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# LOST CORVETTES



## Unique Collection — Car collectors have very specific tastes. They tend to have interest in cars from only one manu- facturer, and are usually inclined toward a specific model. If asked, they can recite from memory the vehicle codes, options, and colors that the car they are seeking will feature. There are few collectors, however, who are as focused in their efforts as Richard Cohen of Copiague, New York.

# Rare Collector

*Richard Cohen's collection  
of big-tank Corvettes is  
unique in the hobby*

*by Jeremy Jenkins  
photography by Bill Erdman*

Richard Cohen, founder of Long Island Corvette Supply, collects Corvettes. More specifically, he collects option code NO3 Corvettes—those which feature an oversized 36-gallon gas tank. To date, he has five of the cars, one to represent each year the option was available.

General Motors made the NO3 option available in Corvettes from the years 1963 to 1967. To purchase a "big-tank" car, interested parties had to get the seal of approval from higher-ups at the company. For the most part, big-tanks were granted at the request of Corvette racers who had a relationship with GM. There were exceptions, but the big-tanks are rarely found in cars that do not also feature the Z06 or race package options, including fuel injection, four-speed manual transmission, oversized metallic brakes, and a dual master cylinder.

Richard first learned of the big-tank cars in the early '80s when a friend of a friend claimed to know the whereabouts of a '67

NO3 Corvette. Research determined that if the car was for real, it was one of just two NO3 cars to roll off of the assembly line that year. The possibility of owning a car that is legitimately one of two, and technically one-of-a-kind considering other options, intrigued Richard. He made contact with the gentleman who had staked the claim and an agreement was made.

In the midst of what turned out to be an extremely long purchasing process to get the '67, Richard began picking up the other cars for what would become his NO3 collection. The first car he would purchase was the '66. He explains, "While I was trying to buy the '67, I was talking to Terry Michaelis and mentioned my interest in the big-tank cars. He gave me the phone number of a guy who said he had one. I called him up, went to see the car, and ended up purchasing it on the spot."

That first car is the only one of the five Richard owns that was factory-race-prepared. He tracked down the original owner, who turned out to be a former Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) race driver who had special-ordered the car for racing. It was one of just

# Unique Collection— Rare Collector

13 factory-race-prepared cars built that year. Interestingly, these 13 cars are believed to have been the test mules for what would later become the L88 engine.

The '66 wears Silver Pearl paint and is trimmed with a black interior. It's powered by the original 425hp 427, and Richard grabs gears courtesy of a four-speed manual transmission. The car was ordered radio-delete, and other options include power brakes, knock-off wheels, and J56 brakes.

After purchasing the '66, a few years passed before Richard became aware of another big-tank car. This one was a '63 Z06, NO3. He talked with Terry Michaelis who was selling the car for the owner, and found it to have a great history. He says, "The car actually had a substantial amount of documentation with it to prove it was all original. I flew out to see it and found it to be a super restoration. It's the only one of the five cars that I wouldn't have had to get restored."

Richard purchased the red-on-red '63 immediately. The car is one of only 76 Corvettes manufactured that year with the NO3 36-gallon fuel tank. He holds complete documentation of the car's history clear back to the original dealer in Michigan, including the shipper's copy of the original delivery invoice. This car was also ordered radio-delete with fuel injection and a four-speed manual transmission.

Besides the big-tank, the Corvette features another rare component—gear-drive, two-bar knock-off wheels. These wheels were used early in 1963 and incorporated a gear that attached to the car's rear axle. Chevrolet would learn early in the year that another company held the patent for this setup, and they were forced to change to a redesigned wheel.

After the '63, it was time for Richard to purchase the car that had started his search for NO3 Corvettes to begin with.

From the time Richard had agreed to purchase the car from the friend of a friend who knew its whereabouts, two years would pass before he would actually get the opportunity to see it. He says, "I had kept in touch with the gentleman until one day he called up and said the owner was going to let him



see the car. I went along and found that it was quite complete." He continues, "At that time, we worked out a deal where I could talk directly with the owner. I would call him every now and then to see if he was interested in selling it, but he would always say no. He said he intended to restore it someday."

Finally, after an additional three years of persistence, Richard got the answer he was

looking for. It happened that the owner of the rare '67 was starting up a business and needed the capital that selling the Corvette would provide. At last, the car was purchased.

This car is actually one of the tamer Corvettes in Richard's collection. It's dressed sharply in white paint and trimmed with a bright blue interior. Power is generated by a 327 with 350 hp. Richard enjoys air condi-

# Unique Collection— Rare Collector

tioning, power brakes, power steering, power windows, and an AM/FM stereo as he shifts gears with the four-speed manual transmission. As stated, the car is one of only two big-tank cars manufactured in '67. Richard has documentation of the full history of the car traced back to the original dealer on Long Island, New York.

The next car to join Richard's collection was, like the '67, an exception to the racers-only rule for ordering a big-tank. It's a '64 Corvette originally purchased by a ranch

owner in Texas. Richard says, "The original owner lived on a large ranch, so he ordered the big-tank to avoid having to make a special effort to refuel." Richard was directed to the car by a friend who knew of his interest in NO3 Corvettes. He made contact with the owner, and after a few months of pursuing was able to make a deal. The car was purchased sight unseen.

Since its restoration, the car features black paint and is trimmed with red interior. The 300hp engine is backed by an automatic transmission, and creature comforts include air conditioning, power steering, power brakes, power windows, and AM/FM stereo. It is one of 38 big-tanks built in '64 and one of just two that were built with automatic transmission and A/C. Again, Richard has documentation to support the car's lineage back to the original dealer in Texas.

Finally, Richard would complete his collection of big-tank Corvettes with the purchase of a '65. He says, "About three years ago, a friend who knew of my interest in the cars found a 396, NO3 in Georgia. I flew down to take a look at it, and it was in great shape. In fact, I wouldn't have had to have it restored except that it had been painted the wrong color."

The Silver-Pearl-on-black '65 is set in motion by a 425hp 396 and four-speed manual transmission. Stopping power is courtesy of power brakes, and tunes are delivered via an AM/FM stereo. He has the full history of the car back to the original dealer with the original dealer's invoice from Tennessee. The Corvette is one of only 41 big-tank cars delivered that year, and one of approximately five big-tank cars to house a 396.

Richard says the most difficult part of putting together his collection was getting the '67. He adds, "That car is really the gem of the collection because it is one of two. Without it, the others wouldn't be as special. It was very tough maintaining patience for five years wondering if I would be able to get that car."

While getting the cars together was a great achievement, Richard says the restoration of each car was probably one of the more rewarding aspects of the whole process. He explains, "I'm in the business of manufacturing exclusively '63-'67 Corvette restoration parts, so it was really valuable for me to go through the process and learn firsthand the needs and wants of a customer who is doing the same thing."

In addition to experiencing the restoration firsthand, Richard has especially enjoyed putting together the documentation and history for each vehicle. He comments, "I've had the opportunity to speak with several of the original owners. They're usually really glad to hear from you, to hear what happened to their car, and they normally have a great story to tell about it."

With a car to represent each year the option was available, Richard's collection of big-tank Corvettes is one of a kind. Given that only one other '67 exists, it will most likely remain that way. He says the only change he would make in the collection would be to substitute another '65 for the one he owns to avoid having two cars with the exact same color combination.

The cars in this rare collection have been shown individually in the past. Richard has collected several awards including Bloomington Gold and Top Flight NCRS. August 27-29, however, will mark the only time that all five of the big-tank cars will be displayed together, as Richard's collection joins the cars participating in the Chip's Choice display during Corvettes at Carlisle.

A collection like Richard's is a rare gem in the Corvette community. Its unique focus presents a challenge to the collector that, when overcome, results in the preservation of an important piece of Corvette history. It's fitting that Richard Cohen would collect Corvettes with oversized gas tanks. It must have taken an endless supply of determination to fuel his desire to assemble these cars over a period of more than 10 years.

Guess that makes Richard a Corvette enthusiast, NO3.

