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SHARK ATTACK

Riding the Next Investment Wave to Hit the Corvette Scene



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Imagine knocking back a cool bottle of Coca-Cola in 1968 and then being the first to see the curvaceous fenders, slim waist and sumptuous hips of '68 Corvette Stingray. You'd make the same mental connection to that shape in your hand. But the "Coke Bottle" Corvettes actually took their looks from the menacing lines of the fiercest predator ever to roam the deep blue, not a glass soda-pop container.

The nose and lower air dam look like they are ready to eat up the road, and the side coves, like gills that keep the monster breathing—as long he keeps moving. From the driver's seat, the sharp fender peaks must look like twin dorsal fins cutting an ominous course through an ocean of asphalt.

There are sharks in the Corvette gene pool and that's a good thing—a very good thing.

The whole Shark Era has been dubbed the "sleeper years" by Corvette collectors because they tend to focus mostly on the '63 to '67 mid-year cars. But as the Baby-Boom Generation looks back to its youth, the new skin for '68 is what they remember most. From 1968 to 1982 the Corvette held the same basic body shape with variations to the nose, tail sections, and side coves. The engine options in certain years are what make the cars really interesting. These engine variations are rarer than even the vaunted '67 427 Tri-Powered roadster.

So here's the bottom line: Mid-year

cars were the investment darlings of the Corvette world five to ten years ago, and they will continue incremental increases over the next ten.

Sharks, on the other hand, are largely undervalued and primed to double and even triple in value over the next ten years. Before we get into the specific sub-models that show the most promise, here are a few general buying guidelines to help you avoid making a pricey purchase mistake.

Documentation is a huge paperwork issue with Corvettes. When you are looking for an investment piece, if you can't prove that the car is genuine with good documentation, then it really doesn't matter how original, how nice, or how drivable the car is.

The basic "must have" documents



From 1968 to 1972 the Corvette held the same basic body shape with variations to the nose, tail sections, and side covers. The engine options in certain years are what make the cars really interesting.



ABOVE: Shown here together, for what it believed the first time, are a 1971 T-top LS5 Roadster and a 1971 LS5 convertible. These cars embody the big-brother shark era.



on the big-dollar Corvettes start with the Tank Sticker showing the engine option. Be very careful, you must document that this tank sticker came off this car, because unlike the typical build sheet, the VIN is not printed on the tank sticker.

Noted Corvette restorer, Al Wagner of An American Classic, recommends photographing the entire process of recovering the tank sticker from start to finish. Be careful to take shots of the gas tank with the sticker still adhered to it before you remove it. Affidavits with multiple credible witnesses, such as your friendly neighborhood NCRS Judge or the like, are good ways to ensure to retain unimpeachable proof that your high-value Corvette is precisely that—the

genuine article.

On shark bodies built in 1972 and later, though, the engine code is in the VIN, so the tank sticker is less of an issue, but still desirable. Additional documentation (personal contact information of previous owners, vintage photos, mileage logs, and oil-change history) all help bolster a pedigree. Copies of copies of old titles are an invaluable tool for proving chain of ownership and substantiating the odometer reading. Since the inception of the Patriot Act, however, you may no longer be able to get old titles from other states. So if you have a car with complete title history, it is even more valuable.

Now that you've established that the Corvette that you are looking at

has a good history, the next thing to consider is originality and condition. When looking at a restored Shark, Al offers some sage advice. (He should know, since he has restored multiple Triple Crown winning Shark bodies like the ones shown here.)

"A buyer is better off to find a car that is untouched rather than cars that have been altered over the years," he points out. "We have learned so much in the past few years from organizations like NCRS and Bloomington Gold that buying an older restoration is likely the start of a long and costly NOS parts hunt. When searching for a core to restore, condition matters less. The more original and untouched the car, the better the end result will be."



Like most every car built, the Mako Shark inspired body had some teething pains the first year out. The trick is to save yourself costly repair work by knowing what to watch out for and ask the seller what has already been addressed. Some engineering oversights were never corrected.

For instance, the steel-reinforcement bonding bar that joins the fiberglass nose to the rest of the body is fastened with aluminum rivets. The mixed metals cause a galvanic reaction, which make the rivets blister in the nose, looking much like a nail-pop in drywall. Some restoration guys drill the rivets and use body adhesive, but this gives over time. The correct way to restore them is to drill each aluminum rivet out and replace them with steel rivets like the factory was supposed to use from the get-go.

In addition, the radiator-support hoop has a channel on the bottom that collects water if the car has been stored outside for any length of time. When this happens the hoop usually rots out and has to be replaced. Reproductions are of decent quality, and if the swap was done correctly, it doesn't really affect the value.

Water also loves to travel down the stainless-steel rain channel, pooling in the A-pillar, eventually rotting it out. If you look into the window around the VIN plate and detect any pinholes or surface rust, these symptoms are a good indicator that the A-pillar may be rotted. Look closely because the repair requires taking the car down to the bare birdcage and reconstructing the pillar. This procedure is both time-consuming and costly.

Another body-fit woe can be found along the rear quarters. Bonding-strip cracks in the rear quarters are commonplace. This problem was so bad even when the cars were new that GM stopped making Corvettes in Tuxedo Black after 1968. From 1970 to 1976 you could order a Corvette in any color as long as it wasn't black. You could do it yourself and order a car with paint code "SPEC." What you got was a Corvette finished in factory primer. A few people did just that, creating a collector's oddity today. For Corvette, black wasn't back until 1977.

In addition, fiber-optic technology was in its infancy during the Sixties and Seventies, but forward-thinking GM used it for dash-indicator lights. When the fiber optics stop working they are difficult to restore, as Al Wagner notes:

"To salvage the original harness, I have to use a 'Ma Bell' phone guy who knows how to splice a fiber-optic cable," he laughs. "The worst thing is to find a car where someone just clipped the entire fiber-optic harness instead of fixing it. Then, you have to splice the whole harness if you don't want to buy a whole reproduction harness."

As with many cars from the muscle-car era, in-dash clocks from 1968 to 1972 are rare to find running; even repaired, a Corvette clock may only run for another month or two.

The vacuum system responsible for operating this model's coolest gadgets is also prone to failure. Navigating the highway of hoses that runs the headlight and wiper door can be more frustrating than a morning spent on the freeway during rush hour. It is a true discovery to find a system that is untouched and fully operational.

The most desirable Corvettes have always had multi-carburetor set-ups. Unfortunately, Tri-Power models were notoriously hard to tune. Most original owners promptly removed them in favor of a single four-barrel so the car



ould be driven daily. So, it is not unusual for the original carbs to be long gone. They are difficult and expensive to replace.

Be sure to check the dates on the carbs, even if the Tri-Power is intact. They could have been swapped out for over-the-counter replacement parts that aren't date-code correct. If the car has a single four-barrel setup and the seller swears it's a real Tri-Power car, check the tach. A Tri-Power equipped, solid-lifter car has a redline of 6500 rpm redline, versus 5000 rpm for hydraulic-cammed, 390hp four-barrel cars.

Given these caveats and cautions, here are some sharks to keep an eye on:

1968 to 1969 L88 Corvettes

These cars were available for "off-road use only." The monstrous RPO L88, 12.5:1 compression-ratio, 427 made a whopping 430hp and 485 lb/ft of torque. All L88 Corvettes came equipped with a special label that read, "WARNING: Vehicle must operate on fuel having a minimum of 103 research octane and 95 motor octane or engine damage may result." This emblem was mounted in the interior of the car behind the transmission shift stick.

Only 80 Corvettes were optioned with the L88 in 1968 and a mere 116 in 1969, representing an average .0029 percent of total production. When you checked the L88 option box, you also opted-in for the F41 Special Front and Rear Suspension, J50 Vacuum Power Brakes, J56 Special Heavy Duty Brakes, G81 Positraction Rear Axle, K06 Transistor Ignition, and the M22 Heavy Duty, close ratio, four-speed manual trans. Each L88 had a heater delete, custom brand tubular headers and body fender flairs were available for purchase from the factory but not installed. All the ingredients are there: a big-dog motor and low production, which translates to big money.

1969 L89 427/435hp

This year was an all-out arms race and Corvette came loaded for bear, offering four big-block options. The L89 took an already potent L71 package and shaved weight by swapping in aluminum heads. This was the big Kahuna for the street-driving crowd. The significant difference between this mill and the L88 racing animal was a pump-gas friendly 11:1 compression ratio. And it came with a heater. This Tri-Powered big block was available with side pipes, and every single one of them came with an attitude. Only 390 Corvettes were blessed to be L89s in '69, and even fewer combined gobbs of horsepower with top-down trouble making.

1971 LS6 454 aluminum block

If the L89 427 wasn't trouble enough, GM operated from a "more is more" principle in 1971. This one-year-only, aluminum-head LS6 454 was a very brutal engine by any estimation (which the factory grossly underestimated to make 429 hp). Of 188 made, only about 68 are left known to exist, and in convertibles only 25 were made.

1970 to 1972 LT1

These models represent the forefathers of the modern high-output small-block V8 that American muscle thrives on today. During her debut, the '70 LT1 belted out an





PRO TEAM'S '70 T-TOP

Here's a quinquennial time-capsule '70 T-Top with only—get this—146 miles on the odometer. This LT1-powered Vette has been sequestered in a private museum since leaving the dealer's showroom some 38 years ago, and now is under the watchful eye of ProTeam Corvette Sales. When new, the '70 LT1 belted out 370 horses, only 20 hp less than her big-block big brother, but the car was a whole lot lighter. The end result was a tossable, kick-in-the-pants sports car that Corvettes guys had been craving.

unheard of 370 hp, only 20 hp less than her big-block big brother, but a whole lot lighter. The end result was a tossable, kick-in-the-pants sports car that Corvettes guys had been craving. For the first two years you couldn't stay cool while you looked cool, because A/C wasn't an option for the high-revving mill. By 1972, the output had been dialed back a bit to 295 hp and could run the cold air compressor. For LT1 fans, a '72 roadster with air is the cream of the crop. And rarified air it is with about only 30 produced.

1974 LS4 454 Convertible

Even though this model made a modest 270 hp, she was the last of the big-block roadsters. This was also the last year for exhaust to run free from catalytic converters. '74 also shed the rear chrome bumper, replacing it with an aluminum bar under a urethane cover. A tad over 10 percent of total production was 454 powered in '74, less than 600 were estimated to be roadsters.

1975 L82 4spd Convertible

This one is another celebration of "lasts," being the finale for convertible Corvettes for more than a decade, until a drop-top was reintroduced in 1986 as an Indy Pace Car. Only 4,629 people opted for an open-top experience. The L82 made a modest 205 hp in 1975. The venerable M21 Close Ratio Transmission could only be had with an L82. A mere 1,057 opted to stir their own cocktail open-top or coupe. Most folks prefer the one-piece rear bumper compared to the two-part setup that put a seam right down the backside of the '74.

1978 Silver Anniversary Edition, L82 4spd

Chevrolet celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Corvette with a special Silver Anniversary Corvette that featured a special two-tone silver paint job, consisting of light silver on the top half and a darker silver on the lower half. They didn't limit production on the Silver Anniversary Edition, and most found it more attractive than the Black over Silver treatment used in the Indy 500 Pace Car Edition. The real news is the L82 350 V8 bumped to 220 hp over previous years and was mated to an M21 Close Ratio Manual Transmission. This is a good example of a shark body that is both attainable and desirable. 🦈

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