

The '66 Corvette Challenge

Part 2

Visit to Fabulous Restorations

by: Pat Cavanagh NCRS #57907

In late November of 2019, I received a call from a friend who is a partner in a private equity firm. They had recently had a management meeting and decided new leadership at the company was needed. They asked if I would accept the position of Chairman of the Board and a temporary role as CEO to resolve several strategic issues and find a new CEO.

After a short conversation with my wife Diane, she decided spending several winter months in South Florida with me working (and her on a shopping holiday) was a great idea! Little did we know what was ahead of us with Covid 19.

In early December, we flew to Fort Lauderdale for a week. Diane found a home that the Company leased for six months in Pembroke Pines, Florida and I spent some time getting to know the management team and trying to understand some of the problems and challenges that lie ahead.

Before we returned to Florida in late December, several of our more *performance-oriented* members suggested I visit "*Fabulous Restorations*" a restorer of Corvettes and other special interest muscle cars in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Beside restorations, “*Fabulous Restorations*” is known for very authentic recreations of iconic performance and racing Corvettes from the 60’s and 70’s.

In early May 2020, we hired a new CEO that started in June. With the end of my interim CEO assignment in sight, I took the time to contact George Haddad, the president and owner of “*Fabulous Restorations*”. I set up an appointment to visit his operation in May before Diane and I returned to Tulsa.



“*Fabulous Restorations*” is located in an upscale industrial subdivision in Northwest Fort Lauderdale. Their waiting room was loaded with automotive and Corvette paraphernalia including hundreds of models, quality automotive antiques, paintings, pictures and 60’s and 70’s style test instruments including many with Penske nameplates that were once marketed and sold by Sears.



George is very gregarious, he proceeded to introduce me to his office staff of long time employees and show me around his office all

the while describing a myriad of automotive antiquities that decorated his office. He is a collector of all things automotive, particularly as they relate to Corvettes.

George grew up in Detroit and after college went to work at Chrysler as a supervisor in a Michigan Assembly Plant. During the downturn in the early 70's, he moved to Florida and went to work at friends shop doing collision work on Corvettes for local Chevrolet Dealers. In 1974, George went out on his own and started Fabulous Restorations in Hollywood Florida.

While Fabulous Restorations specializes in Corvettes, they also do restoration work on many other special interest muscle cars. During my tour, I saw a variety of vehicles in different states of restoration.

Work was being performed on a number of Corvettes including; two '63 SWC's, a '54, a '66 Convertible, a '67 Big Block Coupe, '67 Convertible and a '61 Drag Car. In addition, work was finishing on a rare '67 Toyota 2000 GT, a '53 Chevy Truck, and a '67 Big Block Mustang. Work at "*Fabulous Restorations*" ranges from simple sorting things out, to full body off nut and bolt restorations. "*The Fabulous Restorations*" facility consists of four major areas; car storage, a body and paint shop, a mechanical shop and a clean room engine assembly area. George told me they have built 1000's of stock and high-performance engines since they started in 1974.

George is particularly passionate about '67 to '69 Corvette L88's and ZL1's. His first racecar recreation was of the '67 L88 roadster that finished 2nd in the GT Class and 11th overall at the 24 Hours of Endurance at Daytona in 1970. This car was driven to nearly 300 podium finishes including more than 150 outright wins during its racing career. It was owned and raced by Cliff Gottlob with

Jack Blatchford as the crew chief. This car is currently in the Dana Mecum/David Burroughs collection and was recently at the Mecum 2020 Indianapolis auction but did not sell. Georges' recreation is exact in every way except its Rally Red instead of White to make sure it is recognized as a recreation. I found this car particularly attractive and my '66 will have a similar feel.



George also built a replica of Roger Penske's, 24 Hours of Daytona, 1966 Rally Red Corvette Coupe. Because of Penske's

close relationship with Chevrolet, the St. Louis assembly plant built a specially equipped Corvette that was fitted with a prototype 427 CID L88 engine, 36 Gallon fuel tank and a number of other unique competition options. This #6 Corvette competed in the 1966 24 Hours of Daytona driven by Dick Guldstrand, George Wintersteen and Ben Moore where they finished 1st in Class and 12th overall. This was the only race that the #6 Penske Corvette competed in with the Rally Red paint scheme. Sunoco became the sponsor shortly after the Daytona Race and the Corvette competed in the famous Blue and Yellow paint scheme in future races.

George and his crew decided to recreate this historical racecar and they began by painstakingly researching the exact parts and configuration of the car as it raced at Daytona in 1966. They wanted to ensure accuracy in every detail of the build.



This recreation of this special option '66 Corvette L88 was displayed this year in March at the Amelia Island, Florida Concours d'Elegance with the original car in its

blue and yellow livery. This recreation has many special date code correct parts and it looks fantastic.



Next George has built two '69 ZL1 recreations. The blue car was created from a very original 427/390 BB Roadster. This roadster also has a build date the same week as the known originals. They both contain all of the L88 Components along with date coded all



aluminum big blocks and are exact recreations of the originals. George has recently added side pipe headers, billboard Goodyear tires and Torque Thrust wheels to the blue car. George started the car for me and it is very authoritative with those side pipe headers!

George's love of Corvette race cars and the positive reactions he received on the Gottlob '67 L88 Roadster and '66 Penske Coupe lead him to recreate one of the two famous Owens Corning L88



Corvette Roadsters. The first '68 L88 Owens Corning racecar was built from a big block roadster and GM L88 service parts. This car is in the Rick Hendricks collection today. The second car was a factory fresh '69 L88 open chamber car and it is in the Harry Yeaggy collection.

These Corvettes won 22 straight A production SCCA races from May 1969 to November 1970. In addition,

they had numerous FIA and GT Class wins and raced successfully at Sebring and Daytona.



George's recreation uses Heavy-Duty L88 parts including the J56 Heavy-Duty brake option. The bodywork is just stunning on this car and it has a special Owens Corning paint scheme designed by GM stylist Randy Wittine. This

black/white/red paint scheme was only used for one race, the 1970 Daytona 24 hour. After the race, it was painted in the well-known Owen Corning white and red paint scheme. This recreation is stunning!



These are just several of the famous cars George has recreated. I encourage you to visit his website and check out some of his other builds. He is a very serious enthusiast and has a wealth of Corvette knowledge. His attention to detail and the amount of research he does on these cars is monumental. He makes his reproductions very authentic down to some of the smallest details. I would

encourage you to visit George at “*Fabulous Restorations*” the next time you are in South Florida, or better yet commission him to build you a replica of your dream Corvette...A 1960 Le Mans Cunningham Corvette? A 1957 SR-2 Corvette? 1959 Corvette Racer?

Stay Tuned! For Part 3 of the “*The '66 Corvette Challenge*” where I will discuss the date codes and part numbers of my '66 Corvette and the future direction of my '66 Corvette project.

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