

Corvette: An Italian Connection

By Paul Pollock

Publisher, [The Corvette Story](#)

Most car enthusiasts will tell you that Italy and the Corvette have nothing in common. That is not true as their paths have crossed often through the years.

The earliest example of the Italian / Corvette fusion originated with Bill Mitchell's (GM Vice President and head of Design Staff from 1958-76) 1957 visit to the Turin Salon automobile show. Bill was fascinated by a series of Fiat / Abarth / Pininfarina racing cars. They were designed for top speed runs, so aerodynamics was crucial. The approach was to make the cars as low as possible; so low that vertical blips over the tires was necessary.



The Pininfarina race car inspired Bill to build the 1959 Sting Ray Racer below. The iconic '59 Sting Ray would form the basis of the C3 Corvette.





Above: 1952 Alfa Romeo Disco Volante, which Bill Mitchell also admired. Notice the belt line around the entire car separating the lower and upper halves which would become an important styling element of the 1959 Sting Ray Racer and the C2 Corvette.

/*****/

1959 Chevrolet Scaglietti Corvette



Another example of the Italian – Corvette merging is the 1959 Chevrolet Scaglietti Corvette. It was the result of the efforts of Gary Laughlin (a Texas car dealer) and racers Jim Hall and Carroll Shelby. The plan was to build a series of high performance cars with Corvette chassis and drivetrains to compete with Ferrari.

The plan was doomed from the start as Sergio Scaglietti, the coachbuilder for the project, had Ferrari as an influential customer. Mr. Ferrari, it is said, was "not pleased" and the effort was limited to three cars. It also did not help that GM management did not approve, as racing and high performance cars had become a corporate no-no.



Two of them were equipped with Powerglide transmissions and dual carbureted engines. A third was a fuel injected four-speed.

More about the 1959 Chevrolet Scaglietti Corvette [here](#).

/*****/

1961 Chevrolet Corvette Vignale Coupe



The Italians are known for creating some great looking cars and a good example is this Vignale Coupe. It was designed by Gordon Kelly, who worked for the Brooks Stevens design firm. It was built by Vignale for the 1961 Paris Salon de l'Automobile.



Note the eggcrate grill on the Vignale Coupe. This was a common item on Italian cars of the '60s and '70s, although the Vignale went further than most with an aggressive convex approach. The Corvette shared the same style (below) starting in 1970 with the C3.



The interior door panel is an odd place to place an identification emblem, but Italians are famous for doing things differently.



Power came from a fuel-injected powerplant.



Etceterini

There is a special form of Italian cars known as "Etceterini". The term refers to a collection of lesser known manufacturers that built limited numbers of cars, mostly in the 1960s, such as Bizzarrini, Iso Grifo and Iso Rivolta. Corvette motors were often the engine of choice, as they were compact, comparatively affordable, and well supported.



The Bizzarrini 5300 GT Strada came with a 327 fuel-injected Corvette engine. A total of 133 examples were produced from 1965 through 1968.



Racing Bizzarrinis were successful in the 1960s and featured Corvette powerplants with aggressive Weber carburetion.



Corvette engine as installed in an Iso Grifo. The major Italian automakers (Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati, etc.) had their own engine programs. They produced good power but were complicated, expensive and offered limited support. The minor players, such as Bizzarrini, often went for Corvette power. The cost was reasonable and the compact design – in part the result of a single camshaft located in the block as opposed to multiple overhead camshafts – enabled low hoods and cowls, resulting in that racy Italian look.

/*****/

Corvette Moray



Possibly the most interesting car in the Corvette / Italy discussion would be the Corvette Moray. It is the work of Italian automobile designers Giorgetto and Fabrizio Giugiaro, and was built to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Corvette. It first appeared at the Geneva Motor Show on March 4, 2003.



More Corvette design cues: The silhouette has much in common with the C5 Corvette of which the Moray is based on. There are also the four semi-vertical slats, a nod to the 1967 Corvette.

The Moray answers the question: "What would an Italian Corvette look like?" Although the point could also be made that it is a question nobody asked.



The most interesting aspect of the Moray is that although it is clearly an original design, it still looks like a Corvette, which was the designer's intention. This is very evident with the rear view (above) with the four round taillights and the "Corvette" script. There is even a "Split Window" effect reminiscent of the 1963 Corvette Coupe.



The interior continues the Corvette heritage. Note the "dual cockpit" motif similar to what can be found in the C2 and C5 Corvettes. Side view mirror function is accomplished by small video cameras connected to displays on either side of the steering column. Bright areas are polished aluminum.

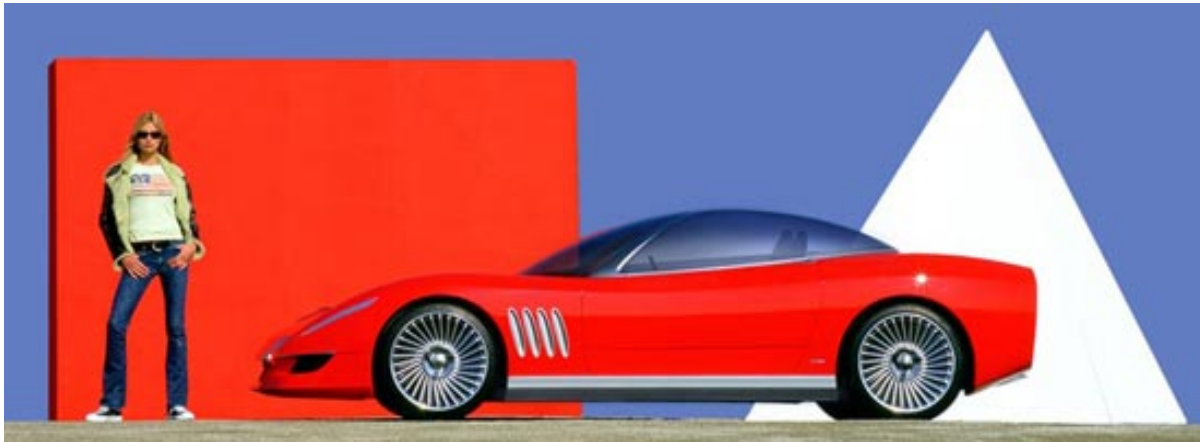




The door is mostly conventional save for the window / roof which rises like a bird's wing. Not practical for rainy days!



Sharp fender creases are similar to the C2 and C3 Corvette.



Unlike many custom show cars of which only one are made, (hence the "one-off" moniker), two Corvette Morays were produced, the second featuring red livery.



Maybe we have something new: the "two-off"?



/*****/

C7 Corvette: Italian Influences

While still distinctly American, there are strong hints of Italian influences in the new Corvette. This is a good thing, since when it comes to making great looking automobiles, Italy has always been able to show the world how it is done.



An example: The Ferrari F12berlinetta, above and the 2014 Corvette below. The headlights and hood area, while far from being identical, do have similarities. Note the air egress vents with the C7 being more angular. There is also the hood creases that end at the base of the A-pillar, which, in addition to looking good, are dictated by the laws of aerodynamics.





A side view: Above is the Ferrari 599 GTO and below is the C7 Corvette. The creases and accents are similar but somehow the Corvette has the advantage with its simple, cleaner lines. It is a great day when you can place a Corvette next to a Ferrari and decide that the Corvette is what you prefer to look at.



The Italian aspect of the C7 is not denied by those who created it. Tom Peters, the director of design for General Motors performance and top dawg regarding the shape of the C6 and C7 Corvettes* admitted to us that this is more than just conspiracy theorists blowing steam. He pointed out that GM and much of the American car industry has long looked towards Italy for design inspiration although it is not always obvious.

*also the Pontiac Aztec, but don't hold that against him.