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A Woman's Touch

Karen Alstott's '59 Vette

By Darrel Arment

This is the story of one woman's quest to create the perfect '50s-era Corvette. Having stated that, who is to say what is meant by perfect, and who gets to choose? As with all cases in this hobby, the choosing is done by the owner and, in this particular case, it would be Iowa's Karen Alstott.

It's in her eyes that we find the definition of perfection, and one that would be a purely '50s exterior design, and that retains almost all of the heavy-handed, in-your-face, flamboyant styling accents that define the timeframe. But under the resto skin would be a massive infusion of mechanical improvements that brings the package back into the present decade.

To Karen, the original Vettes were beautifully designed rolling art exhibits, but were massively disappointing when subjected to today's demanding driving conditions. Yes, it's true, they were state of the art in '59, but circumstances have changed a lot in the past 45 years. We now live in a century where the average family sedan will easily outperform these beautiful old cars in most of the commonly measured performance categories.

That means everything on the new-for-'59 Corvette is quite antiquated by present standards and, to bring it up to today's level, it would need serious alteration. As a matter of fact, when retrospective comparisons are made, we find that the ride was bad, the brakes weak, the handling sluggish, and the engine only adequate. Of course, these minor maladies would never stop a true enthusiast from wanting one, and it didn't slow Karen down one bit.

It just meant that an alternate course would have to be pursued and drastic changes incorporated. Because the alterations would be so drastic and the upgrades so numerous, it seemed rather foolish to start with an original car only to discard most of it. So Karen made a logical choice and selected a body and chassis combination from Mike Walker at Street Rods Only & Walker Vettes (Macon, IL). Mike has his bodies built by Downs Manufacturing and, with that company's stellar reputation for producing quality 'glass bodies, you know they're right. The bodies are so right, in fact, that original trim can be used from any '58 through '60 Corvette OEM supplier, and the trim fits perfectly without one bit of alteration.

The chassis, on the other hand, is a completely different matter. It is custom built by Liquid Concepts (Windsor, IL) using jig-welded, steel tube rails with plenty of bracing in all of the right places for strength. For improved handling, a late-C4 Corvette front and rear suspension pieces are added. The rear half shafts are shortened a total of 3 inches and the transverse-mounted fiberglass springs are replaced by Pro Shock coilovers, both front and rear. As it turned out, it took 400lb springs to control the rear and 500-pounders to control the front.

One other alteration to the C4 package was the addition of the larger C5 front and rear disc brake rotors to improve stopping. To complete the package, a full set of Boyds wheels in 18- and 20-inch sizes were wrapped in Nitto rubber to complement the suspensions capabilities. The suspension package pretty much prepares the car to handle whatever the real world could possibly throw at it, and that's a good thing because Karen's next selection would be capable of testing every bit of technology she had added if she should decide to turn it loose.

Karen wanted her car to have enough raw power under the hood to outperform any image that anyone has ever had involving a '50s Vette, so she contacted Street & Performance and had them ship their version of GM's electronic-controlled, fuel-injected, 400-plus-hp Z06 to Walker's for installation. Then, as a measure intended to refine the engine's potential for brutality, she had him install a 700R automatic transmission and slightly tweaked torque converter, rather than the usual six-speed manual unit used to transfer all of that raw power to the C4 independent rear suspension.

With the chassis packed with late-'90s technology, it was time to set the body in place and start putting the cosmetics together. When it came to the body's design, this car was to represent all the things that made the '50s fabulous. It's all about the chrome, glitz, flash, and the feelings they are supposed to stir up. And, as everybody knows, feelings are all about sizzle and not the steak. So Karen carefully looked the models over, checking them detail for detail, and determined that the '59-60 had the perfect balance of chrome, reasonable taste, and the serious amount of flash required.

The only real alteration to the exterior was the use of VW door handles, a round gas-filler door, shaving off a few of the chrome bits, 14-inch wide wheel tubs, and a serious deviation in body color. For the color, she had the boys at Walker's Vettes lay down a slick coat of bright-



The engine compartment neatly houses the 405hp Z06 engine supplied by Street & Performance (Mena, AR). Colormatched to the car, the engine also uses Street & Performance's chromed alternator, water pump, and polished lines to dress up the engine bay.



Street Rods Only installed instruments, a sound system, and climate control, then electrically connected the components and shipped it off to the Recovery Room (Omaha, NE), where white Ultra Leather was used to cover everything that wasn't painted orange.

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orange body color accented by pure white coves. When the body was finished and the stereo, climate-control system, and instruments were added to the interior, the car was delivered to the Recovery Room (Omaha, NE), where everything that wasn't painted bright orange was covered with an abundance of white Ultra Leather.



Soon Karen took delivery of her dream car and, though she picked up a Pro's Pick her first time out with it at the Good Guys show in Indianapolis, the smile on Karen's face when she's blazin' down a long, open stretch of highway is really a much better indicator of how much she really likes her new ride.

KAREN ALSTOTT	
Fort Dodge, IA	
'59 Corvette	
CHASSIS	
Frame	Custom tube frame by Liquid Concepts, Windsor, IL
Rear Suspension	C4 Corvette indy w/ Pro Shock coilovers
Rear Brakes	Vette disc
Front Suspension	C4 indy w/ Pro Shock coilovers
Front Brakes	C5 Vette disc
Steering	Corvette rack and pinion
Front Wheel	18 x 9" Boyds
Rear Wheel	20 X 10" Boyds
Front Tire	Nitto 235/40ZR18
Rear Tire	Nitto 275/35ZR20
ENGINE & TRANS	
Make	Z06 by Street & Performance
Crankshaft	stock Vette
Water Pump	Street & Performance
Induction	Street & Performance injection
Air Cleaner	Street & Performance
Headers	Street & Performance
Exhaust	2" stainless
Transmission	700R
Shifter	Lokar, console mount
BODY	
Manufacturer	Downs Manufacturing
Body Mods	VW door handles
Bodywork	Walker's Vettes
Paint Type	Bright orange w/ white coves
Painter	Walker's Vettes
INTERIOR	
Gauges	Custom Classic Instruments
Wiring	Centech
Steering Wheel	Boyds
Air Conditioning	Southern Air
Seating	Buckets by Recovery Room, Omaha, NE
Upholsterer	Recovery Room
Material	White Ultra leather

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