

# 1959 Sting Ray Racer

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Publisher, [The Corvette Story](#)

What would the most awesome Corvette be? As cool as it might be, answering "Mine!" is not the correct answer. That said, opinions will vary and it all makes for fascinating conversation at any Corvette gathering.

For me, the "Most Awesome Corvette" award would go to the 1959 Sting Ray Racer.



The 1959 Sting Ray Racer was Bill Mitchell's (GM Vice President and head of Design Staff from 1958 to 1976) brainchild. In 1957 the AMA (Automobile Manufacturer's Association) instituted a ban on everything related to "performance" which included all competition activities and extended to advertising in which all references to power or speed were forbidden. To get around the ban, Bill purchased a mule (industry term for a prototype used for testing and development) chassis for \$500.00 and proceeded with a private racing endeavor.



During a 1957 visit to the Turin Auto Show, his keen eye was drawn to a low, aggressively streamlined form draped over a miniature racing car. It had a very low wind cheating shape with four distinctive blips above each wheel which allowed the rest of the body surface to be very low.



*Bill Mitchell with his 1959 Sting Ray Racer. As was his usual practice, Bill drove it as a daily driver on occasion.*



*1959 Sting Ray Racer at Elkhart Lake racetrack, June 1959. Photo: GM Archive*



*Early prototype rendition of the 1959 Sting Ray Racer.*

The wheelbase for the Sting Ray Racer was 92 inches, 10 inches shorter than the standard 1959 Corvette. Overall body length was 175 inches, only a bit shorter than the 177.5 inch '59 Corvette. Weight was around 2,100 lbs., about 1,000 lbs. less than the Corvette. The frame was not related to the stock Corvette and consisted of steel tubing. The front suspension was a short / long arm and the rear was a deDion design. The differential was a quick change Halibrand unit. Originally the braking was via finned drums which proved themselves a serious competition disadvantage. Four wheel disk brakes were



eventually fitted. The suspension featured coil springs on all four corners.



*1959 Sting Ray Racer on display at the Petersen Museum's Exquisite 'Precious Metal' Exhibit.*



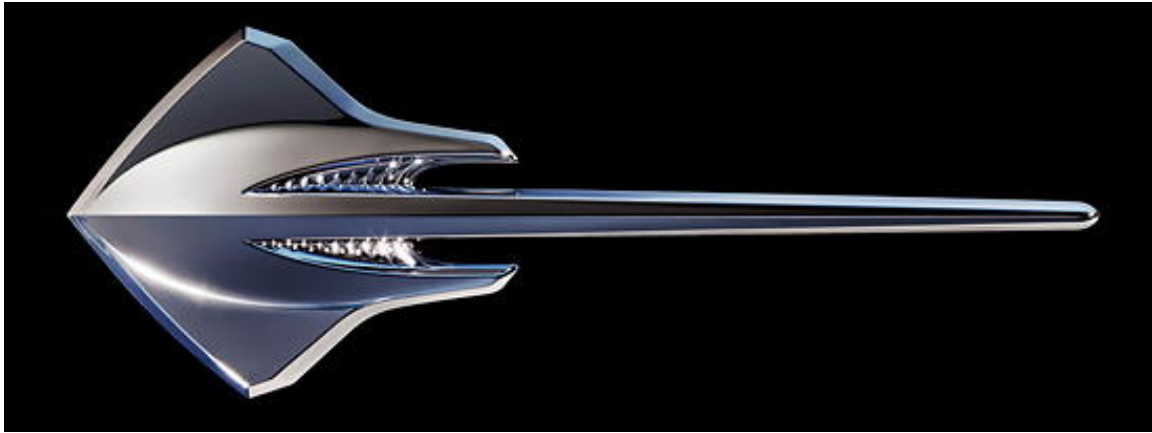
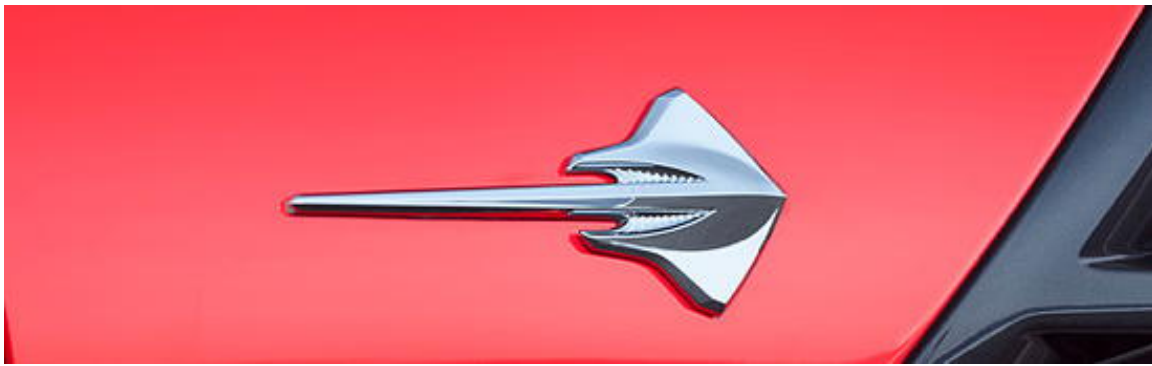
Archival photographs from "back in the day" are courtesy of the Chuck Jordan Archives. The Sting Ray Racer evolved constantly during its early career, first painted red and then silver. Engines and chassis items (such as brakes) also changed.



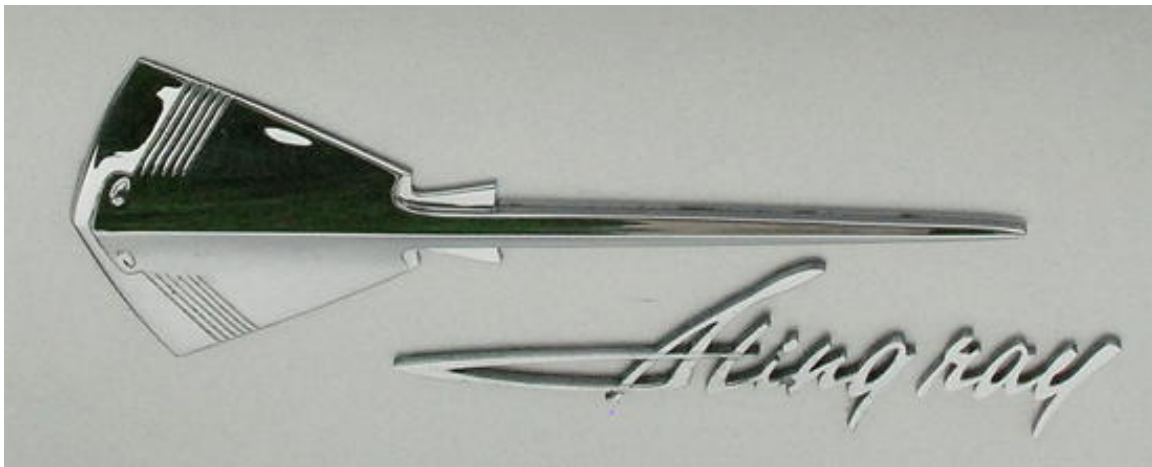
Above and next page: there is no shortage of detail beauty on the 1959 Sting Ray Racer.



Adding to the long list of visual delights on the Sting Ray Racer: The side pipes.



Fans of the Corvette C7 Stingray (aren't we all?) have admired the Stingray emblem and "Stingray" nomenclature.







When owned by Bill Mitchell, the 1959 Sting Ray Racer did not carry any Corvette identification. GM eventually purchased it from Mr. Mitchell; it then achieved Corvette identity and badging.



The 1959 Sting Ray Racer also provided a glimpse into the future as it was the styling basis for the C2 (1963 thru 1967) Corvette.

