

This '64 Styling car was specially prepared by Bill Mitchell for Olsen of IndyCar racing fame.

First, you spot the unusual side exhaust—clearly not a production part, because this is a '64 Corvette. As every enthusiast knows, side exhaust was first offered in 1965. So this coupe has to be an early custom or modified Corvette, correct? But the story turns quickly when you spot the General Motors Styling badge at the back of the door opening. This is another of Bill Mitchell's styling exercises, and a pretty fun one at that.

Werner Meier, Corvette expert

and former GM exec, heard of this high-option '64 Corvette in 1979. Werner owns and operates Masterworks Automotive Services in Madison Heights, Michigan, where he and a number of serious gearheads and craftsmen spend their days restoring these treasures to their former glory.

Werner really had no interest in a 300hp/automatic-transmission coupe, but went to look at the car because it supposedly had a mint set of Kelsey Hayes knock-off wheels, which he wanted for his '64 fuelie. When Werner

drove into the driveway he almost blacked out. "I thought it was going to be a nice, straight, original car," says Werner. "But here's this car with this oddball pearlescent paint job."

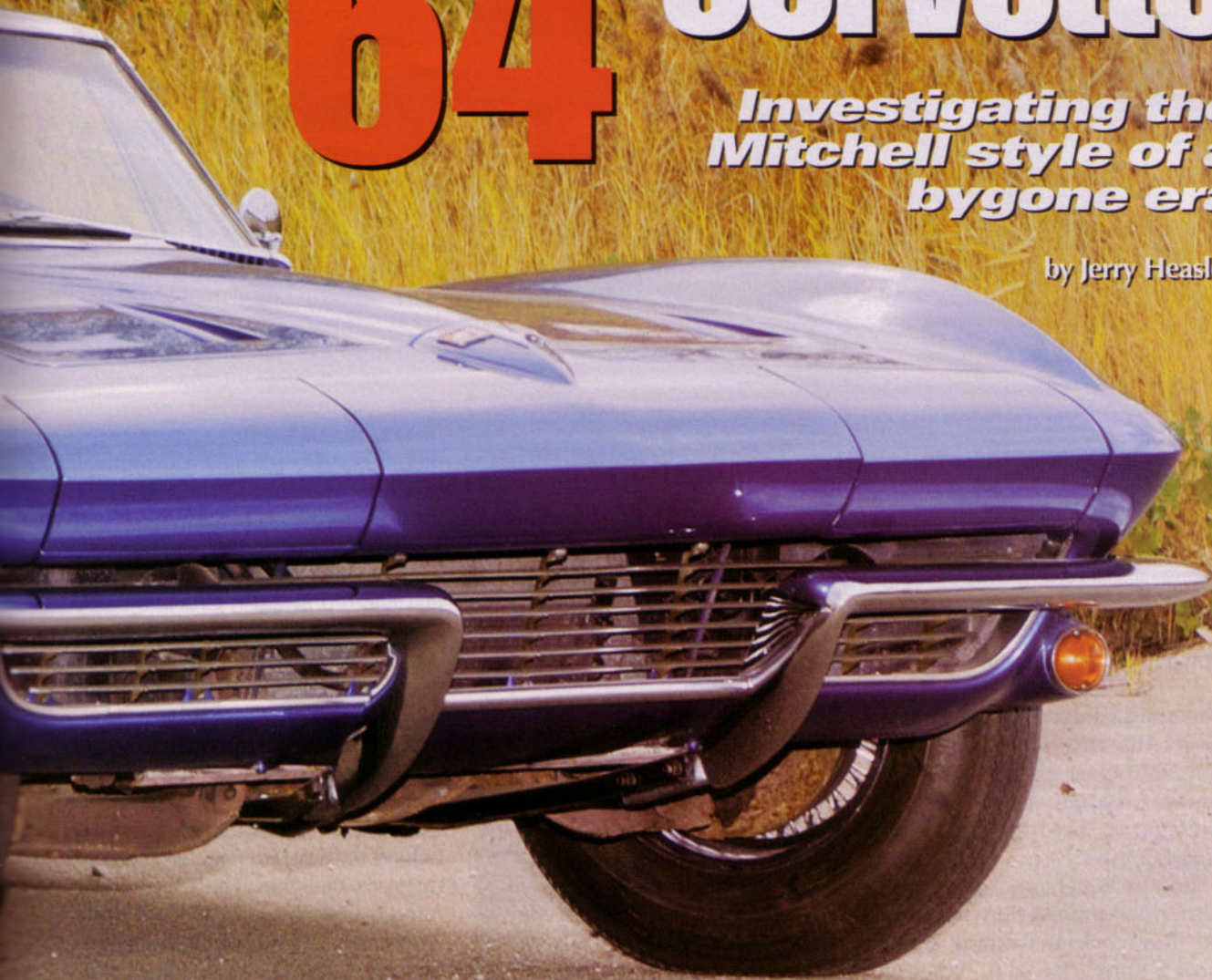
At first, Werner gave the owner a hard time about the "repaint," but the owner insisted the car had never been repainted. Werner tried to find overspray on a molding or weatherstripping to test the owner's claim, but couldn't find any.

"I finally looked at the trim tag and it simply read "SPEC" for color. I

Not Your Father's '64 Corvette

*Investigating the
Mitchell style of a
bygone era*

by Jerry Heasley



closed the door and, trying to act calm, asked the owner, 'Is your price negotiable?' He said, 'Nope.' I said I'd take it. It was that quick."

At the time, the car was not the big deal it is today to collectors. The owner knew the car's history well and told Werner the story.

"This car was specially prepared at GM Styling for a guy named Ozzie Olson," says Werner. "Ozzie was a successful industrialist, who was very involved in racing. You might remember cars at Indy called the

'Olsonite Eagles.' Ozzie started the Olsonite Toilet Seat Company and eventually started building steering wheels for the auto industry. Toilet seats are made out of the same material as steering wheels. So that was the connection."

Ozzie's Olsonite Eagles, according to Werner, were the most well-known race team at Indianapolis in the '60s and '70s, sort of like Penske is today. Olson sponsored drivers such as Dan Gurney and Bobby Unser, who won the USAC championship in 1974.

"A friend of ours knew Mitchell personally and they brought him over to our home to look over my Corvette collection," says Werner of a visit by Mitchell shortly before he passed away. "Bill was very frail at the time and had lost a considerable amount of weight. He was not moving very well, a shadow of the man he was in his earlier years. Bill, in his younger days, was pretty husky, had a broad face, and a ruddy complexion. He had been very ill and was losing his short-term memory.

Not Your Father's '64 Corvette

A unique six-tailight arrangement was a special styling feature and helped show customizers a look that caught on across the country.



His long-term memory, however, was quite sharp. He and my dad hit it off splendidly 'cause they were talking about the old legends, the European Formula One drivers like Caracciola and Fangio who were racing legends in the '40s. Every name my dad would spit out, Bill had known these people personally."

Werner showed Bill this '64 Corvette in his garage. Did Bill remember it? His answer was less than enthusiastic, "I guess I do." But Werner hit a nerve when he told Mitchell, "It belonged to a guy named Ozzie Olson."

"Boy, he lit right up," remembers Werner. "I remember his words. He said, 'Boy, could that son of a bitch throw a party!' He said, 'You'd go down to the track (Indy), and he'd have the whole floor of the hotel reserved. He'd toss you the keys to a suite and he'd have the booze ready and the dollies waiting on you.'"

Corvettes, racing, and partying were the common bonds between Olson and Mitchell. In those days, Werner explained, "It wasn't uncommon for the GM brass to have a car specially prepared for some of their friends. And I'm not sure how many cars of this type were actually produced, but I'm aware of a few of them that were done for people like General Curtis LeMay, Liz Taylor, and this one for Ozzie Olson."



Yet to be restored underhood, the engine is an original 327ci/300hp with air conditioning and power-steering options.



Cool wire wheels are throwbacks to an earlier time when Corvettes and Jaguars ruled the streets.

Some of the cars were fairly normal with features such as the floor grilles, which according to Werner was standard for everything that came through Design Staff. Many cars that were done for the executives and their families received special paint treatment and interior trim appointments.

Werner says, "This Corvette was modified at Design Staff for eventual sale to Mr. Olson. Despite sporting some nonproduction hardware, it was indeed delivered to Dexter Chevrolet in Detroit for sale to Mr. Olson. It was first titled to Swedish Crucible Steel, the company that would later be renamed Olsonite." In addition to the floor grilles, the paint was a custom pearlescent blue. The pearlescent lacquer had begun to craze, so Werner's Master Works shop reluctantly repainted the car a few years ago. Custom vanity mirrors were installed behind both visors. The rear end features six taillights. The lower front fenders, just behind the front tires, were modified, no scallops, and feature the word "STINGRAY" above the simulated exhaust outlets.

The set of side exhausts is the most obvious custom feature. When new, they were not functional. Werner believes this car originally had an undercar exhaust system. Using original photographs as a guide, he remanufactured the housings in aluminum and put mufflers inside. Today they are functional.

Olson owned the car for only a year or so, before selling it to one of his employees at Swedish Crucible Steel, the company his father founded in 1910. In 1969, the car was once again sold, to Bruce Boore, who sold it in 1979 to Werner Meier.

Officially, Werner, who retired from GM a couple of years ago as an engineering group manager at the General Motors Proving Grounds, says this blue coupe and others like it are not really "prototypes" but rather rare shop-order cars done by GM Styling, built to exhibit a design concept or proposal. If the corporate gods blessed the ideas, development work would begin to incorporate the idea into production cars. Prototype vehicles would then be built for testing and validation before the parts would be released for production. Some of these special cars made their way to private individuals. Others would "serve out their time" in some obscure engineering or development function, something that would never happen today due to liability concerns.

Werner met a retired GM Styling employee who told him that four different Corvette side-exhaust proposals were mocked up in early 1964 at Styling for review by the Chevrolet brass. These systems were all non-functional. However, one can clearly see the evolution of the side pipes from the tubular headers used on the Mako Shark in 1960, to the refined units incorporated on three '63 show cars, to the cast look shown in this '64. The production side-mounted exhausts are similar in design to those shown on this car. The actual exhaust pipe and muffler arrangement is quite similar, with provisions for insulating the hot pipes from a passenger's leg. That's one reason this blue coupe is so interesting. The pipes are less practical and more exotic, much like those on the New York World's Fair Corvette (see our March '04 issue).

Over the last 25 years, Werner has put about 1,000 miles on the '64. "I drove it to Kentucky and back once in 1980," he says. "It's a great car. I last drove it to the Gilmore Museum where it had been on display for the last 12 years or so, until recently, when I accepted an offer from Bob McDorman to display it at his shop. Bob is having us restore the chassis and drivetrain, so the car should look better than ever when it once again gets put on display."

The car will be added to the McDorman collection at his Chevrolet dealership in Canal Winchester, Ohio, a Columbus suburb,



White seating and blue carpeting were a unique combination for this '64 Corvette and go right along with the unusual exterior paint color. This car was equipped with an automatic transmission and air conditioning.



where it will be available for viewing at his annual fall car show. This show is a must-see for any enthusiast, where one of the world's largest collections of Chevrolets and Corvettes will be open for viewing by the public every September.

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Identification plates under the glovebox denote the unique nature of this GM Styling exercise, noted by the SPEC code under the "paint" category.

The unique side-pipe arrangement is functional, as opposed to the original concept car configuration. Note the altered front fender and unique Stingray emblem.

