

“PEAKING” IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

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CORVETTE COLORS, 1953-2023

Part 3 C3



Even with the introduction of several colors, it seemed that consumers were looking to return to their humble beginnings. Classic White became the most sought-after color choice for the C3 years. Clean and crisp, the Classic White made for many the best-looking vehicle on the market. In fact, about 43,000 Classic White Corvettes were ordered between 1968 and 1982.

1968 celebrated the onset of the C3 era with a new body style as well as a coupe with removable roof panels and rear window. This year also featured eight new colors (eight hues were also dropped), adding Polar White (1,868 units), LeMans Blue (4,722), International Blue (2,473), British Green (the year's favorite, 4,779 sold), Safari Yellow (3,133), Cordovan Maroon (1,155), Silverstone Silver (3,435), and Corvette Bronze (3,374). Tuxedo Black continued its nosedive, appearing on 708 of this year's 28,566 cars. Marlboro Maroon (to reappear in 1970), Marina Blue, Lynndale Blue, Elkhart Blue, Silver Pearl, Sunfire Yellow, Ermine White, and Goodwood Green were dropped.





1969 continued with color designers being hard at work, with eight new colors added to the lineup (no quantities available): Can-Am White, Monza Red, Riverside Gold, Fathom Green, Daytona Yellow, Cortez Silver, Burgundy, and Monaco Orange. 38,762 Corvettes were produced. T-tops in coupes were now included in the base price. White-letter tires became optional (\$33.15).





1970 introduced some body styling changes (fender flares w/new louvres, front grill) along with the LT1 engine and six new hues: Classic White, Mulsanne Blue, Bridgehampton Blue (apparently named for a racetrack on eastern Long Island, NY), Donnybrooke Green, Ontario Orange, and Laguna Gray. Again, no color quantities are available. The 454 c.i. engine is available as well as the ZR1 package - with heavy-duty four-speed manual transmission, more powerful brakes, an aluminum radiator, and upgraded suspension with improved springs, shocks, and anti-roll bars for \$1,010.50.



1971 saw little change in outward appearance but horsepower and compression ratings were dropping as the end was near for high-performance sports cars. But color choices remained high, with ten total; six were new hues: Nevada Silver (1,177), Sunflower Yellow (1,177), Brands Hatch Green (3,445; named for a racing circuit in West Kingsdown, Kent, England), Steel Cities Gray (1,591), War Bonnet Yellow (3,706), and Mille Miglia Red (2,180; meaning “one thousand miles,” the Mille Miglia is a famous Italian road race). Of 21,801 cars produced, War Bonnet Yellow was the most popular, followed by Brands Hatch Green. Sidenote: a 1971 ZR2 - unrestored, LS6 (454 c.i.), Brands Hatch Green (as shown below) – brought \$785k in Aug. 2023; only 12 models for this year had the \$1,741 ZR2 package.



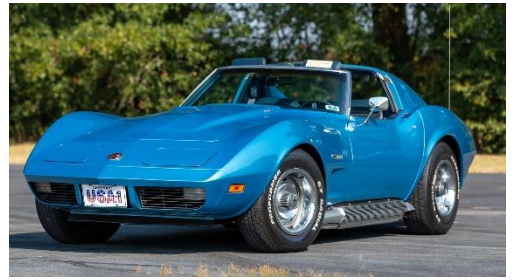
1972 again saw little change in appearance but witnessed the introduction of three new colors: Pewter Silver (1,372 units), Bryar Blue (1,617), and Targa Blue (immediately popular, with 3,198 orders). 1972 also saw the end to chrome bumpers on both ends. Ontario Orange proved the most popular color, wrapping 4,891 of 27,004 cars. Conversely, Pewter Silver saw the fewest orders.



1973 was the first year for a rubber *front* bumper so Chevrolet's 30,464 Corvettes could meet crash test standards (5 mph impact). Eight new colors were introduced and, as seen here, most of them lost their "flashy" names and became rather bland by comparison: Silver, Medium Blue, Dark Blue, Blue-Green, Elkhart Green, Yellow, Metallic Yellow, and Orange. Color quantities for this year's 30,464 models are once again unknown. Pewter Silver, Sunflower Yellow, War Bonnet Yellow, Ontario Orange, Bryar Blue, Targa Blue, and Steel Cities Gray were dropped.



1974 brought rubber bumpers at *both* ends of the Corvette; it was also the last year for the "big block" 454 c.i. engine (later generation high-displacement engines were small-block) and production without catalytic converters. Eight newly added paint hues included Silver Mist, Corvette Gray, Corvette Medium Blue, Dark Green, Bright Yellow, Dark Brown, Medium Red, and Corvette Orange. Again, no sources provide exterior color quantities sold for this year's 37,502 models. Shoulder belts were integrated with lap belts.



1975 ushered in six new colors to its menu of ten options: Bright Blue (2,869), Bright Green (1,664), Medium Saddle (3,403), Dark Red (3,342), Orange Flame (3,030), and Steel Blue (1,268). The convertible option (only 4,629 of 38,465 models built) ceased after this year but would resume in 1986. Classic White (8,007 orders) was by far the most popular color, Silver being second (4,710). Steel Blue (available for only three months) was the least ordered hue. Beginning this year, vehicles could be ordered with non-standard paint or with primer only. For its era, this was to be the last year for the convertible (to return, due to looser federal regulations, in 1986). This was also the last time a base convertible cost less than a base coupe, and the first year for the catalytic converter.



1976 saw the addition - again turning away from flashy names – of four colors: Mahogany (4,182), Buckskin (2,954), Dark Brown (4,447), and Red (4,590). Classic White was again the runaway favorite, worn on 10,674 of 46,558 coupes (no convertibles built). Dark Green was at bottom, with 2,038. About the only changed outer feature was its two different rear emblem styles – one 8” wide and not recessed, the other recessed and 6” wide. Aluminum wheels became an option (\$299). A new sport steering wheel was introduced, but many Corvette fans resented that it also steered Vegas and other “lesser” Chevy models.





1977 was heavily laden with “firsts” and new hues, seven total, all of which sported the “Corvette” moniker: Corvette Light Blue (5,967), Corvette Dark Blue (4,065), Corvette Chartreuse (1), Corvette Yellow (71), Corvette Bright Yellow (1,942), Corvette Tan (4,588), and Corvette Dark Red (3,434). But Classic White remained the favorite, 9,408 of 49,213 coupes built (again, no convertibles). However, Corvette Light Blue and Corvette Dark Blue combined for a little more than 10,000 orders. Conversely, for all of this year’s emphasis on yellow hues, the three shown only sold a bit more than 2,000 units combined. A luggage and roof rack were offered (\$73) to carry the T-top panels and allow more trunk storage room. A Convenience Group option (\$22) included headlight warning buzzer, low fuel warning light, interior courtesy lights, and right-side visor mirror. Leather seats became standard, the Stingray nameplate was removed from the fenders, glass T-top roof panels became an option (\$200), the Flint plant began painting engines blue (previously orange), a trailer package (\$83) and cruise control (\$88) were offered, and the 500,000th Corvette rolled out on March 15th - a white coupe, driven off the St. Louis production line (photo).





500,000th

1978 continued with most of the same colors but added Corvette Dark Brown (1,991) and Corvette Light Beige (1,686). The fastback window (no hatchback) was added for better sight and storage. 46,776 total units - coupes only - were built. This marked the 25th anniversary, so a black and silver Indy 500 Pace Car (6,502 replicas built for the public, for \$13,653) was produced as well as a silver and gray Silver Anniversary edition (15,283 built; paint added \$399). Aside from special editions, Classic White was favored (4,150) and Corvette Yellow was the least popular (1,243) Optional dual rear speakers cost \$49.



Although **1979** carried the same paint options as the previous year, for these models one could order the Pace Car Spoiler package (\$265 pr.) carried over from the Indy Pace Car of 1978. The Indy Pace Car's high back seats also became standard equipment. 53,807 coupes were built, an all-time high; perhaps boosted by the previous year's special edition, Black (10,465) and Silver (7,331) were very popular; Classic White wrapped 8,629 vehicles, however.

1980 was another boom production year, bringing 40,614 coupes to the market; it also brought redesigned bumpers to incorporate the pace car spoilers of 1978 & 1979. Dark Claret (3,451) and Frost Beige (3,070) were added. There was a return to basic color names; White led (7,780) with Black (7,250) close behind. For buyers needing to meet California emission requirements, an extra \$250 was added (the price would vary widely in future years); California also required a smaller engine (305 c.i., 180 hp), for which GM gave buyers a \$50 credit. A roof panel carrier (\$125) could be mounted to the rear deck.



1981 introduced two new color options (although seven previous colors had the added “Metallic” paint): Bright Blue (1) and Dark Bronze (432). Again, all were coupes, 40,606 in total, with 6,387 wrapped in White and Silver/Silver Metallic totaling 5,959; only 1 Corvette was sprayed in Bright Blue. This was the last year for a carbureted Corvette. For the first time, Corvettes were built at two locations simultaneously, in both St. Louis and Bowling Green, KY. Production ended in St Louis on August 1st and Bowling Green had its first Corvette built on July 1st - a total of 40,606 (Sport Coupes only) for the year. With the new location, Chevy could shift from lacquer paint and instead use enamel basecoats and topcoats, and also apply two-tone paints – now a \$399 option; four such schemes were introduced this year: Silver/Dark Blue, Silver/Charcoal, Beige/Dark Bronze, and Autumn Red/Dark Claret. Eventually 25 two-tone color combinations were possible. “Computer Command Control” became standard. Power seat (driver’s side) became available (\$183). This was the last year for the manual transmission until 1984, and the last year forever of the pure 4-speed manual scheme (overdrive being added later).



Examples of the 1981 two-tone color scheme



1982 brought Silver Green (723), Silver Beige (immediately a leader, at 6,759), and Gold (648) hues to the stable, with Yellow, Maroon, Beige, Mahogany, and Autumn Red of the previous year being dropped. The two-tone color option price was raised to \$428. This was the first year for the Cross Fire Fuel Injection system and the last year for the C3 body style. GM released a limited run of Collector Edition Hatchback Corvettes (6,759 vehicles of 25,407 total coupes were built with this option, costing \$22,537) with opening rear hatches and special amenities, to end run of the C3.

