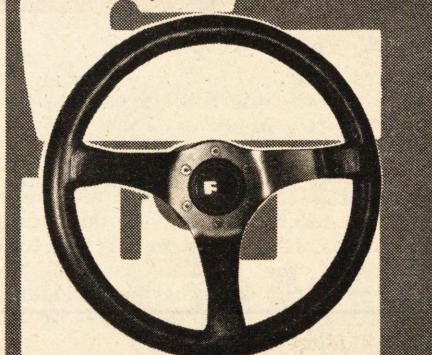




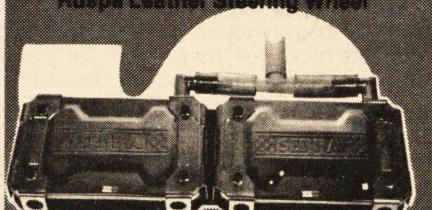
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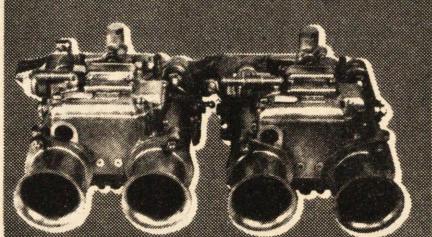
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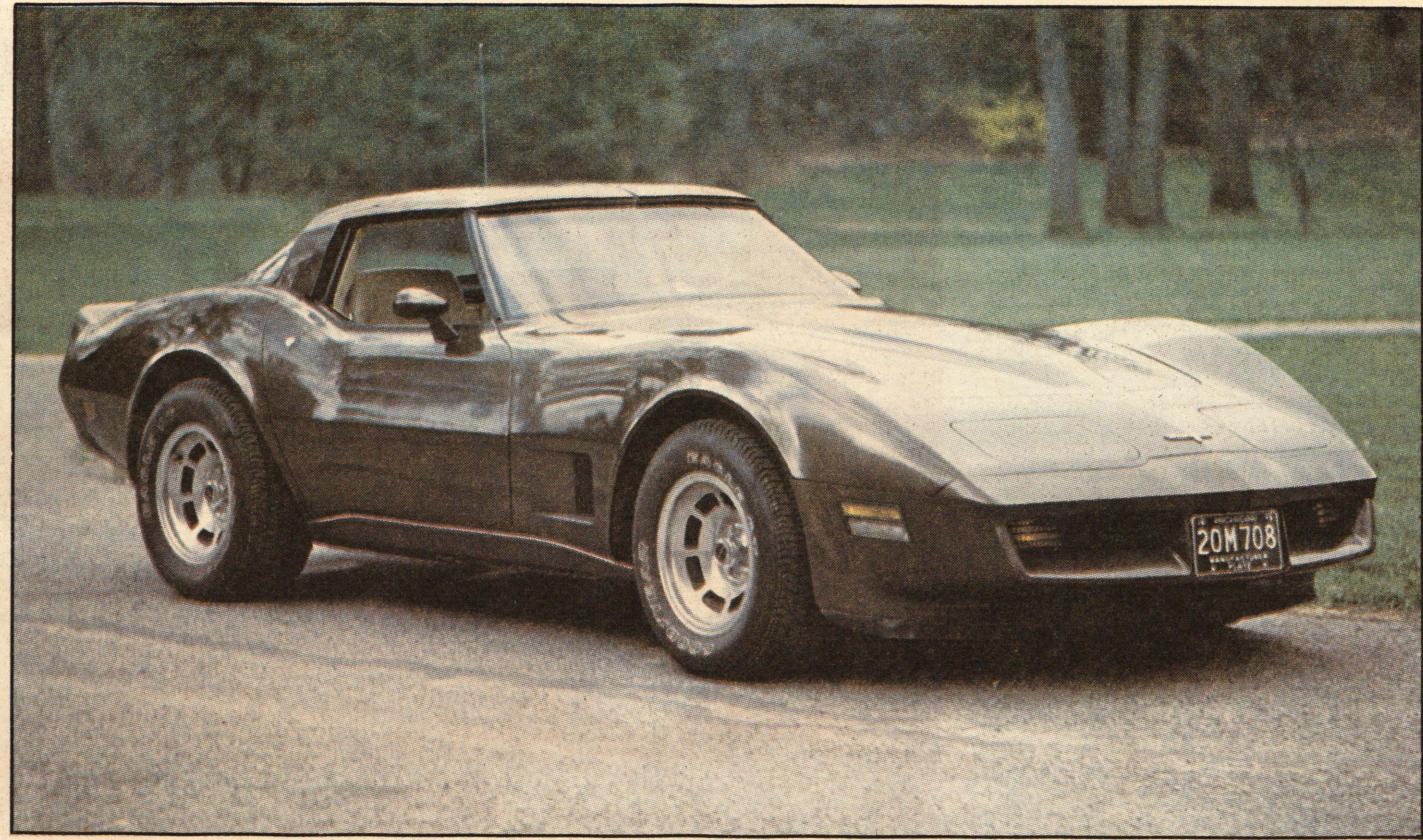
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Jim Plegue

1980 Chevrolet Corvette

Still America's hottest street machine

By Jerry Burton

Corvettes in a sense always have epitomized the American dream. It was indeed the exceptional teenager whose heart didn't throb at the mere sight of one cruising down the street. Of course for most adolescents, the mere idea of owning one was like reaching some unattainable euphoric state. Just the car to guarantee a date to every dance and land the homecoming queen as a steady. And it seemed the perfect balance of nature to have a Corvette and a Ford Country Squire wagon sitting in the driveway of your split-level home.

Yet, for a car that has served as an American sex symbol for over 27 years, Corvettes were never very practical. They sucked gas, had little luggage room, took up a lot of space on the pavement and fostered outrageous insurance rates.

Still, the Corvette is and always has been America's only true sports car, as the people from Chevy like to say, and its drawbacks somehow added to its appeal. Despite all that's been written about Vettes since 1953, it is still a distinctly American sports car. Though it may not be the most sophisticated animal in the world, it has provided performance parameters that rival imports double its price.

Despite its fine tradition, however, the old girl is beginning to show some wrinkles. The body style is now 13 years old (it will not be retooled until 1983) and even in an age when the Caddy El Dorado has been sent to the health spa for defatting, the Vette remains much the same as it did in 1968.

The 1980 Corvette comes in three models—the 190-HP L48 automatic, the L48 four-speed and the 230-HP L82, which is available as an automatic only.

Our test car was an L48 four-speed, courtesy of Chevy Engineering in Warren, Michigan, and compared to an L48 automatic that we drove several months ago, the four-speed was a different machine all together. Although much of the difference can be attributed to the transmission, it was significant enough for us to recommend the four-speed or nothing at all.

The beast is remarkably quick. Definitely a throw-back to the muscle cars of the '60s, it still maintains the deep throaty sound of a big-bore V-8 (despite the smog gear) and definitely has the power to match. It required all the self-discipline one could muster

not to stomp on it after every traffic light. Power like this just isn't available anymore unless it's in turbocharged form, and this way you don't have to cope with turbo lag.

Equally up to snuff was the four-speed transmission which seems perfectly suited to the brutish nature of the engine. There's no babying this shifter; definitely not the melted butter feeling you get on some of the imports. Just ram 'er through the gears as hard as you like—she feels crisp

and bullet-proof.

It's hard to understand, though, why a five-speed isn't offered—especially when the gas gauge seems to go in the opposite direction as the tachometer at seemingly the same rate. Our gas mileage could best be described thusly: On a clear day going downhill on a smooth road with a hefty tailwind—the mileage was terrible. Under normal conditions it was worse.

Don't let this scare you though. No—

Continued on Page 16

Redesigned Vette due in '83

America's only mass-production sports car has been getting a little long in the tooth of late, having received its last major redesign in 1968.

Corvette finally gets a much-needed overhaul come the '83 model year. By then, the Vette, in its present incarnation, will have enjoyed a 15-year lifespan—relatively long by Detroit standards.

The new model, sources say, will be instantly recognizable as a Corvette, with its fiberglass body, swoopy lines, hideaway headlamps and body-colored urethane bumpers.

A hatchback, which is being added to the '81 model, will be carried over to the new car in '83. The current T-top roof may be replaced by a single lift-out roof panel, complemented by a steel targa band.

Overall length will be chopped eight to 10 inches, and curb weight will drop from the present 3,350 pounds to about 2,750 pounds.

Most critical interior dimensions by and large will be nearly identical. But some new goodies will be added to the already plush passenger compartment. Sophisticated bucket seats (perhaps Scheck or Recaro) and digital instrumentation are among the new equipment rumored in '83.

Unlike many of General Motors' future passenger cars, Corvette is to remain a front-engine, rear-drive design. Perhaps the biggest surprise, in the face of GM's switch to V-6 and four-cylinder engines, is that the '83 Vette will keep the big 350-CID V-8.

The small-block Chevy is likely to get throttle-body injection in the new Vette, and may be turbocharged as well.

While performance should be improved in the lighter-weight body shell in '83, fuel economy will be hiked with the addition of a new five-speed overdrive transmission. Chevy is aiming for an EPA city rating of about 20 MPG, compared with 14 MPG on today's model.

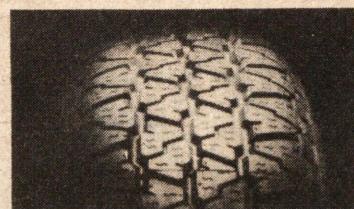
A V-6 may be dropped into the car at a later date, but only the 350 V-8 will be offered in '83, sources say.

Elsewhere, mechanicals will be quite similar on the new car, which probably will still use a single transverse leaf spring in the rear (composite material will replace steel there, however). Four-wheel disc brakes and the usual array of power equipment will be standard.

Good news: GM is switching Corvette production from St. Louis to a new plant in Bowling Green, Ky., in the 1982 model year in order to work the kinks out of the new production facility prior to the introduction of the all-new car in '83. The Bowling Green plant will have 50-percent greater production capacity than St. Louis, which means Corvette buyers may not have to wait as long to take delivery of their new cars.

On the minus side: The Vette's already inflated price of \$13,597 will balloon to close to \$20,000 by the time the '83 model rolls off the assembly line.

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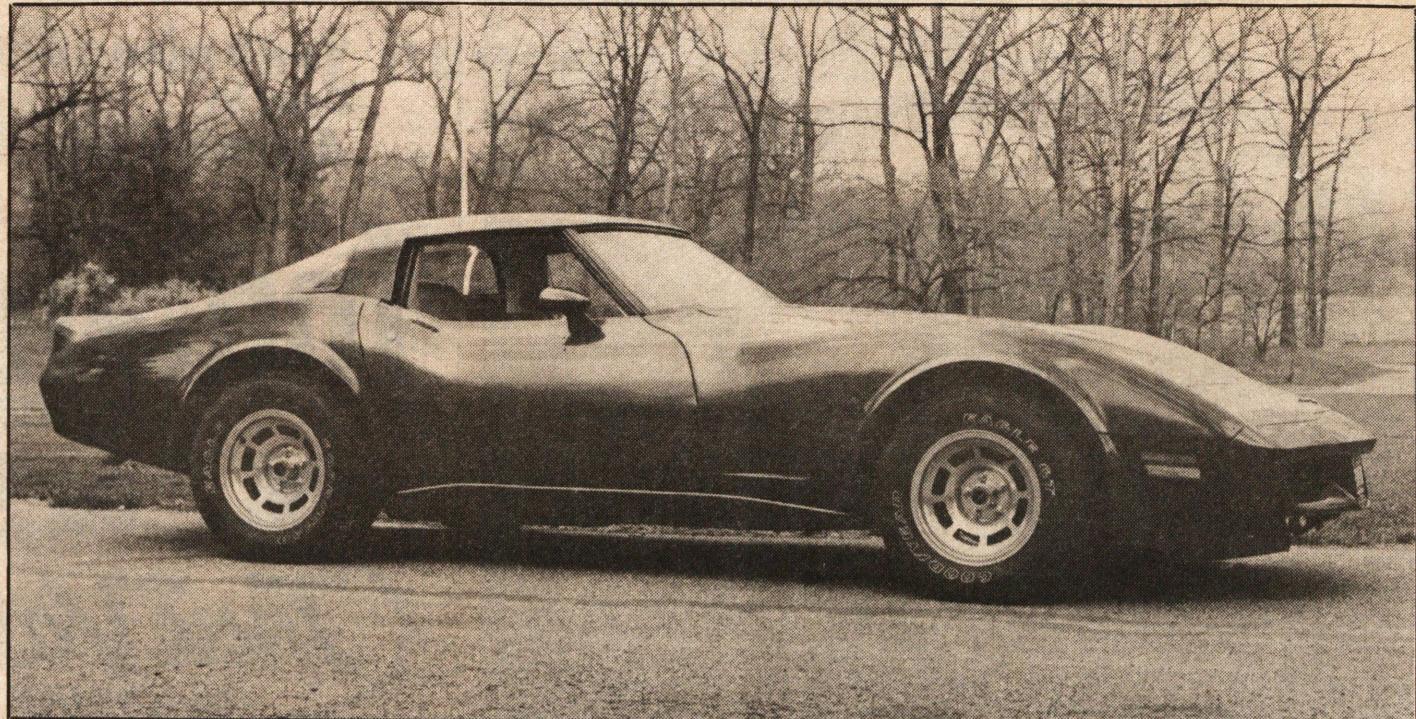
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George Levy photos

Vette: Still America's hottest machine

Continued from Page 10

body ever bought a Corvette for the gas mileage. And if you are really concerned about MPG's, there are five-speed conversions available from independent shops.

The suspension can best be described as capricious. It seems quite up to the task on smooth roads at moderate-to-high speeds, but try to get too cute by going late into a corner and it'll bite you like a mad dog. Also, don't expect a super smooth ride; that aspect of owning a Vette has been preserved from the old days.

The steering is relatively precise, but requires a lot of concentration when pushing the car. The heavy front end produces a natural understeer, but we sensed a certain unpredictability in high stress situations.

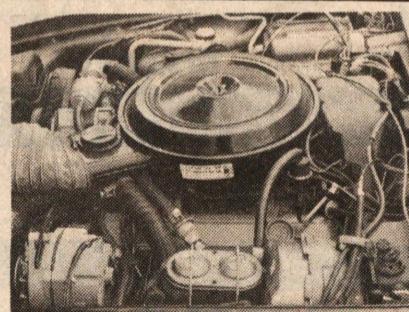
Speaking of steering, you may want to consider having your mechanism

checked to make sure it's up to blueprint specs. Insiders say this has been a constant problem attributable to the line work in St. Louis, and a little attention here will make your machine feel like a race car rack-and-pinion unit.

The optional Goodyear GT radial P/225/60 R15 tires are excellent and a must for this car. Believe us, they'll make you feel a lot more secure on the corners, and we recommend going with a tire that is at least up to these specifications.

The four-wheel ventilated disc brakes are excellent, especially for a car weighing close to 3,300 pounds. They do what they're supposed to although they were a bit grabby and did tend to lock in panic situations at high speeds.

The biggest gripe we had about the car (which is nothing new) is that the



1980 Corvette L48

Body style: Two-door T-top
Base price: \$13,965.24
Price as tested (including options listed): \$15,426.00
Roof carrier—\$125; rear window defogger—\$109; power door locks—\$140; AM/FM cassette tape player—\$168; dual rear speakers—\$31; gymkhana suspension—\$55; Goodyear P255/60 R15 GT radial tires—\$426; aluminum wheels—\$407.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase (in.):	98.0
Length (in.):	185.3
Width (in.):	69.0
Height (in.):	48.1
Front track (in.):	58.7
Rear track (in.):	59.5
Curb weight (lbs.):	3336.0
Seating capacity:	Two
Front seat	
Head room (in.):	36.2
Shoulder room (in.):	47.5
Hip room (in.):	49.9
Leg room (in.):	42.1

POWERTRAIN

Layout: Front engine, rear drive

Engine type: V-8
Displacement (cu. in./liters): 350/5.7
Compression ratio: 8.2:1
Fuel delivery: Carburetor
Net horsepower: 190 at 4,400 RPM
Net torque (lbs. ft.): 280 at 2,400 RPM
Redline: 5,300 RPM
Fuel requirement: Unleaded

Transmission type: Four-speed manual

Gear ratios:

I	2.88:1
II	1.91:1
III	1.33:1
IV	1:1

Final drive ratio: 3.07:1

GENERAL

Suspension:

Front: Independent standard lower arm with coil springs

Rear: Fully independent with fixed differential, transverse multi-leaf springs, lateral struts and U-jointed axle shafts.

Steering:

Overall ratio: 17.6:1
Turns, lock to lock: 2.58

Brakes: Four-wheel ventilated discs

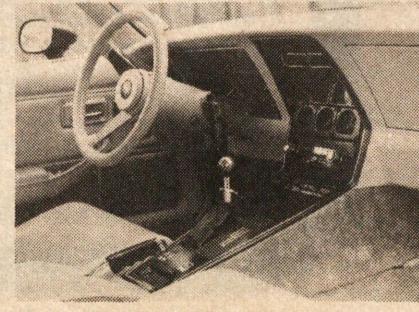
Tires: P255/60 R15 Goodyear GT Radials

Turning circle (ft.): 41.3

Fuel tank (gal.): 24.0

Cargo capacity (cu. ft.): 8.4

EPA, fuel economy rating: 14 city/20 hwy.



thing seems so damn big on the outside for the amount of room on the inside. True, the 1980 model has been trimmed down in weight by a couple of hundred pounds, but it still maintains the same external dimensions and seems huge compared to some of the newer offerings from Detroit these days. It definitely doesn't have the nimbleness of an RX-7 or Porsche 924, but then again we're talking about a 13-year-old design.

Oh, there are a few consolations to modern times such as a built-in burglar alarm that will easily embarrass an unsuspecting friend who borrows your car sometime without knowing how to shut it off. Other goodies include a subtle beeper that goes off when you leave the lights on, an interior light that stays on for a few seconds after you shut the motor off and even a lighted makeup mirror in the visor for primping up before entering the disco.

The interior is typically American—lots of vinyl and vast expanses of plastic-covered gauges. Nothing can be said about the instrument panel that hasn't been said already, and the only really noticeable change in the interior lately has been an increase in seat lumbar support. The adjustable steering wheel is also nice (going in and out as well as up and down) which makes it fairly easy to find a comfortable driving position.

As is usual in Corvettes, it's impossible to see the front nose of the car from the inside, so you'll have to rely on your better judgment when parking the beast.

In keeping with Corvette tradition, the exterior fit and finish of the car are somewhat marginal. The fiberglass work still contains flaws, and many of the pieces don't seem to fit quite as well as they should. Hopefully, the problem of premature paint fade (especially in the nose and tail sections) has been improved somewhat. Still, we found subtle differences in paint shade on our test car. Quality control of this nature always has seemed to be a problem at the St. Louis plant and hopefully this will be solved once production moves to Kentucky, in 1982.

Funny thing about the styling. Despite its age, you still get the feeling that it's a lot newer than 13 years old. And compared to the boxes you see on the freeways these days, the swoopy curves of the Vette look sexier and meaner than ever.

The 1980 Corvette may be an anachronism in this day and age, but it's still the best high-performance car available on the American market and still a bargain in many senses—if you don't mind shelling out for the gas. For those of us who can't afford the gas, we can only wait hopefully for 1983.