

'69 'Vette has been 30 years of fun

By Rod Wilson

My favorite car is a 1969 Corvette. I ordered it from DeNooyer Chevrolet in September 1968 and paid \$6,315 for it on January 5, 1969; I still have the cancelled check. Today it is worth in excess of \$50,000.

This appreciation is due to the fact that I've kept the car up to original and stock specifications, so it has intrinsically more value than a car that has been restored.

I have eight other cars, including a Ferrari, Maserati, Aston-Martin Lagonda, Rolls-Royce, GMC Syclone, Cadillac Seville, Lincoln Continental Mark V and Lincoln Navigator. Some of these cars are considerably more valuable than the Corvette, but it is still my favorite.

Prior to purchasing this particular Corvette in 1969, I had owned several others, but I knew that I was not going to buy another one thereafter, which is why I've kept it all these years.

Why am I so partial to the Corvette, you ask? I always wanted to have one because I like its performance and style.

1969 was a popular year for Corvettes, but as I mentioned, mine is rare because it's completely original inside and out.

Aside from general maintenance, it has not been modified in any way. I've meticulously kept mine in top-notch cosmetic and mechanical condition.

The Corvette is painted its original color of Riverside Gold and its convertible top is black. The interior has black leather upholstery.

Mechanically, it has a 427cubic-inch engine, which means it's a big block engine, developing 435 horsepower and it's coupled with a turbo-hydrumatic transmission, which means it is not a stick shift.

Because this is a very high-performance engine, I have to use a minimum of 110 octane gasoline, which is the conventional leaded kind.

As far as I know, there are only a couple of gas stations in the Kalamazoo area that even handle this gasoline, also known as racing fuel.

One of them is in Galesburg and the other one is at Raceway Total on D Ave., so I have to drive a ways even to fill up.

Another downfall—it's expensive! The mileage is rather poor and the fuel cost is obviously rather high at \$3 per gallon.

Unfortunately, my Corvette was designed to run on this gasoline, so that is what I have to pay to make it run properly. Fortunately, I don't go through more than three tanks of gas each year.

During the summertime, I put full-coverage insurance on all of my cars, but I only drive them on very nice, selective days or for a ride in the evenings.

Even in the summer though, my normal everyday driving and working vehicle is my Lincoln Navigator.

I don't drive any of my collectible cars around town. In fact, I wouldn't even think of doing that. I try to minimize the risk of an accident and drive extremely defensively.

When I'm not driving my cars, I store them in a secure, heated facility. The heat reduces the cars' deterioration and the need for security goes without saying.

Occasionally, I do put my Corvette in shows, but they are not competitions. Although I have won some honorary awards, I just don't have the time to compete.

Having said that, I have no plans to do anything with the Corvette, other than what I've done for 30 years; enjoy it.

When I die, it will go to my estate with my other cars. If no one in my family wants the Corvette, it might be sold at that time.

—As told to Tara Marion

Rod Wilson lives in Portage and drives his 1996 Lincoln Navigator. He is the president of Wilson Air Equipment Co.