

TALES FROM THE ROAD

Close Encounters

Episode 2--THE L-88

by Patrick Ofenloch

Many articles have been written about the extremely rare and valuable L-88 Corvettes. Some of my better fantasies feature me--the hero, of course--driving into the sunset in an L-88. My very best fantasies are about my actually owning an L-88. Can you imagine what kind of experience that would be? Might it possibly be the most fun you could have with your clothes on?

This Tale begins while driving the length of the great state of Indiana, "The Cross Roads of America ". I pulled out of Evansville, a city of 121,000 people, that it so far South it would probably be Kentucky if not for the Ohio River, and pointed the headlights northeast toward South Bend--population 255,000 on the Michigan border almost 320 miles away. Evansville is the home of one of the newest Toyota plants; South Bend is the resting place of the last Studebaker plant. It is

also home of a little-known college that has a football team--Notre Dame.

I stopped for lunch in a town where the businesses had names like "Boot City", "Fence City", "Sofa City", "Food City" (and of course, a Wal-Mart). If you are a stranger in small-town America, and walk into a local restaurant, everyone is going to stop what they're doing, and stare at you. Never fails. A few tables over, a lanky unshaven man in jean overalls stared more than most. Finally, he stood up, walked to my table, and told me why.

"I see y'all got a Corvette shirt on." (thankfully, this was true) "What year 'vette do y'all have? "

"I have a 1995," I proudly responded.

"Hell," he growled, in a voice that convinced me he gargled broken glass every morning, "That ain't no Corvette! Why, I got me a 1968 split window. That is a true vette.

"Hmmm..." I thought to myself. I am no Corvette expert, but I never heard of a

1968 split window. Did I misunderstand? Maybe he meant to say 1963?

"I ordered my car new in 1968," he continued, " and paid only \$3800 for it. And, I only have 24,000 miles on it. I'll bet it is worth 20 times that amount now. Yes it is.

"That is a great car and I am very happy for you," I said. "You should be proud of it. So what color is it? "

"It is a black car and I ordered every option that was available in 1968. I even got that there '427' with a 500-plus horsepower motor in it. You know they only put about 100 motors like that there in those cars. "

Now, he had my full attention. I continued to ask questions in a curious but calculating manner.

"So your car has aluminum cylinder heads? "

"Yessiree! he answered.

"4-Speed?

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“Yep. Why it even has that there M22 close ratio trans with one of those 3.55 posi“

My heart started to race. Was this an unidentified L88? Had I found the Holy Grail? In 1968, only 80 L-88s were built. Today, just 56 are still known to exist. Could this be number 57?

I mentally multiplied \$3,800. times 20 and came up with \$76,000. Could I possibly buy this car for just \$76,000? At this point, my mind began racing, my heart pounding, and the best of all my fantasies (those in which I am fully-clothed) began playing in 3-D! I could picture myself driving a true, thoroughbred L-88. And yes, the color of the car in my dreams was now black.

Now wouldn't that be a fun call to my wife. “Hey, Honey! I need to mortgage the house so we can buy a car from some guy who drives a taxi that I met at Luke's Diner near Boot, Fence, Sofa, and Food Cities. And, I am not going to leave this guy's side until you send the money!”

Okay, okay. Before making that call, calm down and breathe; think, analyze...try to remember your marriage vows.

“So where do you buy gas for your corvette?” I asked my newfound, best friend.

“Why hell, man, ”looking at me like I was from Pluto, “. you can buy gas fer a vette anywhere!

“But, don't you need 103 octane? Is there a sticker or label on the console that says anything like that?”

(At this point I can't speak clearly anymore, and I am starting to slur my words. For a moment I could see myself at the Barret Jackson Auction, lighting a cigar as the auction bids topped \$750,000 on my newfound treasure.)

“Nope, there ain't a sticker like that.”

“Was there ever a sticker or label that you can remember on the car? “I was beginning to feel actual pain.”

Why hell, I guess you don't know much about vettes do you? Corvette

Motors never put any sticker like that on any car.”

I wish I could end this story sipping on a glass of rare wine,—served by my French maid—and relating how I made automotive history by discovering a Corvette of great heritage, rich in tradition and practically priceless. However, let me tell you “the rest of the story” and we can both head to “Liquor City” for a bottle with a cap instead of a cork.

As our conversation continued, the term “split window” came up again. Yes, this was definitely a “427” Corvette with a 500-plus horsepower motor. Yes, it was a rare car. However, while the gentleman was serving our country in Viet Nam, one of his friends put a '63 split window in his 1968 corvette and then, modified the engine.