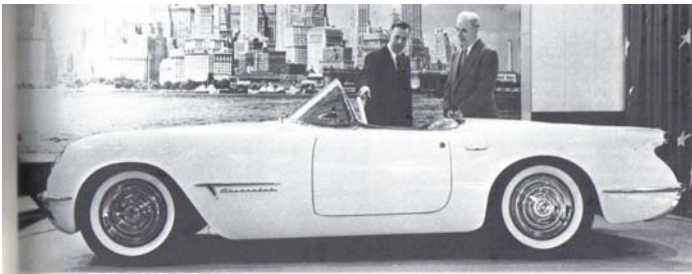

The Jack Knab Story by Jack Knab

My experience with Corvettes all began with a Dayton Newspaper article about the GM Motorama Auto Show in New York in January, 1953. It included a photo of the Chevrolet Corvette, a GM Styling exercise to attract public reaction to future design ideas. It became



the hit of the GM show, and the public response was overwhelming! I was just 22 years old, and a fledgling commercial artist at the time, but the SWS Chevrolet dealership on E First St. (next to the Victory theater), had my order for one the next day! The only problem was, it was just a GM show car, and the order only went as far as the desk of George Shellabarger, the owner/manager.

What George did do, however, when GM made the decision to manufacture the Corvette, was to honor my order for the first one at the dealership, and he

kept me advised of all of the activity concerning the car as it went into production.

In the latter part of 1953 as we were anticipating delivery, George called and said he had bad news: Chevrolet had made a decision that all the early Corvettes were

only to be sold to Very Important People (VIPs), and as a Very Young Artist, I was extremely low

on the Totem Pole. And so I ended up getting the second one that SWS received in early spring, which was 1954, from the St. Louis Plant. Even at that, there were not too many in the Dayton area, and some of those were GM Division cars that were doing test work. Of some interest, in the light of today's car prices, I was able to buy the Corvette for \$2750.00 (the difference between '52 Chevy trade) with a 90 day note from Winters Bank! It became my daily driver and also business car, as I was now working in the family printing business. It was completely dependable, and I never had one

mechanical problem during the time I

owned it, but....wet weather was another story altogether! The wraparound windshield created a real problem for weather-stripping, and it was never right until the 1956 model year! Later in '54 I added Dayton wire wheels, and a Scott hardtop. I also became a member of a local sports car club, the FCCA, where most members were running MGs, Austin-Healeys, Porsche speedsters, and Jags. We conducted monthly events including rallies, tours, speed events, and an annual hill-climb, and the Corvette held its own in that group



Continued on page 2

The Jack Knab Story (con't) by Jack Knab

Continued from page 1

When the 1956 Corvettes were announced in the fall of 1955, I ordered my '56 with the HP V8 with two 4-barrels, 3-speed stick and both tops, black with the red interior from SWS Chevrolet and George. On delivery, I traded my '54, but kept the Dayton knock-off wire wheels for the new '56.



I started attending sports car races, such as Sebring, and Elkhart Lake, with my friends in the FCCA, and developed a real interest in photographing the cars and drivers at those events, and so I joined the SCCA.

The monthly events with the FCCA led to a closer friendship with Bill Howe, who was the Chevrolet Dealer in Middletown. He and I attended the SCCA National Convention in St. Louis in December of 1955. which included a tour of the Corvette Plant. The plant was down for the weekend, but we did see how they were produced!



I attended races at Sebring, and both Elkharts in 1956, but only as a spectator, and to photograph and shoot 16MM movie film.



At Elkhart in June, we saw the debut of the Jerry Earle SR2, and the Dr. Dick Thompson '56 that would win the SCCA National

Championship in class C Production.



Racing a Corvette was beginning to look like I could do it!

Bill was already competing in SCCA races with his '56 Corvette, and he wanted me to join him at some regional races. I finally decided to attend a race & drivers' school at Lawrenceville, Illinois in the fall. The race course was laid out on concrete runways and access roads at a former Air Force base. I only competed in the driving school event which included a short observed race.

Continued on page 3

The Jack Knab Story (con't) by Jack Knab

Continued from page 2

As a novice I did well (didn't hit anybody or cause any concern to the observers) but it became obvious to me, that my '56 wasn't up to any serious road racing! I ran out of brakes after two laps...chunked the tires...and pitted the windshield! I thought the Dayton wire wheels would help cool the brakes, but I was wrong. In addition, the wire wheels required tubes (running in tubeless tires!)...which caused heat build-up in the tires...all that, plus the abrasive airport concrete, spelled the end of my new venture into the racing world with the '56!

Bill wanted me to attend the 1956 SCCA National Convention in Detroit, Michigan with him, because he was also invited to a special meeting at GM regarding his order for a new 1957 Corvette. This turned out to be a meeting with Mr. Fred Warner, Corvette Racing Director, and a group of Chevy dealers from around the country, which were also involved in SCCA and Cal Club racing. They were

there to get availability and ordering details for a production 1957 Corvette with racing options, as they would be used, and approved by the FIA, for use at Sebring in March. Mr. Warner asked for the got a commitment from those attending. The SCCA had also arranged a tour of the GM Tech Center with a special display of both Styling and



Engineering prototypes.

A group of the FCCA members decided to go to the

Sebring, Florida twelve hour race in March, 1957 as there was much speculation about the manufacturers

and new race cars that would compete there! ... and it was all true! All the top teams were there with exciting new cars..all the top drivers! And for us, the debut of the SS Corvette! The car was stunning and generated a lot of pre-race media and spectator interest. We watched it practice with John Fitch, Zora Duntov, and the great Italian driver Piero Taruff, each driving...trying to get it race-ready...but they had run out of time...the race car had just arrived from Detroit...and was untested and flawed...and it would fail, soon after the first hour of the race...but not without first demonstrating...that it may have been the quickest, and fastest entry there...and hope that they could work out the



Continued on page 4

The Jack Knab Story (con't) by Jack Knab

Continued from page 3

car's defects prior to LeMans. The race was won by the world champion, Juan Fangio in the big 4.5 litre factory Maserati, followed in second, by his teammate, Stirling Moss, in a 3-litre model. A great world class historic race. The next day, John McKee (Delco Moraine) and I returned to the track..to visit the Chevrolet garage and see the crew that built the SS, and watch them load the car on the transporter... not knowing at the time....that it would be the car's only race.

Part 1 by Jack Evans Knab



Editor's note: Stay tuned for the next Part of the Jack Knab Story coming up in the next issue of the Vette Gazette!



Time Gone
Bye picture is
Terry Brim's
1965 Vette
circa 1973

