also exists as to why some of these exotics received special "Shop Order" numbers, and others did not. One thought



was that if extensive modification or fabrication was involved, an SO number would be some place to bill time and material, however, some non-SO or Styling Cars carry the same expensive features as the others!

To restore an SO or Styling Car becomes a unique and special challenge to their owners. No manuals or documentation exist. The only guide to a reasonably authentic effort is the evidence you find on the car, the information you glean from GM photos, and what other cars from this special breed look like. Having three in your



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possession does not hurt either.

"This was the lousiest of the cars," Meier commented. "The frame was bad, it had a terrible body, the stainless steel custom door panels had speaker holes cut into them — it was a rolling piece of neglect." But even though he had restored two similar cars, this restoration had its own challenge for Meier.

One of his projects was to repair the large diameter holes in the door panels. "I went to one of the best welders I knew and we were going to tack-weld plates in the holes, then refinish them. As soon as the welder hit the metal, the stainless curled right up," Meier explained. It became necessary to fabricate new sheets and duplicate the finish. Dozens of hours were spent on the process.

"The exhaust system on the inside was very crude," said Meier. "We

spent nearly 40 hours just fabricating new exhaust flanges, then built a stainless steel exhaust system from scratch. We also made our own tool to cut exhaust gaskets, since no conventional parts matched the custom exhaust. The rocker moldings were built from scratch, too."

Another difficulty for Meier was the hood grills. The previous owner had begun a restoration and had sent the functional hood grills to be plated. "Whatever they dipped them in, it just ate up and separated the back sides of the grills," Meier said. In an effort to mate the brass back-plates to the chrome-plated steel fronts, Meier added some silver solder and was going to bake the grills. "They looked like a couple of bananas when I took them out of the oven," Meier laughed. "I got a quick physics lesson on how different metals react to heat!" Not knowing how the factory mated the pieces, a layer of Locktite now does the job.

Meier encountered other oddities as he restored SO 10300. For example, a white instrument cluster with no reflective coatings for the panel lights; a battery relocated adjacent to the jack storage area resulting in a cover which mounted several inches higher than conventional covers and leaving a rear floor which is completely flat; a prototype shifter console that

was similar to a '64, only one piece in design except for the upper trim; and the list goes on. Even the small "General Motors Styling" emblems located on each fender had to be fabricated at a cost of almost \$300 each!

And speaking of cost, Meier was asked what sort of financial commitment it takes to do an SO car. "It was twice as expensive as a normal restoration, and that was only because I was





Harley Earl's SO Sting Ray

The Corvette pictured with SO 10300 is SO 10323 (shown with removeable hardtop), originally produced for retired GM styling head Harley Earl. Earl had a tremendous influence on these unique cars before his retirement from GM in 1958, evidenced by this car with twin instrument panels supporting 15 gauges, special exhaust, knock-off wheels and several prototype '65 features like disc brakes and hood. This car is owned by Joe Roebuck and Ray Nicholson of Bingham Farms, Michigan.

able to do much of the work myself. The cost would go higher if everything was done in a restoration shop." Meier also gives much credit to his father, Eric, a Swiss-trained tool and die maker who helped with much of the work.

Meier was finally asked what his favorite Corvettes are, and with an obvious bias toward Chevrolet's show cars, he said the Manta Ray and the Mako Shark. "They are the best of the best."

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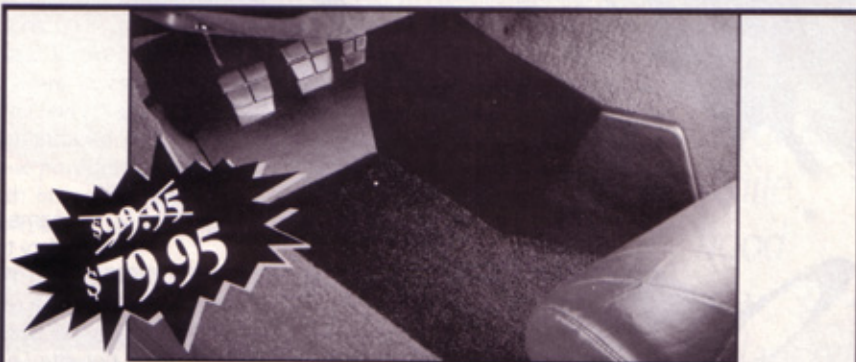
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