



Classical Gas



MCKEEL HAGERTY'S BEAUTIFUL SPLIT-WINDOW VETTE

TEXT BY STEVE TEMPLE, PHOTOS BY MILE DRILLING



In Homer's *Iliad*, the ill-fated Achilles had weakness in his heel. (Recall actor Brad Pitt's vigorous portrayal in the movie *Troy*, along with his untimely end.) McKeel Hagerty needs no such cinematic reminder, however, since he's a student of classic literature (besides serving as CEO of Hagerty Insurance, which, coincidentally, specializes in covering classic cars). McKeel admits to a weakness in his foot as well, but his involves an itch to stomp the throttle pedal of a variety of vintage vehicles, including his '63 split window seen here.

"It's a wonderful car and phenomenal performer, as it revs so nicely," McKeel says, despite not having the

much ballyhooed big-block. There's a good reason it doesn't (which we'll explain momentarily), but the simple reality is that a healthy small-block makes for much more manageable road manners. Of course, the large V-8 Vettes are far more valuable, but his priorities are with driving, not investing.

McKeel attributes that trait to his father Frank Hagerty, who instilled in him an appreciation for cars from an early age—and not just from the historical standpoint. "I grew up driving vintage cars," he relates. "Dad insisted that we drive them. To him they were just cars." McKeel cut his teeth on a '56 Thunderbird with a manual tranny, and then graduated to a '67 Porsche 911S, which he restored at the tender age of 13. He still owns it today, along with a baker's dozen of different sports cars.

Considering that his company's number-one insurance category is for Corvettes (especially C1 to C3), it just wouldn't make good business sense to be without one. It's a decision he's never regretted, as he relishes cruises in cool weather (since it has a hardtop, and the cockpit can get toasty in the summer) on the Michigan peninsula near the home office in Traverse City. But how he came to own the split window about five years ago was more than purely a business decision.

During a luncheon with Mike Stowe of Great Lakes Motor Works, McKeel learned of the car, and expressed his interest in acquiring it. Stowe said it was available, but on one condition—he had to buy it before the end of the meal, as it wasn't going to be around after that.

"Here I was, sitting down at lunch to talk about a Corvette," McKeel recalls with a smile. "And the next



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thing I knew, I was writing a check for it." Insurance execs aren't usually known for making impulse decisions, but then again, he's not your typical insurance agent. Like we noted at the outset, he has a weakness in his right foot.

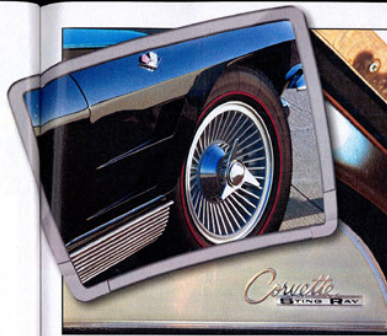
You could hardly blame him though, after seeing just how beautifully preserved it was. The original owner was a well-heeled (no pun intended) lady, without the need for a fire-breathing big-block. The base engine, a 300-hp 327, was more than enough for tooling around town. A nasty rat motor would be unseemly for this gracious society matron, as Stowe described her as "an absolutely delightful woman."

She eventually handed the car over to her son. Since it was beginning to show its age, he embarked on a moderate restoration, redoing the paint and interior, and refreshing the engine. The only non-standard modification on "Eleanor" (no connection to the Shelby GT500 from *Gone in Sixty Seconds*) was the addition of a tilt steering system,

since his large stature made it difficult to get into the cockpit.

Sadly, part way through the project his mother passed away, and he lost interest in the car, as it became a painful reminder. So Stowe took over the build and completed it. That's when McKeel entered the picture. "His knowledge of cars is pretty darn good," observes Stowe. "And it's one of the nicest midyear Corvettes I've ever driven. I kinda hated to let it go." So McKeel knew this collectible split window was the real deal, and not some sort of lather-day Trojan Horse. (Yes, more *Troy* references.)

Having found his iconic Corvette, McKeel had more battles in store for him. In keeping with his appreciation for the classics, he noted there was no U.S. representation for FIVA (Federation Internationale des Vehicules Anciens). This organization, with 1.2 million members, provides both regulatory and social/cultural support to preserve our precious legacy of classic cars. McKeel had become

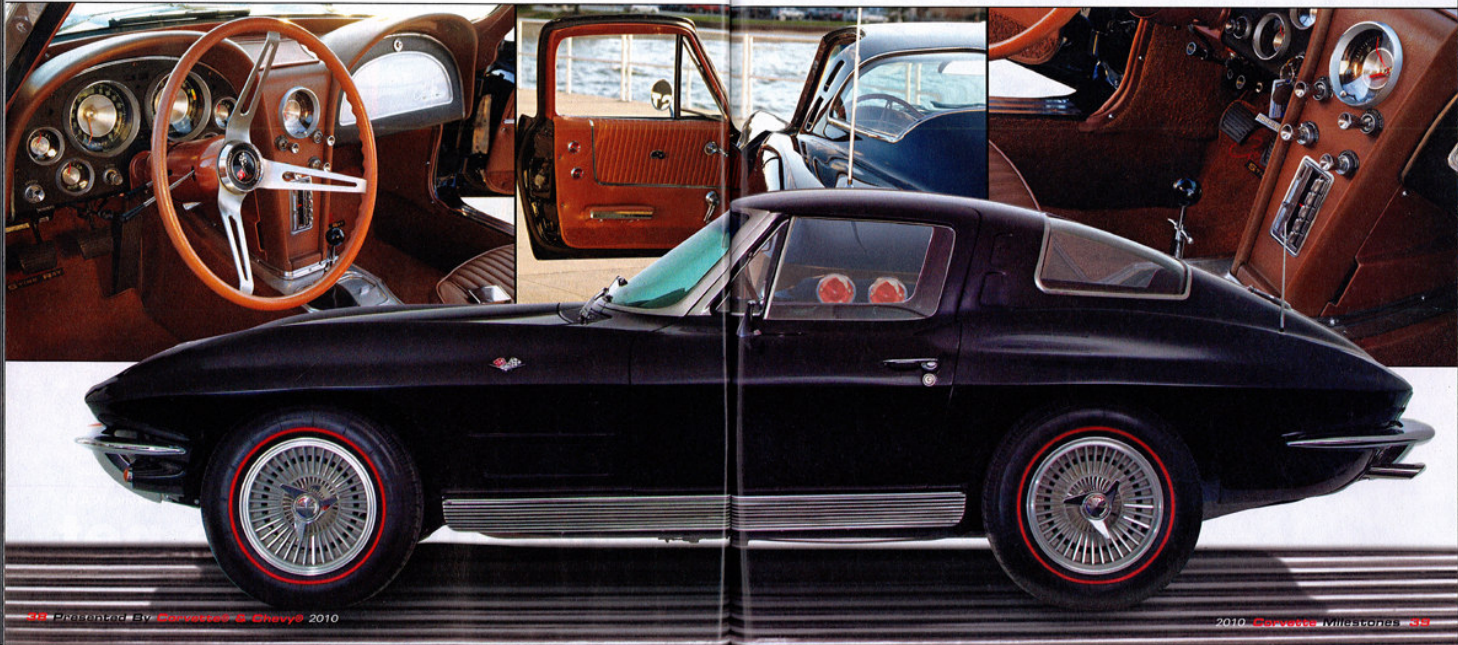


closely acquainted with this organization while serving as a FIVA judge (the youngest ever) at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

Anticipating a potential problem for Corvette owners as troubling as a Greek tragedy, he founded the Historic Vehicle Association (HVA). "I'm a firm believer that Corvette owners are facing challenges to operate their vehicles on public roads," he says, citing issues of fuel quality, emissions testing, safety retro-fit requirements, crusher laws, and others.

The HVA was founded by Hagerty Insurance in 2009 as the recognized, exclusive North American affiliate of FIVA to advocate for historic vehicles in the United States and Canada. Its mission is to *Keep Yesterday's Vehicles on Tomorrow's Roads*. The HVA is focused on preserving the historic vehicle heritage, ensuring a supportive political environment, and promoting the numerous positive social and economic activities of the historic vehicle community.

Putting it simply, "We don't want Corvettes to go



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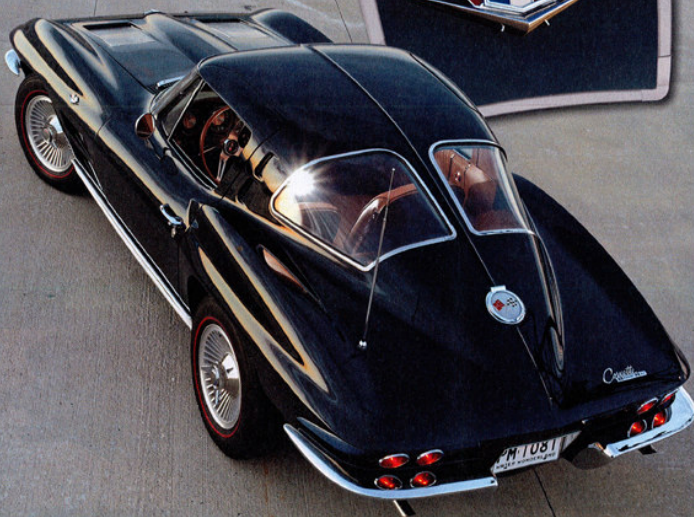
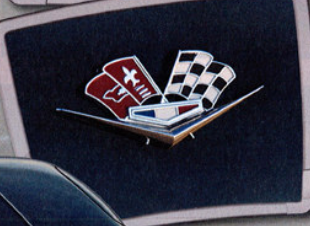
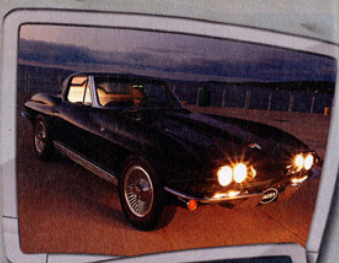
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the way of the horse," McKeel states. "There's an old Chinese proverb that I quote often: 'Dig a well before you get thirsty.'"

Getting back to McKeel's split window, though, we had one more question about his personal experience with the car. We wanted to know how he feels about the rib in the center of the rear window. After all, it does hinder visibility, so much so that early owners were known to slice it out and insert a one-piece rear window. (Which sounds positively horrifying in retrospect, given the split window's rarity and collectability.) McKeel's succinct reply: "I don't know who's behind me." And that about sums it up for a guy who not only loves classic Corvettes, but is looking ahead to keep the cars of yesterday on tomorrow's roads.

SOURCES:

- www.hagerty.com
- www.historicvehicle.org
- www.collectorsfoundation.org



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