

1968: A Different Corvette

By Paul Pollock

Corvettes are different. To start with they are made of plastic / fiberglass. While there are a fair number of cars that have featured fiberglass bodies, none have the over 60-year tradition of the Corvette.

Many people will not buy the first model year of a car, not wanting to take the risk that the bugs haven't been worked out. The 1968 Corvette is pointed out as justification for the theory.

To start with, the 1968 Corvette is not a Stingray or even a Sting Ray. This is a common point of confusion amongst the car enthusiast public as the 1963 thru '67 were Sting Rays and 1969 thru 1976 were Stingrays. Why 1968 was passed over is unknown.



Note the "Stingray" emblem on the 1969 Corvette which is missing on the 1968 (left). This is the most obvious indication of a 1968 model year.



The other area that makes the '68 "different" is the exterior door opening method. The 1968 had a push button mechanism (right). All other C3 years had the hand latch performing double duty of opening the door and providing a door pull. The 1968 push button was an ergonomic disaster as it required – unless you liked being a contortionist – a different hand depending on whether you were opening the passenger or driver's door.



Another ergonomic problem with the 1968 Corvette involved the door panels that intruded into the interior. The problem was severe and especially uncomfortable for broad shouldered occupants. It was fixed in 1969 (below) reportedly at a considerable cost to GM.



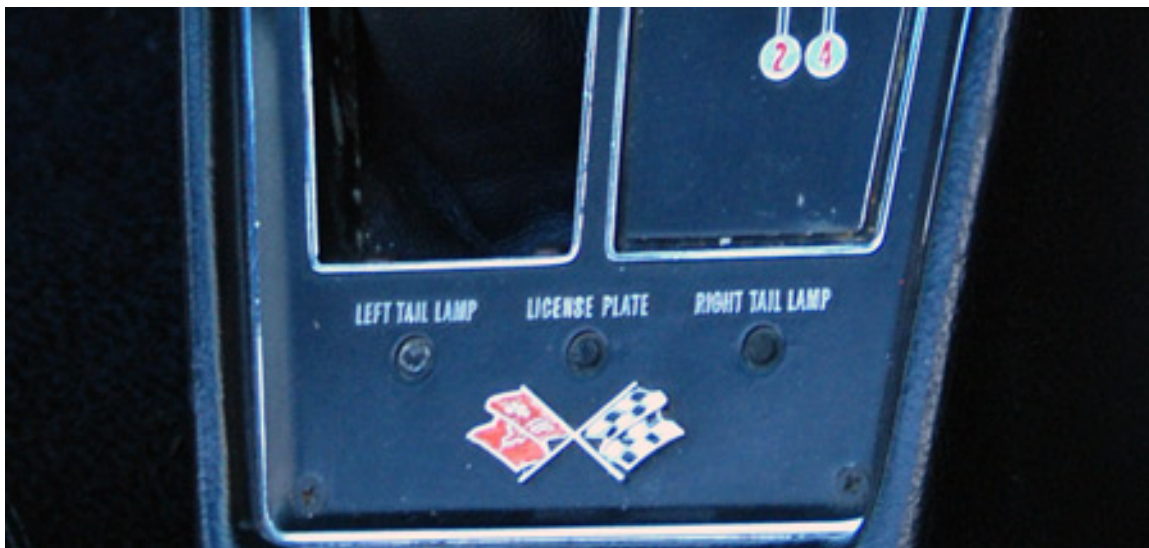
Compounding the problem of the wide door panel was the 16-inch diameter steering wheel, also exclusive for 1968. The driver's knuckles would constantly rub against the door panel while turning during parking maneuvers. The problem was solved in 1969 with a one-inch smaller 15-inch wheel.

The multitude of ills that plagued the 1968 model year is cited as reason to not buy the first production year of a car until the bugs have been worked out. For current owners of 1968 Corvettes the “ills” are something of a badge of honor; Corvettes are different and 1968 Corvettes are very different.

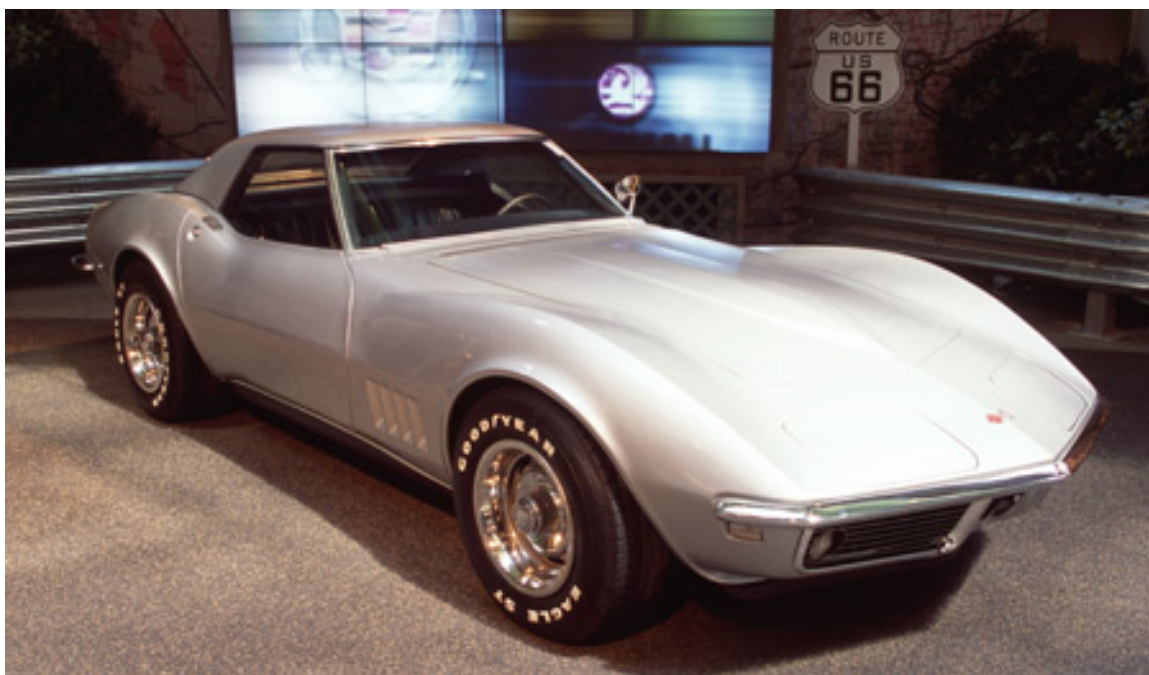


The seats also changed in that 1968 was the last year they were available without headrests (above, left). Headrests were first available in a Corvette in 1966; 1,033 (3.73%) were equipped at a cost of \$42.15. The numbers went up until 1968, when the RPO A82 option was on 3,197 (11.19%). They were an option in 1969, but since they were required by federal law, 100% of the Corvettes were so equipped.





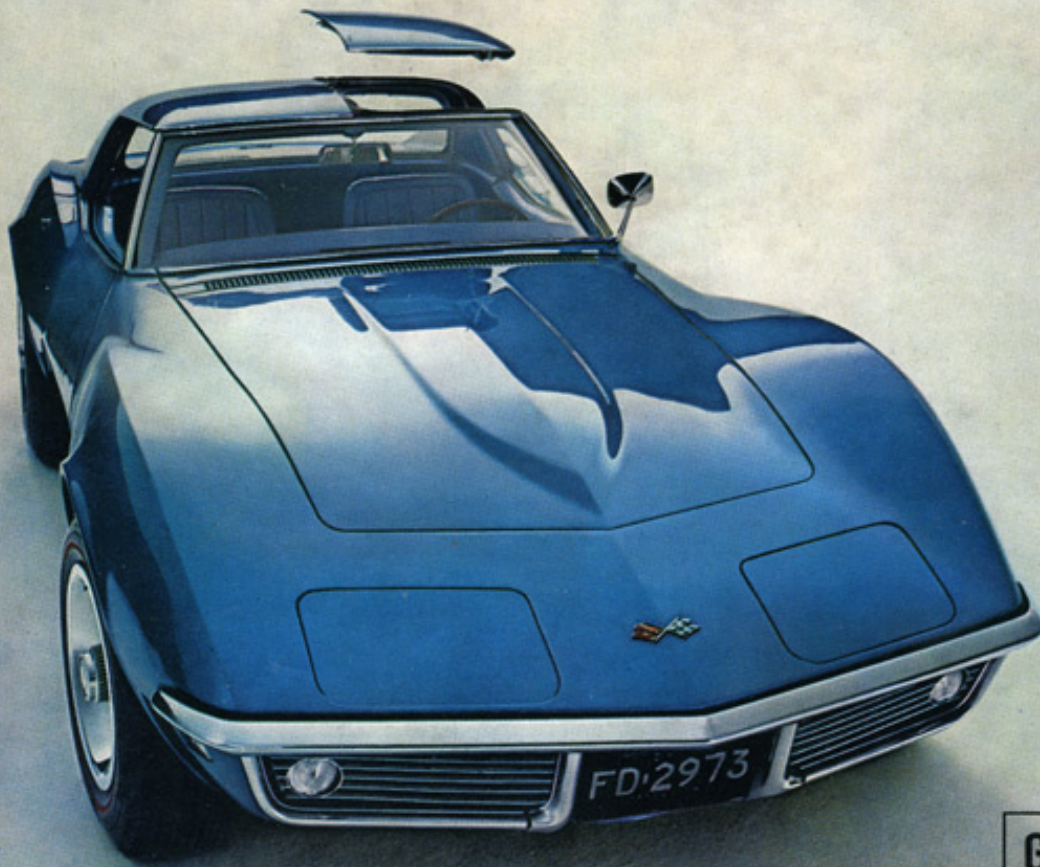
The center console is also unique to the 1968 (above). Below the fiber optic lamps and the shifter / shift plate is a crossed flags emblem. For 1969 and later Corvettes, an engine specifications plate was included.



The Oh-My-Heavens one. You release a few latches and those panels in the roof are ready for lift off. You release a few more and the rear window's ready for lift off. You flip the key in the ignition and you . . . and you . . . say, you're not listening. Hello, do you read us? What's the use. You're in a world all your own. **Corvette** Like a car, only better.



10 seconds to lift off.



Sports Class winner of the Motor Trend 1968 Achievement Award, for which we thank them.

1968 was the first year for the much-admired T-Top Corvette.

Did you expect anything less from The Leader?



Anything less than an astonishingly beautiful sports car seven inches longer and nearly two inches lower, with windshield wipers concealed by a power-operated cowl, rear deck spoiler and high-backed bucket seats. Anything less than Astro Ventilation, a new air-intake and pressure-relief system.

Anything less than four-wheel disc brakes and fully independent suspension.

Anything less than V8s you order up to 435 hp. Anything less than new security features like side marker lights and many more.

The '68 Corvette Sting Ray.

What else would you expect from Chevrolet?

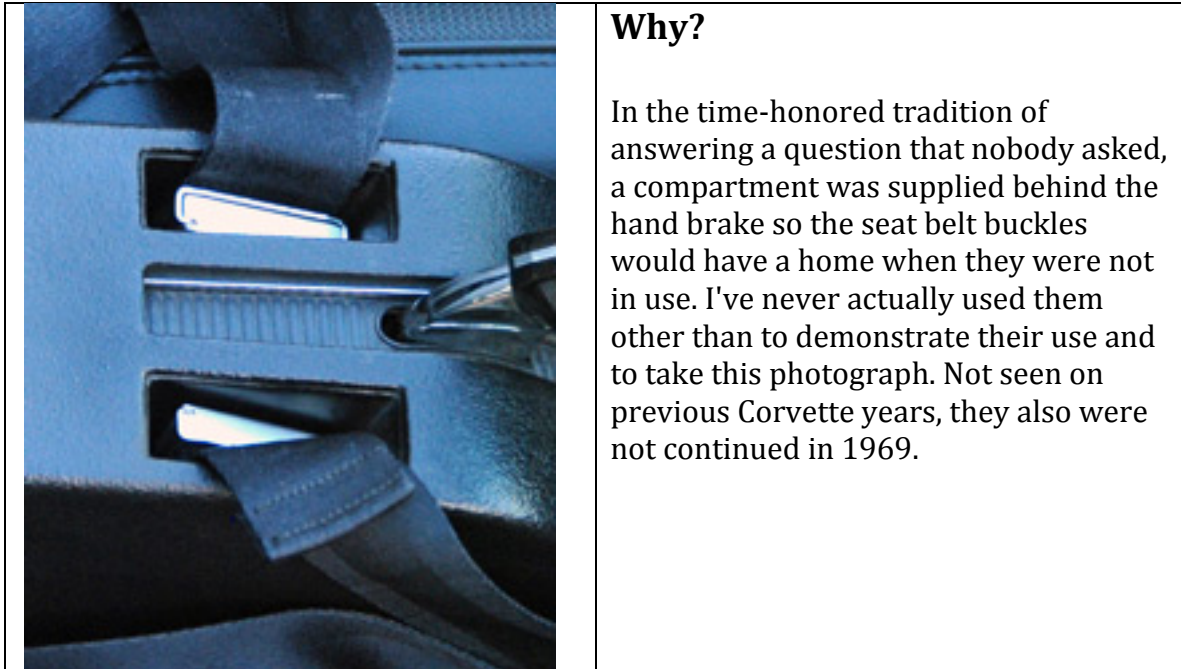


'68 Corvette

Above: Magazine ad for the 1968 Corvette. Notice the second to the last line – “The '68 Corvette Sting Ray.” Only problem is that the '68 Corvette was not a Sting Ray!

Check out the [options page for the 1968 Corvette](#) and you will notice that 65% of the 1968s sold were convertibles. This compares with 43% for 1969 and 38% in 1970. This is not because convertibles were super popular for 1968. When the new generation 1968 C3 was introduced in September 1967, only convertibles were available.

The coupe was originally to be a full targa style roof, similar to what was used in the C4. The body style suffered from tensional stability problems - the roof could not be removed or installed unless the Corvette was on a flat surface. This meant that the first 10,000 1968 Corvettes were all convertibles. A panicked effort resulted in the T-Top design and its production started in January 1968. The situation was a problem for the convertible's top supplier who was initially told that 60 units a day would work but then had to produce twice that. Compounding the situation was that if a customer liked and wanted the new body style of the C3, their only choice was the ragtop.



Left: The dash mounted ignition switch was last seen on 1968 Corvettes. Federal anti-theft rules caused it to be moved to the steering column (right) starting in 1969. During those years, Corvettes were a prime target for car thieves, so there was justification behind the move. Still, from the point of view of this 1968 owner, the early dash mounted ignition switch gave it a certain "character".



An individual backup light is also exclusive to the '68. The numerous "1968 only" items can cause a parts sourcing problem when compared to the other C3 years.



You can add wheels to the list of exclusive 1968 items. For the C2 generation, six-inch width wheels were offered. 1968 (and only 1968) featured seven-inch wheels. The subsequent C3 years were equipped with eight inch wheels.



Above: 1968 Corvette (and only 1968 – again!) passengers had a blank view of the dash. They also had minimal storage area and what storage was available – it was behind the seats - had poor access.



1969 and later 'vettes had some pockets for maps (remember them?) and other items. Not everybody felt this was an improvement. Some thought that it looked bad when items were stashed. Another drawback: They would sag following frequent use.

