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// **FROM CLASSIC TO CUSTOM** //
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HEADS OF THE CLASS

Corvettes have pride of place in Ken Lingenfelter's meticulously curated car collection

| BY GARY WITZENBURG | PHOTOS BY RYAN CYKIERT |

Ken Lingenfelter was just 10 when he saw his first 1963 Corvette split-window coupe. "That hooked me," he says, "put me over the top. Corvette was the thing I was most interested in. Wonderful cars, big bang for the buck, fun to drive, fun to race—they've got it all." He later spent a lot of time finding the best '63 split-window he could for his growing collection.

Like many of us, Lingenfelter has been a passionate car guy almost from birth. As a kid, he could name every car on the road, he had a huge Matchbox car collection and he customized model cars by swapping parts from other kits.

At 22, he founded a real-estate settlement and title-insurance company and started collecting cars as soon as he could afford to. "There was a time when I had to trade one car to get another," he says "But I had to have some of these cars that I had been watching over the years. So I set goals, and when I hit those goals, I rewarded myself with another car. And many times it was a Corvette."

Ken's distant cousin, John Lingenfelter, an NHRA champion drag racer, engineer and tuner, was critically injured in a racing crash in 2002. And when John finally succumbed to those injuries late the following year, Ken stepped in to help run his Lingenfelter Performance Engineering (LPE) company in Decatur, Indiana, which built (mostly GM) high-powered specialty cars.

He had sold his own company that year for a healthy sum, and he ultimately bought LPE outright in 2007.

Ken's collection now numbers some 250 cars, which he characterizes as roughly 30 percent muscle cars, 30 percent exotics and the rest Corvettes. "I don't count them," he says, "because that would remind me how carried away I've gotten. We have 60-plus years of Corvette, and I've appreciated and enjoyed every one. I love them all, and when you think about how many different approaches you can take to Corvette, I'm determined to make sure I end up with the ones I really like." He keeps "just 160 to 180" of his cars on display at his Brighton, Michigan, office facility, he says, "because you have to have room to get around."

The display is not open to the public, but Lingenfelter and wife Kristen host up to 100 charity events there each year. "The mission for the collection has always been charity work," he says. "We do a lot of charity fundraisers and meetings for groups, everything from black-tie to pizza and beer, including our big annual breast-cancer event in October."

What was his first Corvette? "A 1977 350, nothing special." His best Corvette? "The new one I just bought. The C7 is drop-dead gorgeous. We were fortunate to get a very early car, but my engineers got it. I ended up buying four new C7s, and they grabbed each

one to supercharge one, put heads-and-cam on another, a bigger supercharger on another.

"So last year I ordered a new C7 Z06, white with red interior [and] the Z07 package. I got it in November and told my engineers they couldn't have it, that I was going to drive it as my personal car. That worked for a while, but they grabbed it in January, and I just recently got it back. It has a Stage I engine package on it and is making 725 horsepower. It is very fast!"

Not counting those C7s, his favorite Corvette? "That '63 split-window. It's not my favorite to drive, but it's my favorite because of what it meant to me."

Having last published a story on Lingenfelter and LPE in July, 2010, we felt the time was right for a follow-up focusing specifically on his cars. On display during our most recent visit were a stunning array of rare and exotic Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Maseratis; a 1988 Porsche 959; a 1996 Vector M-12; a 2006 Saleen S7; a 2007 Bugatti Veyron; lots of 1960s through current muscle machines (Z28s, Trans Ams, GTOs, 442s, Shelys and more) and several modern LPE creations (including some great-looking Z28 and Trans-Am bodies over modern hardware). Naturally, there were also Corvettes—55 of them by our count. And every one of them has a story. What follows is a list of 10 of our favorites, along with a few details on what makes each of them special. ○

1953 Supercharged

One of two supercharged '53s built by McCulloch Motors, it is also number 24 of just 300 Corvettes sold that year. It features Kelsey Hayes wheels and extra gauges, and it once belonged to (and was restored by) former NCRS president Dave Ferguson.



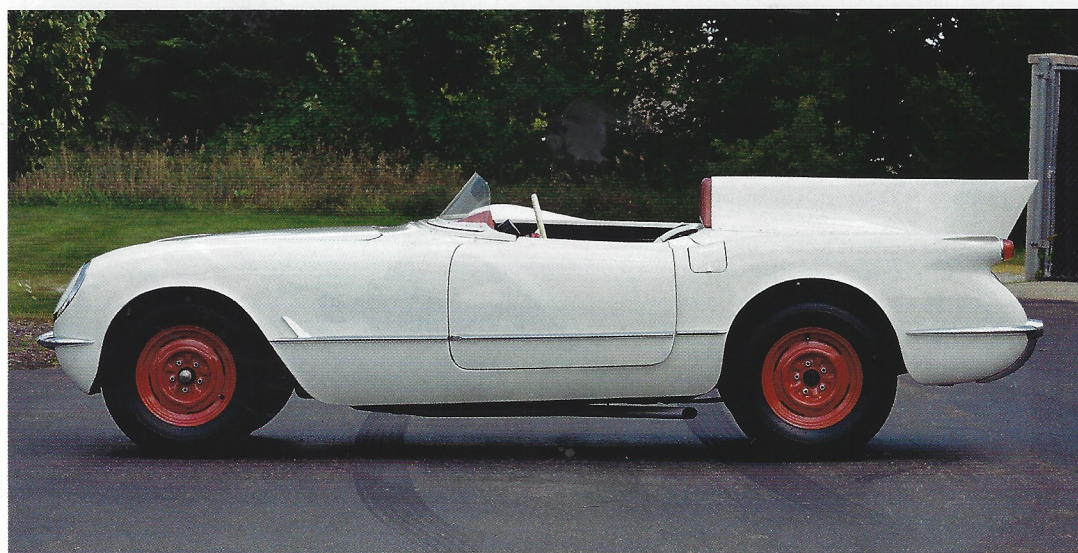
1954 GM Styling Corvette

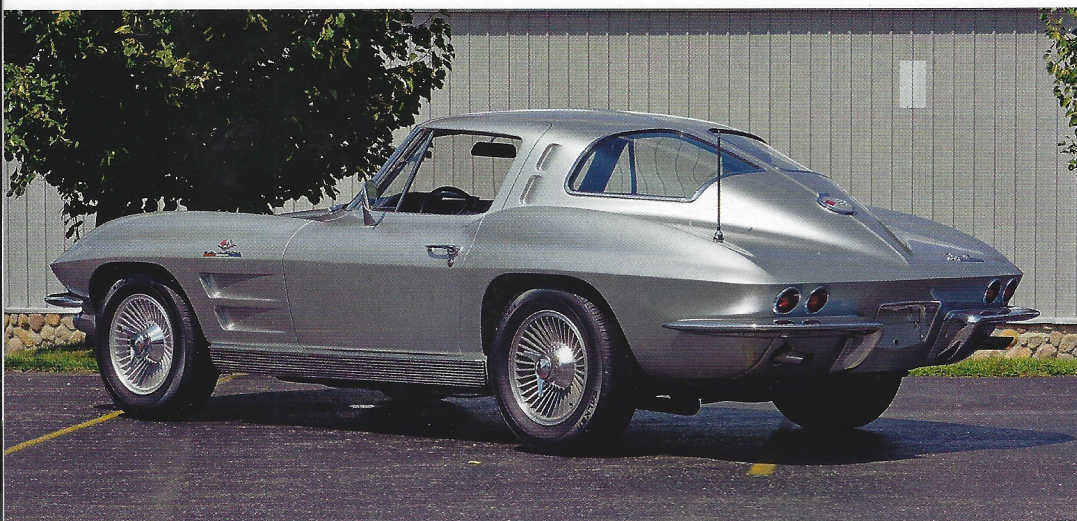
Originally owned by GM employee Roger Crispel, this '54 became a Motorama styling idea car with new upholstery, a modified instrument cluster, a prototype steering wheel, a center armrest storage console, special "shark fin" headlamp fittings and custom Sierra Silver paint.



1954 EX-87 "Duntov Mule"

Chevy engineer Mauri Rose, Jr. installed a prototype 265-ci V-8 in this finned '54, later replacing it with a 307-ci V-8 with a Duntov Cam. Smokey Yunick drove it to a record 163 mph at GM's Mesa, Arizona, Desert Proving Grounds in 1955. It may well have been the first V-8 Corvette.





1963 Split-Window Coupe

"This [model] is my favorite because of what it represents," Lingenfelter says. "It really inspired me and hooked me [on] Corvette. I love the look of it, and I'd jump the fence of the Chevy dealership just to look at it when it first arrived. This one is an unmodified 327/360 Fuelie four-speed with power windows."



1967 427 Sting Ray

The final-year C2 is considered by many enthusiasts to be the most beautiful Corvette ever built. This numbers-matching, 390-hp, four-speed car was previously owned by Nicholas Cage, who had a major restoration performed on it.

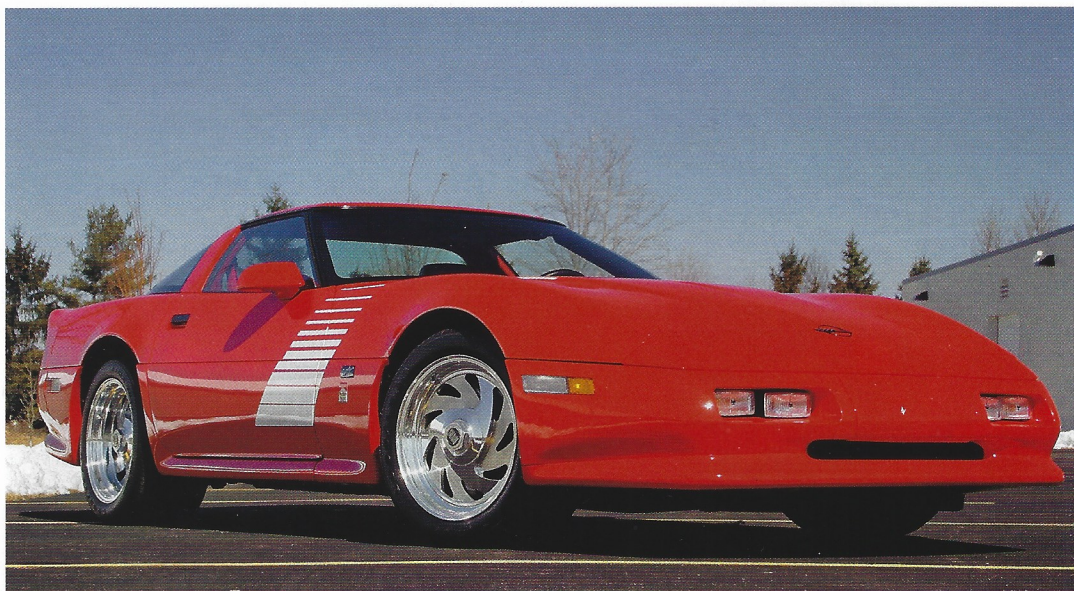


1981 Greenwood GTO

This is one of only two street GTOs built by Corvette racer/builder John Greenwood and his brother, Burt. It's also the only one with a four-speed manual transmission bolted to a 450-hp, turbocharged L82 350. It features Bilstein shocks, BBS wheels and power seats and windows. "I always had a passion for...Greenwood stuff," says Lingenfelter.

1990 Rick Mears Edition ZR-1

This one-off, Larry Shinoda-bodied ZR-1 was built for the Roger Penske/Rick Mears Marlboro Indianapolis 500 team and awarded to Mears when he won the race. The wheels are from aftermarket supplier Boyd Coddington.



1996 Dick Guldstrand GS90 Nassau Roadster

The second of nine GS90s built by Dick Guldstrand and Detleff Stevenson, this car's hand-crafted, carbon-fiber body salutes the legendary '63 Grand Sport racers. It was originally intended to be sold through Chevy dealers, and its supercharged LT1 engine puts out a claimed 420 hp.



2001 LPE Twin-Turbo Wide-Body 427 C5

One of five built by LPE in Decatur, this car's wide-body package includes fixed headlamps and carbon-fiber components. Its twin-turbo, 7.0-liter engine makes 725 hp on 93-octane gas or 900 hp on 100 octane.





2007 Pratt & Miller C6RS

The fourth of nine C6RSs built by Pratt & Miller, this car's carbon-fiber body is 1.6 inches wider than that of a C6 Z06. Powered by a 600-hp, 8.2-liter, billet-aluminum V-8, it's good for 3.5-second 0-60 runs and a 202-mph top speed.

Walking with Ken

THOUGH WE DON'T HAVE THE SPACE to highlight the remaining 45 Vettes in the collection, we wanted to include some of the many insights, observations and recollections Lingenfelter shared as we strolled through the aisles of the Brighton storage facility. It's clear from the detailed information he provided that his interest in these cars, and the heritage they represent, runs deep.

"This is the car we raced the Blue Angels with for *Motor Trend* TV. We beat them in the quarter mile, but obviously they caught us later on.

"This is a C6 Corvette re-bodied like a '67 with our 660 engine. [It's built] off the Z06, but it can also be built off a base Corvette. It marries the C6 interior, chassis and drivetrain to the '67 look. Or we can have it built to look like a '63 split-window.

"This is a true original '61. Corvettes were owned by jet pilots and astronauts, and the guy who owned this one was a Northrop test pilot.

"This Eckler Eagle is one of five...so ugly it's cool. It's got the Eckler fastback and a Granatelli motor.

"These are Callaway cars. Reeves and I are good friends, and

we...built this supercharged '08 C16 Speedster together to unveil at Pebble Beach.

"These are one-off Lingenfelters, a lot of them [built] on C4 Corvettes and ZR1s. This ZR-1 is a unique wide-body. That '06 is a commemorative car that represents the total essence of everything my company has done to this point, including a 427 twin-turbo. Pretty amazing car.

"This was our first C7, a beautiful Cyber Gray. That blue C7 Z06 has a big Edelbrock blower on it, making 850 hp.

"This yellow one is my wife's C7 Z06. She's having a lot of fun with it and has already tracked it three times at Gingerman Raceway. That 2012 Grand Sport is Kristen's prior car, with a Magnuson Heartbeat supercharger. Not sure how much

power it's making, but we could have turned it up to 900 without much trouble.

"The thing about Corvettes that is so cool," Lingenfelter adds with a grin, "is that there is so much you can do to individualize them: wheel-and-tire combinations, paint, engine, transmission, autocross, road or drag racing. They are amazing cars that you can do a lot of things with."

