

“PEAKING” IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

By Ken Peak, RCC Historian

CORVETTE COLORS, 1953-2023

Part I, C1



What’s *your* favorite Corvette color? Was it popular with the Corvette buying public as well? GM? Here’s your chance to find out.

This is the first in a series of 8 articles (one for each Corvette generation) depicting the many colors that have been seen on Corvettes from 1953 through 2023 (colors on pace cars and anniversary/special edition models excluded). Included are some facts concerning model changes from year to year.

There were a few years when detailed Corvette production numbers were not kept; for those occasions color quantities are based on estimates and available information from purchasers. Furthermore, according to *Motor Trend*, from 1953-1962 not a single Corvette left the factory with a paint code on the car; therefore, the only way to tell if a unit from those years came with a certain color was to look for traces of the original paint (or overspray) somewhere on the vehicle. Also, there were years when a special-order color or primer only was put on a handful of Corvettes that left St. Louis, with no further information available. Finally, where some internet figures disagree with what is found in Mike Antonick’s excellent resource, the *Corvette Black Book, 1953-2023* (Michael Bruce Associates, Inc., Powell OH), the latter’s figures are used. CorvSport website is also used.

NOTE: there are two ways to view or count Corvette colors: (1) by their factory names only (as listed in the *Black Book*) as well as by their assigned GM codes. Skip Hosler’s article in October’s Drivelines described the complicated, challenging, and difficult task of identifying colors using the code method. Readers of that article will note that dozens of Corvette colors have both a factory given name as well as an added “Metallic” (small bits of powdered metal and aluminum added) or “Tintcoat” name (basecoat with clear applied over it), particularly after 1981. So, are Navy Blue and Navy Blue Metallic two different colors, or variations of one and the same? That is a debate for the ages. This can also become a bit confusing; for example, Tintcoats are a 3-stage paint and can be *metallic*. Even

some graphics showing Corvette colors omit the names Metallic and Tintcoat. Thus - hopefully I've not belabored the point – given Skip's article and for the sake of simplicity, **ONLY the *Corvette Black Book's* factory issued color names will be used in this series. However, the end of Part 8 will contain a listing of all colors having those added names.**

Finally, in addition to Skip's input, all due credit should be given to Corvsport - quite possibly the best website in the universe devoted to all things Corvette. Membership is inexpensive and the rewards are great. Most of the photos in these articles are taken from it.

The Most Popular Corvette Color of the C1 Generation (1953-1962): White

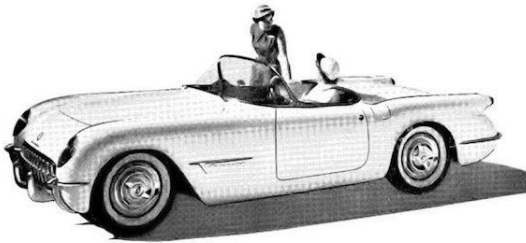
As any Corvette aficionado knows, the first 300 Corvettes, appearing in June 1953, were all white. This brings to mind Henry Ford's comment in 1908 concerning his new Model T: "Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it's black."

All 300 of the 1953 Corvettes were built by hand in the back of a customer delivery garage in Flint, Michigan. No company had ever mass-produced a fiberglass car, so the process of assembling these cars was basically an exercise in trial and error. Each fiberglass body began in the 1952 assembly year as 46 separate pieces; workers had to fit all of these pieces into wooden jigs then glue them together. Many pieces did not fit well due to molding flaws – which required even more physical labor to correct. Therefore, to help to cover such flaws and eliminate further confusion and additional manufacturing delays, all of the first 300 (the first two units were engineering test cars and later destroyed) were built the same way, enabling workers to concentrate on putting the bodies together properly. As a result, the decision was made to have all 1953 Corvettes painted Polo White with Sportsman Red interiors & black tops.

Shades of white would become the most commonly selected C1 color codes, totaling 6,895 orders. Even as Chevrolet refined the Corvette and added more colors - red, black, and blue - Ermine White was the most popular color of choice on the roads. Heater (\$91.40) and AM radio (\$145.15) were options.

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In 1954 Corvette manufacturing was moved to the St. Louis plant, capable of producing up to 10,000 of the cars per year (while only 3,640 roadsters were built this year; it would be six years – 1960 – when 10,000 or more were built). Although there were few design changes from the 1953 model, a wider color palette was offered in addition to Polo White (still by far the most popular this year, with 3,230 orders, including the following: Pennant Blue (300), Sportsman Red (100), and Black (only 4). New options included a turn signal, whitewall tires, Powerglide transmission, windshield washer (although, per the *Black Book*, it's almost certain that all of this year's models included these options).



For 1955, Polo White (325 units ordered of 700 total roadsters built) and Pennant Blue (45) were continued while Harvest Gold (120) and Corvette Copper (15) were introduced and Gypsy Red (180) replaced Sportsman Red. While the body style differed little from the previous two years, the big news for this year was mechanical: the appearance of the V8 engine – 265 c.i., 195 hp with 3-speed trans. and soft top, available for about \$130 above the base 6-cyl. price of \$2,774; six-cylinders were still available, but only 7 were ordered.



1956 witnessed a new body style for the 3,467 convertibles that were built and also added five new colors: Onyx Black (810), Aztec Copper (402), Cascade Green (290), Arctic Blue (390), and Venetian Red (the most popular color, 1,043 units). ALL colors from the previous year, except for Polo White (532), were dropped. Design changes included exterior door handles, roll-up windows, exposed headlights, and a sculptured side cove with optional colors in either silver or beige (the two-tone paint option cost its 1,259 buyers an extra \$19.40). And, beginning this model year, an auxiliary hardtop was offered (2,076 were sold this initial year, at \$215.20; it could be substituted for soft top at no cost). Power windows and power folding top were added to the options list.



1957 added Inca Silver Metallic (65 units of 6,339 convertibles built) to the other six color choices of the previous year. Optional side cove colors included Silver, Beige, Red, Ivory, and Inca Silver; again, it added \$19.40 to the cost for the 2,797 buyers of this option. Same body style seen as in the previous year, but with 283 c.i. engine, fuel injection, 4-speed, power windows, and posi-trac being available for the first time.



1958 brought even more styling changes: dual headlights, seat belts, twin trunk spears on trunk, nonfunctional louvers on hood (the latter two being one year only), body panels, instrument panel, new upholstery, passenger grab bar on dash, and central console. Horsepower increased, the 283 c.i. engine now with optional 290 hp. Seven new colors were offered: Charcoal (1,631 units of 9,168 convertibles built), Snowcrest White (the best seller, 2,477 units), Silver Blue (2,006), Regal Turquoise (510), Panama Yellow (455), Signet Red (1,399), and Tuxedo Black (493 units); Inca Silver (only 193) was also continued, while Aztec Copper, Cascade Green, Arctic Blue, Venetian Red, Onyx Black, and Polo White were dropped. Cove color options for the 3,422 seekers of a two-tone look included Inca Silver, Snowcrest White, and Black, costing \$16.15.





1959 introduced Classic Cream (223), Frost Blue (1,024 units), Crown Sapphire (888), and Roman Red (1,542). Snowcrest White (3,354 units of 9,670 convertibles produced) remained the most popular. Cove color choices were Inca Silver and Snowcrest White. Trunk spears and hood louvers of 1958 models were discontinued, and this was the only year turquoise soft tops were available (217 of 6,911 total). An auxiliary hardtop (\$236.75) could be ordered as replacement for the soft top at no extra cost. Again, the two-tone option added 2,931.





1960 saw the addition of Tasco Turquoise (635 units), Honduras Maroon (instantly popular, with 1,202 units), Sateen Silver (989), Ermine White (3,717), and Horizon Blue (766). Cascade Green (140) was reprised from the 1957 offerings, bringing the total colors offered to eight. Ermine White (3,717 of this year's 10,261 convertibles) was the most popular, while Roman Red remained strong (1,529). Cove options were Silver and White (\$16.15). This would be the last year of taillights curved into the rounded rear fenders and heavy "teeth" in the grill.



1961 brought two fresh colors, making seven total: Jewel Blue (855; one year only) and Fawn Beige (1,363). The previous year's Ermine White was the most popular, 3,178 of 10,939 total convertibles, while the previous year's Sateen Silver was the least popular (747). Tasco Turquoise, Horizon Blue, and Cascade Green were dropped. Again, cove choices were Silver and White (\$16.15 cost). Windshield washers, courtesy light, sun visors, and parking brake warning light standard.



1962 added Almond Beige (820 of a total 14,531 convertibles produced) to the previous Fawn Beige (1,851); Jewel Blue was dropped. Other color quantities are unavailable. Note: because the cove “lip” trim piece that had surrounded the coves was removed in 1962 and thus the cove was not accented by bright trim, this year’s model could not be ordered with contrasting cove colors. The 327 c.i. engine became available; this was the last year of the solid axle and first year of rocker panel moldings.

