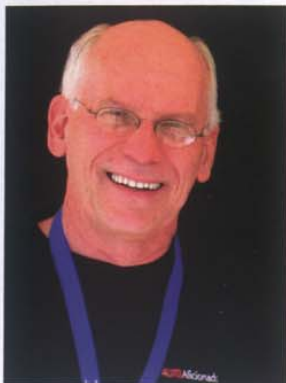


A Voice for Unsung Heroes



This magazine celebrates the automotive culture from the perspective of an American aficionado. That culture, of course, includes lots of great car companies that pay US taxes and others who do business beyond our coasts. This issue celebrates a General Motors racing legacy, one that has been an acknowledged success story for half a century.

Corvette is America's sports car. Ford never had the heart to take their Thunderbird into that competitive arena. The brilliant Ford GT and Chrysler's Viper seem to fit into garages better equipped and less used than those where Corvettes tend to wake their neighbors. The nearly affordable Corvette also has had as big an impact on international racing over a longer period than either of its American cousins. Many of us know the key personalities and some of the stories, but Tim Considine brings us the human side of a racing history in his essay as full of urban legends as a Rolling Stones tour book.

Among the cadre of racing characters in the Corvette legacy stands an American legend almost lost in the noise of corporate applause. John Fitch, the multi-mast deep water sailor, P-51 pilot, champion club racer, and Mercedes-Benz works sports and grand prix driver had more input on the Corvette becoming a race car than either Zora Arkus-Duntov or the GM design gurus. Duntov built engines and Fitch developed the Corvette into a worthy support system. Even in its most rudimentary form the Fitch-developed Corvette won GT class victories in spite of its cheap, sedan-developed drum brakes. It was no coinci-

dence, either, that Harley Earl's SS was copied, more or less, from a Mercedes-Benz 300SL space frame and Fitch was the on-track development engineer who made it work in a few short weeks. Even Bill Mitchell's beautiful Stingray, based on the by-then aging SS space frame, used Fitch, the intellectual racer, to make it an SCCA B-Modified national championship winning car.

Since his "retirement" 40 years ago John Fitch has accomplished more than men half his age. His racing and highway safety patents have saved countless lives, and at 89 he hasn't quit yet. Now in development are single-seat driver modules, barrier-wall cushions of various kinds and, relevant to this issue of *AUTO Aficionado*, are the Fitch Fuel Catalysts that improve fuel combustion efficiency and reduce emissions in otherwise standard internal combustion engines.

In spite internal, and even external, politics, General Motors' design and engineering staffs have always included genuine enthusiasts who were capable of using, and occasionally abusing, the system to keep the corporation on race podiums for decades. Our job is to celebrate the best in our automotive culture, and GM and the Corvette team deserve a round of applause at least equal to the sound of a C6.R at full voice.

See you on the road,

Larry Crane

Below: John Fitch in a 300SL for his 1952 Mercedes-Benz team driving test at the Nürburgring. Right: John at Goodwood in 2000 in Bob Sirna's recreation of John's '52 300SL Carrera Panamericana roadster.



BOB SIRNA ARCHIVE PHOTO