



# Corvair Racing 1959-1968

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## Prologue

While I know there are many within CORSA who appreciate racing and its coverage in the *Communique*, others not so much. It is the author's perception that most CORSA members think Corvair racing only began at some vague time before CORSA itself was created, probably with the creation of the Yenko Stingers in 1966. This is not true.

Some of the following information seems vague or insufficient. This is primarily because the original sources of the information are also vague and insufficient. Contemporary writers were writing for a wider community than Corvair people. Coverage was in proportion to Corvair racing success and to some degree, the interests of the writers.

With this article, I have pretty much exhausted my Corvair racing knowledge and resources. So, to the best of my ability, the following is the early history of Corvairs in road racing. I hope you enjoy the enlightenment.

The Corvair was introduced on October 2, 1959. Six weeks later it was being road raced. Within the next four months, it would be raced three more times. Remember, at that time in this country, there were few places to race sedans of any kind outside of NASCAR.

## Castle Rock 1959

The first race was in Colorado the middle weekend of November, at Continental Divide Raceways in Castle Rock, Colorado, south of Denver. This was the location of the 1981 CORSA National Convention autocross.

The Denver Area Chevrolet Dealers Association funded five Corvairs for the six hour race. Drivers were a mix of well-known professionals and local amateurs. The cars were ordered three weeks before the event and arrived one week later. They were equipped with 3.89:1 final drives and 6% leaner jets from the factory. Before the race a private practice was held at the race track. A Valiant, not entered in the event, showed up and was immediately ten seconds a lap faster than the Corvairs due to bigger engine and the ability to use 6,000 RPM in second gear coming off the corners. The Corvair crews immediately began making adjustments, looking for more speed. They found five seconds a lap. In qualifying, their best lap time was 2:54 while no other cars were timed under three minutes. There were five Corvairs,



three Falcons, a Nash Rambler, plus an assortment of traditional foreign cars.

The crews planned for two pit stops during the race. Four of the Corvairs started with Goodrich tires and one with U.S. Royal tires. But only U.S. Royal was able to deliver 40 tires for the event. This would be a problem. The Corvairs had to be driven in third gear all the time. They were faster in corners than the competition, but usually found the corners occupied by cars faster on the straights. Their cornering advantage was thus negated. One of the Corvairs left the race due to an accident not of its making.

Early on, a Renault Dauphine blew a Michelin tire and rolled off the track. Then a Corvair blew a tire in a corner. The rim dug in and the car rolled over, but landed on its wheels with the engine still running. It was done for the day. Following this, Bob Donner, an experienced Porsche racer and fastest Corvair driver, pitted. They were shocked to see his rear tires were coming apart after just 60 miles or 21 laps. They started stopping for tires well before 60 miles and thus lost a lot of track positions. According to one source, they finished fifth and sixth. The winner was the Rambler American driven by two professional drivers. A VW Beetle was second with one fuel stop and no tire changes.

### Sebring 1959

The next event for the new small sedans was a two hour event held as a support race for the very first U.S. Grand Prix/Formula One race. In all, 27 sedans started the mid-December event. Under the international rules being used, cars of



Ed Hugus and George Constantine at Sebring, 1959.

up to five liters and costing up to \$5,000 were allowed. Thus there were two well-prepared Jaguar 3.8 sedans and three factory supported Studebaker Larks entered. All these cars were driven by professionals from NASCAR and SCCA road racing. Additionally were three factory backed Volvos, two Valiants, a pair each of Saabs and Renaults, a couple Borgwards, and single examples of Rambler, Falcon, Sunbeam Rapier, VW, and English Ford.

Three Corvairs were entered by Don Allen, a Chevrolet dealer with showrooms in New York and Miami. They were piloted by three top drivers. After Castle Rock, a very interested Zora Duntov "father of the Corvette" was in attendance. He reworked the Corvair carbs, added an anti-roll bar at the front, and rebound straps and two degrees negative camber to the rear suspension of each car. Sadly

the cars still had three-speed transaxles, but they did have proper racing tires on all four corners. Duntov also had installed the very first spring to maintain tension on the fan belt pulley.

At the green flag, the Jags and Studebakers ran off and had their own private race. One Corvair retired with rear suspension damage, while the remaining Corvairs finished sixth and tenth place.

### Daytona 1960

The next compact/small sedan race was in February at the 1960 Daytona Speed Weeks. Held in conjunction with the second running of the Daytona 500, the first weekend featured multiple races. The small sedans raced twice the same day, once clockwise on the 3.8 mile road course, and then counter-clockwise on the 2.5 mile oval. Due to NASCAR imposing a limit of 200 cubic inches displacement, the Jaguar sedans and V-8 Larks from Sebring were not entered.

There were five Corvairs entered at the event. Allen brought the three cars from Sebring, plus a new coupe. The otherwise unknown Jim Kaperonis brought a white four-door. The Corvairs were upgraded from their Sebring configuration with the new four-speed transaxles, 95 HP engines, larger exhaust pipes, plus ignition and carburetor tweaks. The five drivers consisted of well known road racers Ricardo Rodriguez and Ed Hugus, NASCAR great Glenn "Fireball" Roberts, plus Jim Reed and Jim Kaperonis. There were also seven Valiants, five Corvairs, two Falcons, eight Volvos, and single entries of a six-cylinder Lark,



Bob Donner Corvair leading Wendt and Sterling Falcons at Castle Rock, 1959.