

FIRST TIME EVER! '63-72 RESTORER'S TIRE GUIDE

VETTE

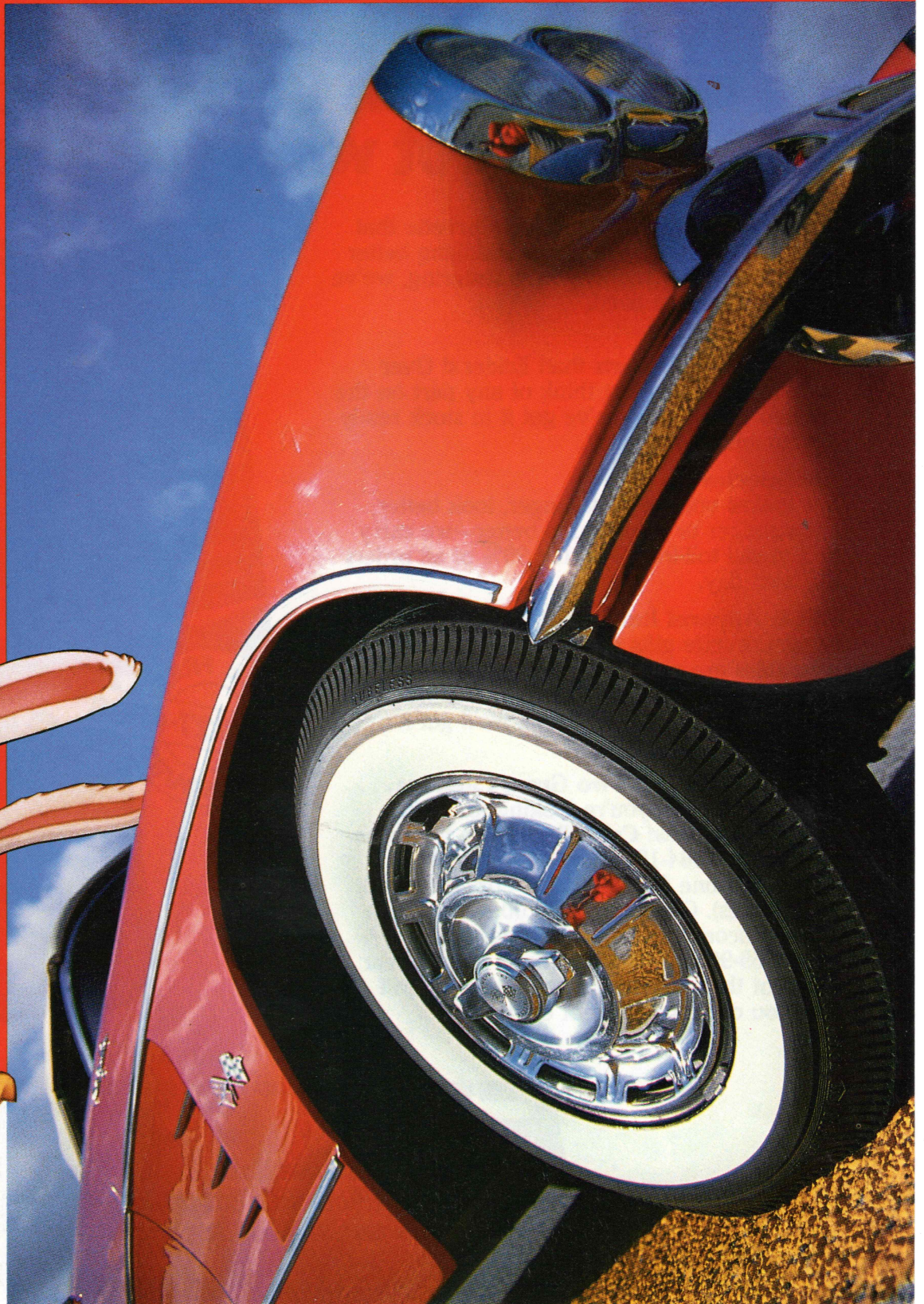
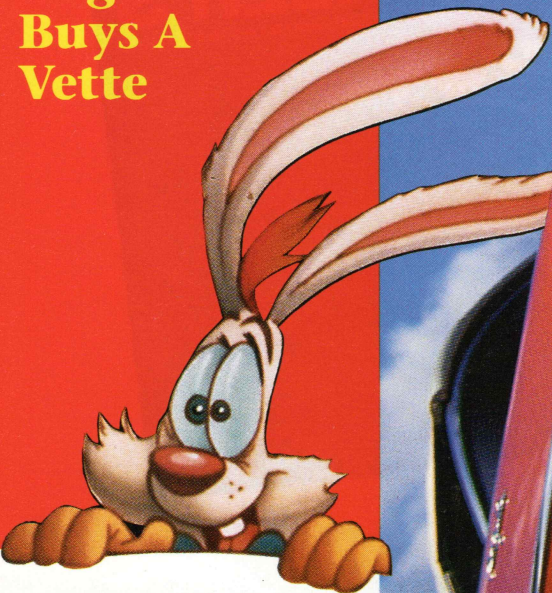
APRIL
1990

'66 390/427—
*The Ultimate
GT Car?*

1975
*Convertible:
Everyman's
Ragtop*

Revealing!
*Lotus
Talks ZR1*

Exclusive!
*Roger Rabbit
Buys A
Vette*



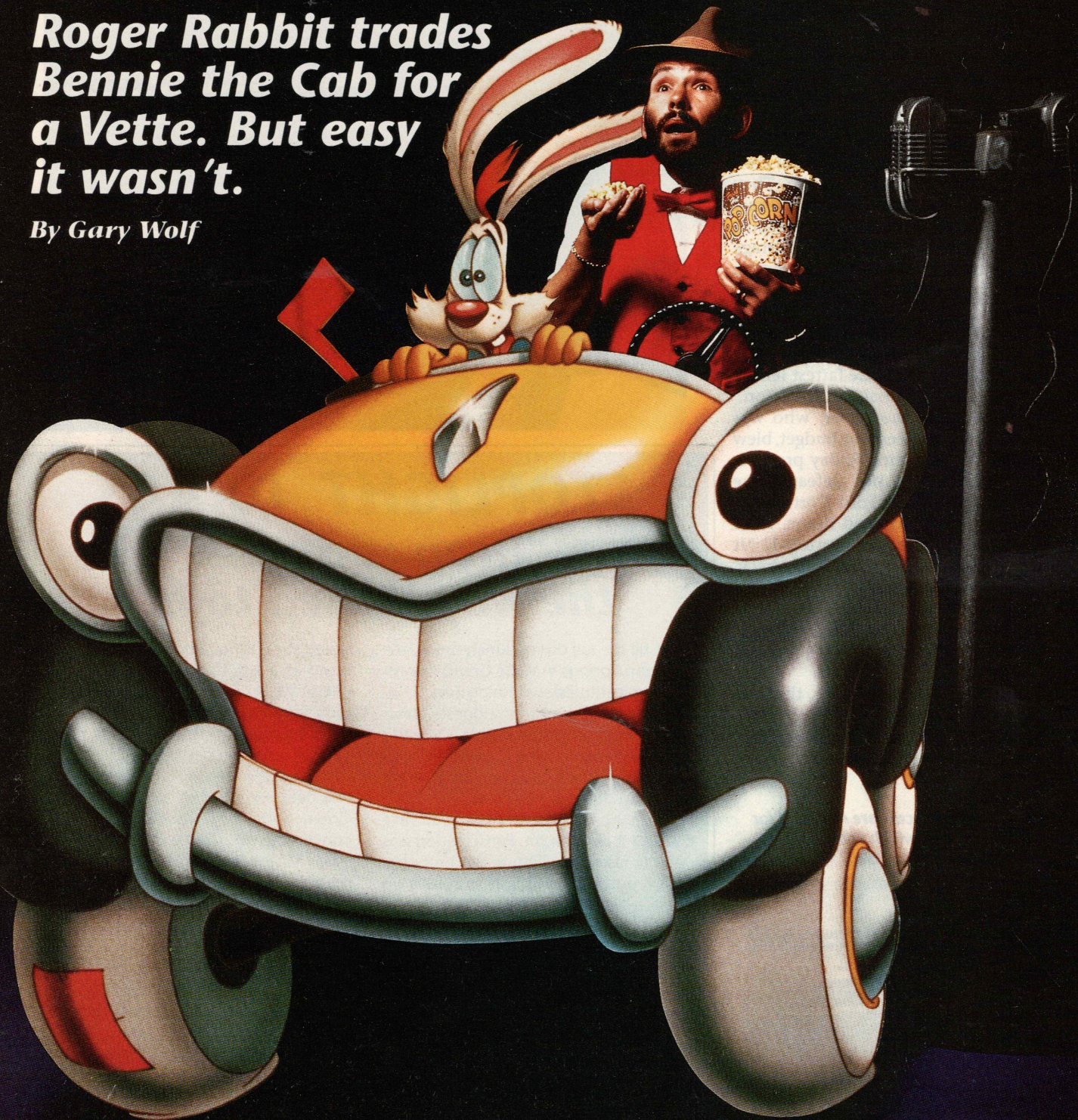
USA \$3.50 CANADA \$4.25



Roger Rabbit Buys A Corvette!

*Roger Rabbit trades
Bennie the Cab for
a Vette. But easy
it wasn't.*

By Gary Wolf



God bless you, Steven Spielberg! Thanks to you and your buddies at Disney, Roger Rabbit hopped out of Toontown with enough Simoleans to replace his talking taxi with a roaring Corvette.

As his practical-minded guardian, I tried long and hard to talk him out of it. After all, I counseled, what good is a Vette in New England? Summer is two weeks long. There's enough salt in the air to kipper a whale. Local auto thieves have gall the size of Rhode Island—one stole my Oldsmobile with me in it. In fall, tree leaves and car frames all turn to rust. Fire and brimstone are an April shower compared with acid rain. Back country roads boast potholes the size of dinosaur tracks. No way can you fit into the front seat of a Vette wearing a down jacket. Rationally, I told him, he'd get more use out of a snow blower.

For a funny bunny, Roger can be awfully pragmatic when it comes to justifying a speedy new jalopy.

He showed me a *Wall Street Journal* article in which a bright, hot-shot stock trader proclaimed that he'd switched from junk bonds to "hard assets at a value." Translation—the real stuff, cheap! Next, Roger hit me,

ka-pow, with a feature in *The Boston Globe* listing the 1959 Corvette as one of five cars most likely to out-appreciate Impressionist paintings. All of a sudden, it's not a sports car he's after. It's a hedge against inflation. An investment that'll go from zero to 60 faster than IBM.

How could I argue with logic like that? As a clincher, he promised I could drive it whenever he went on location.

Over carrot cake and coffee, Roger and I wrote up a list of exactly what we wanted in our Vette.

Roger specified the years. He loved the 1956-60 models. They reminded him of Jessica. Rounded rear ends and prominent headlights.

The Rabbit's a hot rodder at heart. He wanted a drag strip racer with wheels the size of King Kong's flea collar. Or a fuel injected four-on-the-floor fire dragon. Or a customized screamer with more alterations to its basic lines than Michael Jackson.

Me, I learned to drive in a slug-slow 1947 Pontiac family sedan. High performance is definitely not my speed. I convinced him to stick to a base engine 3-speed or an automatic in a car that would be as close to

original condition as we could find it.

To win that one, I gave in to his next request.

Roger loves to tinker with mechanical things. (He's terrible at it! Fixing my toaster has become his life's work.) Still, I agreed our car should be unrestored so he could futz with it during the winter.

Finally, and foremost, we needed a reasonable price. Roger's a movie star, sure, but Hollywood studios refuse to pay rabbits what they pay Sylvester Stallone. Don't believe me? Ask Bugs Bunny what he's driving these days.

With our requirements in hand, we visited the local Corvette dealers and got very encouraging news. Seems nowadays everybody's after big-block midyear Corvettes. Nobody wants cars of the 1956-60 era. The

unanimous verdict: We wouldn't have a bit of trouble finding a car that fit our bill exactly. There happened to be none in stock at that precise moment, but everybody assured us we wouldn't have to wait long before the right car turned up.

So, Roger and I went home, bought a matching pair of Corvette jackets, practiced downshifting on our lawn mower and waited for the phone to ring.

A few days, a few weeks, a few months went by in total silence.

We cranked up Bennie the Cab and made the rounds again. This trip, we got a slightly different story. Or rather several slightly different stories.

Sorry Story Number One. Every original car of that era has already been restored.

Sorry Story Number Two. There aren't any cars of that era around anymore because they've all been shipped to (take your choice) Germany, Japan, South America, Bruce Springsteen's museum.

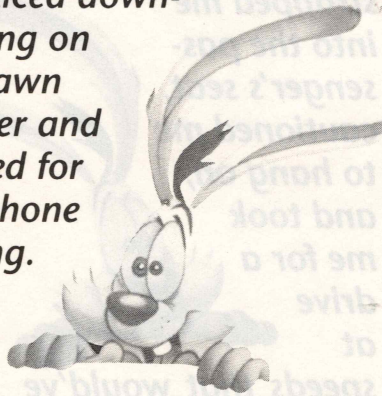
Sorry Story Number Three. VH-1 is buying them all up for a big contest.

Sorry Story Number Four. Disney is buying them all for a Blast From The Past promotion.

Sorry Story Number Five. Too bad you weren't in the market a year (two years, three years, four years) ago. You could have had all you wanted. People back then were giving them away.

Sorry Story Number Six. You should have been around just last month. My brother-in-law (cousin, college buddy, guy I know, guy I read about) answered an ad for a Chevy and found a little old lady (father of

**Roger and I went home,
bought a matching pair
of Corvette jackets,
practiced down-
shifting on
our lawn
mower and
waited for
the phone
to ring.**



deceased Vietnam Vet, junk man) selling a mint vintage Vette for \$500.

Sorry Story Number Seven. There's this guy who has one he's restoring. He took it completely apart and now he (a) can't figure out how to put it back together, (b) ran out of patience, or (c) ran out of money. He'll sell it to you cheap if you can only track him down.

Sorry Story Number Eight. So what if it doesn't have the engine it came with? Find a replacement and have it restamped. People who buy vintage Ferraris don't worry about matching numbers. You shouldn't, either.

At that point, it became clear to Roger and me that our dream car wouldn't find us. We'd have to take a more active role in tracking it down.

We started reading *Hemmings* with the fervor of archaeologists studying the Dead Sea Scrolls. From there, we broadened our search, telephoning dealers across the country with our list of requirements. (One month we placed so many long distance calls, AT&T inserted a thank-you note in our phone bill.) We spread the word to our friends and told everybody we talked to (even strangers who called up to peddle magazines) to keep an eye out.

Still, no car.

Finally, after nearly half a year of fruitless searching, we got our first solid leads.

A newspaper ad Roger spotted during his cross-country travels led us to a totally original 1958, still in the possession of its first owner, a little old lady—no kidding. While Roger looked on with envy, she strapped me into the passenger's seat, cautioned me to hang on, and took me for a drive at speeds that would have won us a pole position at the Indianapolis 500. I emerged shaken but happy.

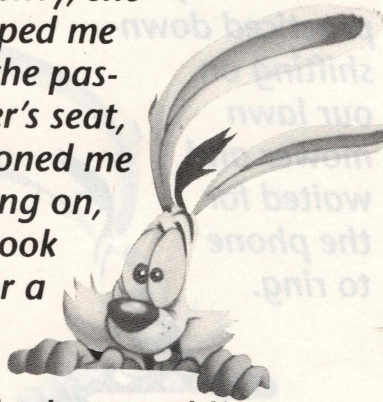
This car had everything. Base engine. Four-speed. The right parts attached to the right places. Only one problem. She'd just spent big bucks on a new paint job, and she'd built it into the price. It wasn't polka dots, but it wasn't a color we liked, either. Add the cost of repainting to the cost of buying and restoring and that threw this honey way over our budget. As we walked away, Roger cried harder than he did the day he found out what has-senfeffer meant.

Referrals from friends turned up three more unaltered, unrestored, original-owner cars, a '58, a '59 and a '60. So far, so good. None had been on the road for at least 20 years. Fantastic! Unfortunately, not one of these owners wanted to sell. Can't say we

blamed them. If Roger and I owned one of their cars, we wouldn't sell it, either.

While on the West Coast shooting his new cartoon, "Tummy Trouble," Roger spotted an ad for a 1957. He called me and told me about it. On paper, the car met our requirements. Roger volunteered to go by and give it a once-over, but I didn't trust him. He subscribes to the Toontown theory of automotive mechanics. He believes cars are powered by chipmunks on treadmills. I suggested he pay a prominent West Coast expert to inspect it for us. The expert did. When the car checked out fine, the expert arbitrarily refunded our money and bought it himself. (Where's Judge Doom when you find somebody who really deserves The Dip?)

While Roger looked on with envy, she strapped me into the passenger's seat, cautioned me to hang on, and took me for a drive at speeds that would've won us a pole position at the Indianapolis 500.



Next, acting on a tip from a man who remembers seeing an old Corvette abandoned off a dead-end country lane, we found a vision, the kind of thing Corvette fanciers fantasize about.

There it sat, in amongst a rag-tag heap of twisted bicycles, a busted baby buggy, an old sink and assorted other flotsam and jetsam. Judging from the height of the foliage around it, it hadn't moved for years. The owner lived in a ramshackle bungalow a few miles away. Great shades of *Sorry Story Number Seven*. He had taken it halfway apart, intending to restore it, when he ran out of patience and money. Sure, he'd be willing to sell it. Unfortunately, it was a 1967 coupe. Wrong year for me and Roger. (A fellow eventually showed up with cash, a strong hankering for a midyear and

an industrial-strength weed whacker. He left with the car.)

On a real long shot, I even tracked down the first Corvette I'd ever driven, a 1959. I had just graduated from high school. As a going-away-to-college present, my folks bought me a car. Dad and I visited Humm Brothers Garage, the local Chevrolet dealer in Earlville, Ill. The Humms had a new Corvette in stock. I took it for a test drive, came back and told them to write up the sale papers. But my Dad owned the local pool hall, and \$4000 was a lot of 8-ball. I went home instead with a well-used \$500 pink and black 1954 Plymouth and a bad case of unrequited love.

Turns out a local carouser eventually bought that Vette. Driving home late one night after a long session at The Prairie Center Tap, he gunned straight through his barnyard and merged his car with the rear end of John Deere. Priorities being what they were in those days, he repaired the tractor and sold the Vette for scrap.

By this point, Roger and I had called dealers and owners in nearly every state, three territories and two foreign countries. For our trouble, we'd gotten nothing except two more dubious stories to add to our collection.

Sorry Story Number Nine. Savvy collectors won't buy a 1956. That year doesn't appreciate as fast as everything else.

Sorry Story Number Ten. The pros stay away from '58s. They used odd-ball parts that nobody makes anymore.

We were getting desperate.

One weekend, in a local paper, Roger spotted an ad for a 1958. It boasted a correct (read: nonoriginal) fuel injected engine, was totally restored and cost an arm and a leg. In short, it didn't satisfy a single one of the items on our list. But so what? We'd waited long enough. The car we were looking for didn't exist. We wanted a Vette, and we wanted it now.

We made an appointment to see the car.

During our search, we'd met Ron Bunnell, a Fitchburg, Mass., Corvette restorer with a reputation for knowledge and honesty. We asked Ron if he'd look at the car with us.

He agreed.

Luckily for us, Ron took Roger and me on a significant detour along the way.

Next month—Chapter Two In This Hare-Raising Saga: Roger finally finds a car!



VETTE READERS DRIVE THE ZR1 ... AND TELL ALL!

VETTE

MAY
1990



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Part 2—Roger Rabbit buys a Vette



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Roger Rabbit Buys A Corvette Part 2

How it happened: The matchup of a nice couple, a pair of bozos—and a swell car.

By Gary Wolf

When we left Roger Rabbit last issue, he and I were desperately seeking to sink a few simoleons into a completely original, reasonably priced, unrestored, base-engined 1956-60 Corvette.

We weren't having much luck. After months of searching, we hadn't found a single car that even came close. So we'd relaxed our standards the tiniest bit. We were on our way to look at a completely restored, horribly overpriced 1958 with a nonoriginal, fuel injected powerplant.

As we were walking out the door, the phone rang. It was Ron Bunnell, owner of Ron's Auto Restoration in Fitchburg, Mass. Roger and I had become regular visitors to Ron's. He restored Corvettes exclusively. If we couldn't have one, at least we could look at other people's and drool. Plus, there was Ron himself, a friendly, knowledgeable guy who patiently answered all our stupid questions. And they were *stupid*. Roger learned everything he knows at a night course Goofy taught called *Keeping Your Car In Toon*.

Ron had promised to keep his eye out for us. He was calling to tell us about two customers of his, Kevin Cavanaugh and Susan Delle Chiaie. They co-owned a completely original Inca Silver 1959 Corvette, a 230-horsepower 3-speed with 103,785 miles on the clock.

It was their pride and joy. They were slowly, bit by bit, restoring it to mint condition. They had already done the brakes, the front end, the engine, the muffler and exhaust system, and a whole bunch of other stuff the teacher must have talked about the one day I skipped auto shop.

To raise the money to take advantage of a good business opportunity, Kevin and Susan had reluctantly decided to sell their car.

Ron had known them for some time. Sue was a qualified NCRS judge of 1958-60s. Kevin knew more about Corvettes than anybody this side of

VETTE Magazine. Ron considered them both to be extremely honest. Coming from Ron, who once chased me down the street for half a block to tell me he'd accidentally overcharged me a *nickel* for a Corvette key chain, that was good enough for Roger and me.

Kevin and Sue had given Ron a list of every single thing they knew to be wrong with the car. He read it to us over the phone.

The radio didn't work. The car needed a new dashboard panel. The soft top needed a new frame. The underside of the frame had a minor rust spot. The car had some minor body damage to the left front and left rear quarter panels. It had been repaired and looked perfect, but Kevin and Sue wanted us to know about it. And the car needed to be repainted.

That was it.

Roger and I had the same reaction. We fell to our knees in the middle of my living room, raised our clasped hands to heaven and shouted, "Thank you, Lord."

Did we want to see it, asked Ron? We were standing in his shop, ready to go, before he put down the phone.

Ron, Roger, and I drove to New Hampshire together to see the car.

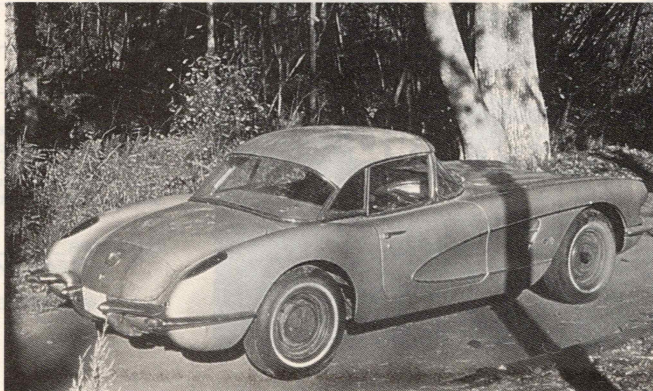
Kevin opened the garage door, and we got our first look.

It reminded me of the time when I was 15 years old and got set up on a blind date with

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a girl named Amelia Lackowich. Amelia opened her front door, and turned out to be the only blind date I ever had who was truly the knock-out I was told she'd be. I took one look, at Amelia and at this car, and fell into serious love.

While Roger and I kicked the tires and tested how well the doors worked, and Ron verified serial numbers, Kevin told us the story that went with the car.

A New Hampshire traveling salesman bought the car new. He drove it year-round, winter and summer, on sales calls. (Talk about company cars! Best I ever got was a Honda Civic.)

The second owner drove it until the engine started to smoke. He yanked it, put it on a stand, and replaced it with a 327. He drove the car until one day in the early '70s when he pulled it into a barn, shut the door and left it there.

In 1984, Kevin and Sue saw it advertised for sale in the *Plaistow/Hampstead News*, a small New Hampshire shopper's weekly. It was buried

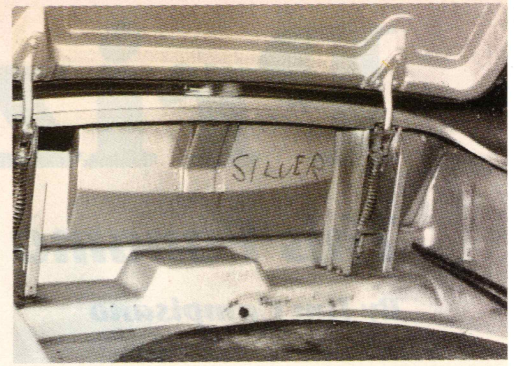
in amongst a motley assortment of Chevy S-10s, Subaru Wagons and Toyota Tercels. They checked it out, liked the car and offered to buy it, but couldn't come to terms. They stayed in touch anyway, calling the owner regularly and driving up to see him in person every few months. Their persistence paid off. Several years later, they finally bought the car, rolled it out of the barn, loaded it onto a carrier and took it home.

Ron crawled out from underneath the car and gave us his opinion. The car was exactly as promised, totally original in every regard.

Now came the moment of truth: the dreaded test drive.

For the past three years, I'd been tooling around Boston in a Saab 900 automatic. I hadn't driven a manual transmission for 15 years. When I went from reverse to first, I discovered the hard way that '59 3-speeds don't have syncromesh. Kevin tactfully offered to drive me out to the highway. When we got there, he put me into the driver's seat, aimed me straight ahead and told me to have fun. I did—if you call fun jerking

like a high schooler the first day he takes the car down the family driveway, and being honked at and passed by an



angry, elderly farmer driving a truck-load of chickens.

In every transaction there's always one critical incident that makes or breaks the deal. Ours came after the test drive, when Kevin opened the trunk. Restorers had told me that when these cars were built, a GM worker came around with a crayon and wrote the car's paint color inside the trunk. Using powerful lights, Kevin and Sue had located the raised outline of this worker's writing under the paint. Carefully wielding a sharp Exacto knife, Sue painstakingly peeled away the paint to reveal the word "silver" big as life written on the back of the trunk in green crayon. How can you not love a car, and two people, like that! Roger and I were goners.

We told Kevin and Sue we had a deal. Roger gave them his paw on it.

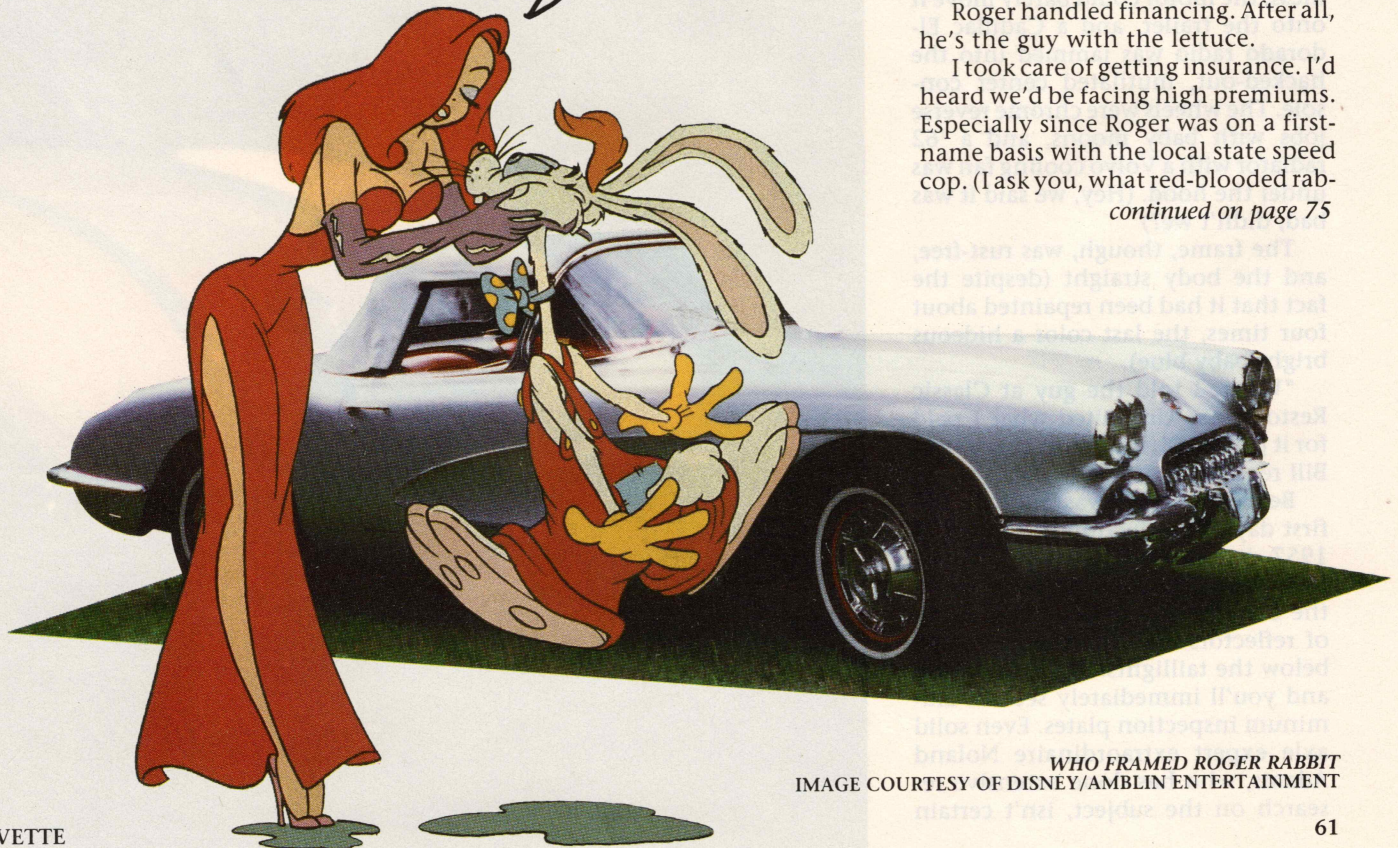
We went home and set to work doing all the things you have to do to buy a car.

Roger handled financing. After all, he's the guy with the lettuce.

I took care of getting insurance. I'd heard we'd be facing high premiums. Especially since Roger was on a first-name basis with the local state speed cop. (I ask you, what red-blooded rab-

continued on page 75

OOOOH HONEY BUNNY!
I JUST LOVE RABBITS WITH
BIG CORVETTES!



WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT
IMAGE COURTESY OF DISNEY/AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT

FIX YOUR BEARING PROBLEMS FOREVER

Roger Rabbit

from page 75

And what did Ron Bunnell get out of this financially? Not a thing. He took no commission from either buyer or seller. He did it, honestly, out of the goodness of his heart. He saw a chance to match up a nice couple, a pair of bozos and a swell car, and he did it. Most religions elevate people like Ron Bunnell to sainthood.

After Roger and I got the car home, I hired a private detective buddy of mine named Eddie Valiant. For 50 simoleons and a rancid bottle of Old Overshoe, he promised to uncover our Vette's whats, whens and wherefores.

I don't know how he did it. When dealing with Eddie Valiant, you never ask questions. I did catch a glimpse of a few names he had scribbled in a little black notebook he carries around. Dan Gale, David Burroughs, Ralph Kramer, Bob Stempel, Roger Smith. Who told him what? Eddie's not talking. But somehow, some way, Eddie snuck a peek at the car's original particulars.

Eddie told me his sources revealed that the car started out life as a 230-hp, 3-speed, Inca silver with a white cove, red interior and both tops. For options, it boasted a heater, signal-seeking AM radio, courtesy light, sunshades, parking brake alarm, 6.70x15 whitewall tires and Positraction axle. Its first owner bought the car in June 1959 from Jim Howe Chevrolet in Newton, N.H.

The white cove vanished 10 years later when the body shop that repaired the left side damage painted the entire car.

Roger drove our car every day during the summer, top down, his ears flying in the wind.

He quickly discovered what seems to be one of life's universal truths. It's impossible to run a quick errand in a '59 Vette. It always draws a crowd. Stop the car for a minute, and people come at you from all directions. Always with the same questions.

What year is it? Were they still making them out of metal that year? What did it cost new? And, of course, the inevitable how much did you pay for it?

When Roger told one old-timer it cost about \$3500 new, he figured out our purchase price himself. A 30-year-old car, factor in depreciation ... he guessed it couldn't have cost us

continued on page 83

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Roger Rabbit

from page 80

more than \$200 to \$300 max. We didn't burst his bubble.

One day, a fellow from right down the road pulled into our driveway. Seems he was the original owner of a cherry 1960. He was thinking about selling it. (Where was this guy six months ago?) He asked me what it was worth based on what we paid for ours. We took a look. A nice car. All original. I told him he could get 15 for it, easy. He was disappointed. He was hoping to sell it for *three thousand dollars* at least. Roger scribbled a check on his arm and told the fellow to take him to the bank. I put a quick halt to Roger's grand larceny by telling the fellow he'd missed a few digits. He left wearing a big grin.

As summer turned to fall, and it came time to put our car away for the winter, Roger and I started thinking. Since this car was so original, and since we were going to restore it anyway, let's put it back into showroom condition and take it to a Corvette owner's Disneyland—The Bloomington Gold Corvette Show.

Roger thought about it for maybe half a second and said the two words that struck terror into my accountant's heart. "Why not?"

Next month—*The Final Chapter: Roger Lifts His Body.*

Talking LT5s

from page 73

course—but it has the NACA ducts in the hood, similar to the first Callaway that came out. The photographer, Jim Dunne, who's a pretty well-known spy photographer, told me that he heard it was a method to get rid of some underhood heat.

To get rid of underhood heat, you don't want NACA ducts—that puts heat in. You want something to get air out.

I've never had a heating problem with one.

It's an aluminum engine. So it's got a much better curve for heat conductivity than iron. All finned and ribbed, it loses a lot of heat. The thing is, it's part of our technique. We take the heat out of the engine and put it into the surrounding air. We don't leave it in there. You can kid yourselves, you know, leave the heat in the engine, but

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SALES RAY

they aren't very efficient when you do that.

I think there have been oil cooling problems. Primarily because we have asked for lower oil temperatures than CPC is used to. But I don't really know why we've asked for it. Because the end-to-end system crank pin that we use isn't about temperature. If the engine temperature goes up, the oil pressure doesn't go up, because the thing that controls the oil pressure is the size of the holes drilled in the crank. It's got nothing to do with burning terms. So I'm not so sure why we've been so emphatic about keeping the oil temp down.

How do you feel about synthetic oils?

We have a philosophy that we have to make the engine run on any oil the

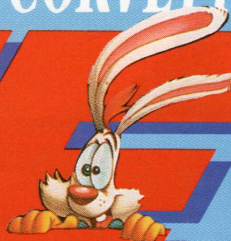
customer is likely to put in. You don't like to say, "But only run on Brand X." Because that ties them down. If it's a Formula 1 engine and you can get a few more horsepower by using a synthetic oil, fine. I'm not against them.

Well, you've done a great job with that engine. I think that the only unfortunate thing is that many of these cars are being bought and turned into museum pieces. Their owners aren't driving them. I think that's really unfortunate.

That's sad, isn't it? Because it's good fun to drive. Because I travel so much and arrive home from a trans-Atlantic flight late at night, I have a chap who drives me, and whenever we're going somewhere, he says, "Can't we go in the Corvette?"

WHAT'S YOUR CORVETTE WORTH? LATEST PRICES INSIDE!

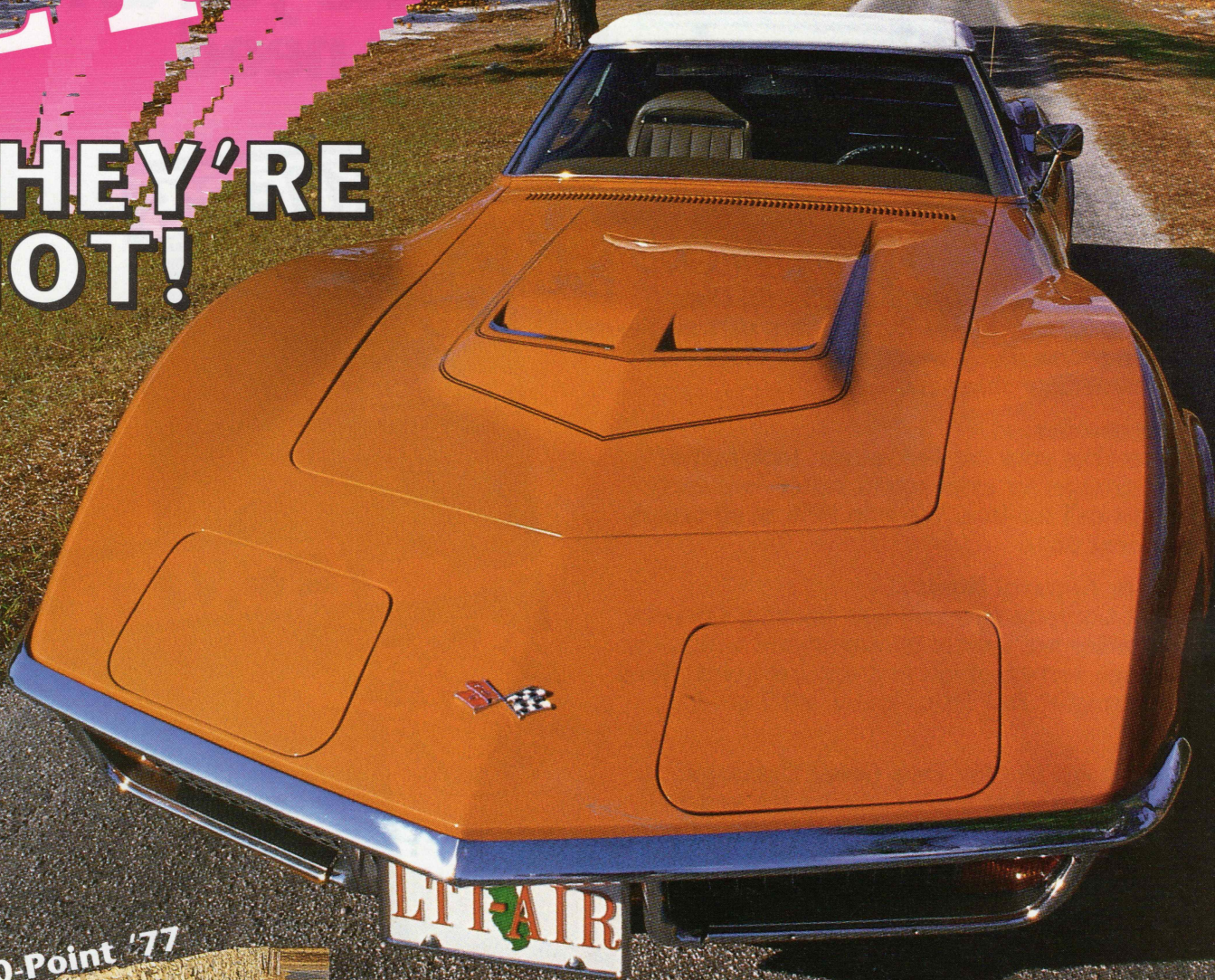
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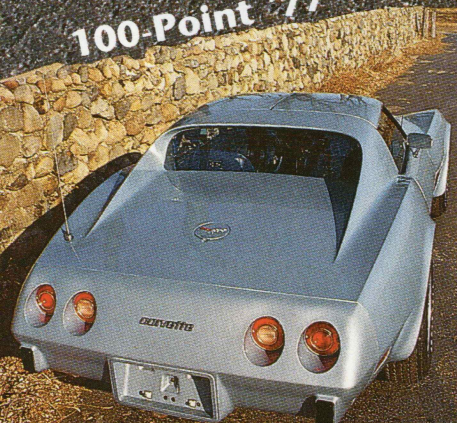
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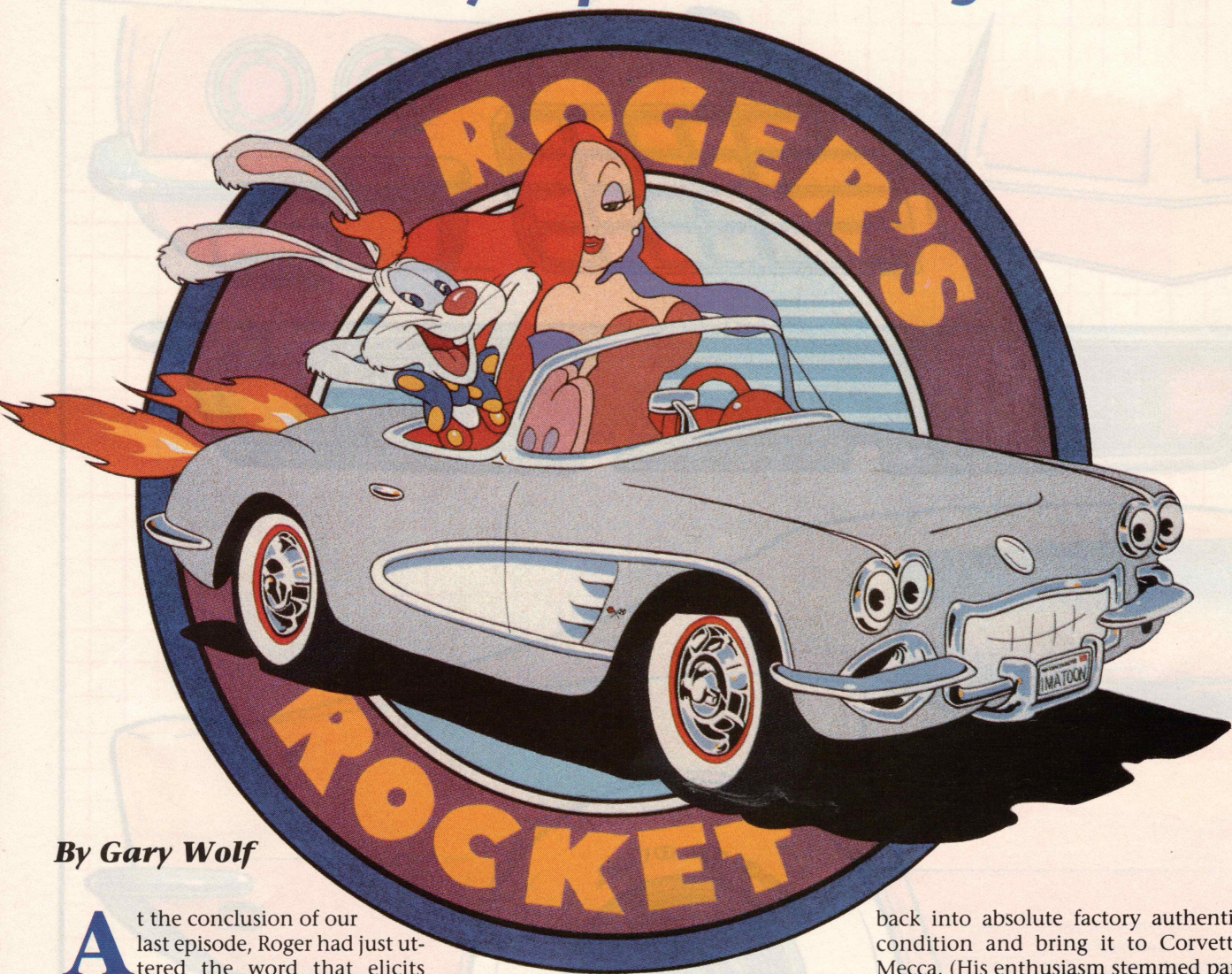
**Roger Rabbit
Goes For The Gold**

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Roger Rabbit Buys A Corvette: Part 3

The Bunny hops to Bloomington.



WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT IMAGE COURTESY OF DISNEY/AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT

By Gary Wolf

At the conclusion of our last episode, Roger had just uttered the word that elicits shrieks of joy from those nameless, faceless government bureaucrats who calculate huge drops in personal disposable income. He said, "Bloomington!"

Here's a quick recap. Roger and I jointly bought a 1959 Corvette. We went after an all-original car, and we got one—completely authentic, General Motors issue right down to the

radiator cap. We wanted it solely for tooling around town and amazing locals (not that hard when one of the primary drivers is a talking rabbit!). Taking our Vette to car shows ranked about even on our preference list with using it to haul trash to the dump.

Still, as Roger emphatically pointed out, the car was in *such* fine shape, it seemed a crying shame not to put it

back into absolute factory authentic condition and bring it to Corvette Mecca. (His enthusiasm stemmed partially from the fact the Bloomington is located in the section of Illinois that produces the world's finest carrots!)

I resisted the project. The car was good enough the way it was. There was absolutely nothing to be gained by making it perfect. Unfortunately for me, the rabbit knows exactly what it takes to change my mind. He opened his liquor cabinet and hauled out the

earthenware jug emblazoned with three X's. "Drink?" he asked.

"Always," I answered.

Next thing I knew I possessed a whopping headache, a handshake agreement with my fuzzy partner, and a shopping list of Corvette restoration shops.

Roger and I made the rounds of every restorer within a 200-mile radius. We always went incognito. (You can't imagine how quickly, how much, and how often the price goes up when you use Spielberg and Bloomington in the same sentence.)

All we got for our efforts was a bad case of *deja vu*. Everybody seemed to be restoring the same big-block midyears. It stood to reason we'd have our best chance of scoring a gold with somebody familiar with cars like ours. But we rarely saw anybody working on one. Apparently, to mix a few metaphors, everybody had jumped off the solid-axle ship and onto the midyear bandwagon. We always asked our standard question: "When's the last time you restored a solid-axle Corvette?" We got back a routine answer: "Haven't done any lately (or ever) but, hey, a Corvette's a Corvette. Bring her in, I'll give her a whack."

We passed. The old college try wasn't good enough for me and the fur ball.

After a few weeks of fruitless searching, Roger and I were hanging out at Ron's Restorations in Fitchburg, Mass., trying to figure out what to do next. If you've been paying attention through the first two installments, you know that Ron Bunnell is the fellow who found us our car. He's a friendly, knowledgeable guy willing to stand around patiently for hours answering dumb questions. Believe me, nobody asks them dumber than Roger.

We were crying on Ron's shoulder, telling him about our problem finding a qualified restorer. Roger was sitting in a blue 1959 that Ron had just finished putting back into showroom condition. I was leaning on a 1957 fuelie that Ron had about halfway to heaven. Suddenly a hundred-watt bulb went on over Roger's head. How about

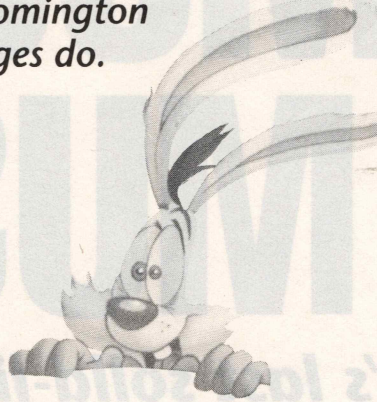
having Ron do it?

Ron knows Corvettes backward and forward. He does as many solid axles as anything else. He's thoroughly familiar with our car. He already did the engine work and the front end. He's no one-man band. His seven grease monkeys log about 300 years' worth of experience between them. His shop is neat and clean without any girly posters hanging around, so Roger can bring his mom by without making her wear blinders. Ron's fair, he's honest, he's nice. Makes you wonder what he's doing in the car business. Best of all, he's only a short hop away from where we live. We can come over here *all the time*.

Ron balked at the prospect of having a slightly off-kilter writer and a batty rabbit constantly hanging around his shop, but finally decided we couldn't be any worse than a barrel of oily rags. He agreed to do our car.

To show how much we trusted Ron

The dudes down at the Dari-Joy never crawl underneath to see if the bottom's clean. But the Bloomington judges do.



and liked his work, we picked him despite his one major flaw. He never saw *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. I take full credit for convincing Roger to let that one slide. Given a choice between a restorer like Ron, who spends his spare time studying old Corvette service manuals, or one who watches flicks

until his eyes bug out, no contest.

Ron started the process by giving us an estimate of what it would cost to put the car into Bloomington condition. Remember, this is a vehicle that was totally complete, fully driveable, and looked absolutely sensational from any distance greater than 2 1/2 feet.

When I saw the figures, I lapsed into a state of shock second in severity only to the time Roger convinced me I could use a grounded hair dryer in the bathtub.

To get the car ready for Bloomington, we'd have to replace perfectly good tires, a perfectly good battery, perfectly good seat belts, perfectly good carpeting, perfectly good headlights. The list went on and on. Naturally, all this cost perfectly good money. Be honest. Who cares what the *underside* of a car looks like? When you're only using it for cruising the drive-ins, all that matters is good paint, throaty mufflers, and loud radio. The dudes down at the Dari-Joy never crawl underneath to see if the bottom's clean. But the Bloomington judges do. That means you've got to fund two swabbies with scrub brushes and paint thinner for a couple of days at \$42 an hour.

Roger and I discussed it long and hard. The cost of restoring the car to Bloomington standards roughly doubled our purchase price. That meant we'd have put more into it than it was worth on the open market. I voted a firm, two-handed thumbs down. Roger could ply me with moonshine 'til he was blue in the face and I was red in the nose. He wasn't getting me to lay out that many simoleons just so I could spend four days in an Illinois cornfield armed with a spray bottle of Meguiar's No. 40 vinyl cleaner, No. 7 glaze, Windex, touch-up paint, polishing cloths and rags. When all we get out of it is a crummy certificate. No way, Jose.

Roger tried dazzling me with statistics. He pulled out his blackboard and drew a pair of intersecting lines proving that the value of the car would eventually catch up to however much money we invested in it. We might have to wait for 30, 40, 50 years, but sooner or later those two lines would cross. That's Toontown economics if ever I heard it. I suspect Roger's the rabbit who formulated the fiscal management policies that sent Penn Central into bankruptcy.

I still wasn't buying. Then Roger came up with the bright idea that makes me sorry I ever persuaded Colonel Sanders to start serving Kentucky Fried Rabbit. He suggested we script a movie based on our experience. That way the whole project becomes a write-off. He

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About The Author

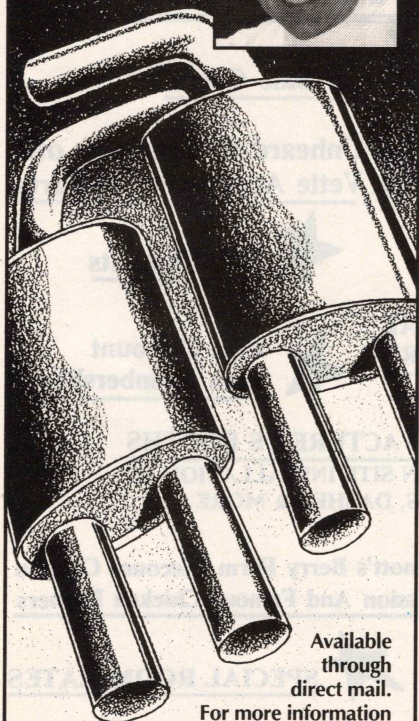
Gary K. Wolf is the author of *Killerbowl*, *A Generation Removed* and *The Resurrectionist* (Doubleday). He's also the creator of the fabulous Roger Rabbit characters, as author of *Who Censored Roger Rabbit* (St. Martin's Press and Ballantine). Steven Spielberg produced the animated/live action film version of the book, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, for Walt Disney Studios. The film won four Academy Awards.

As a screenwriter, Wolf created *The Flying Tigerfish* and *Typhoon Lagoon* (Walt Disney Studios), *The Curse of Cali Caliph* and *Genie Man* (Talking Rings Entertainment). We are honored to have his work in VETTE.

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Roger Rabbit

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outlined a story called *Corvette Gold*. It dealt with a dead end kid who redeems his life by restoring his deceased uncle's factory race car. Roger pitched it as *Karate Kid On Wheels*.

While I thought it over, Roger plied me with more dew from his infernal earthenware jug. Let's go for it, I hiccuped. In no time flat, we had signed a contract with a motion picture studio to do the movie. And another contract with Ron to restore the car.

Roger was in La La Land filming during the initial disassembly. When he came back, he hightailed it over to Ron's to check on progress. "Where's my car?" he asked.

It's like the limerick about the guy who got hit by a train. They found him mainly in Mass. and a mass in Maine. Ron pointed here, there and everywhere. Our car was in more parts than Lizzie Borden's family tree. Roger, who has trouble assembling a two-piece jigsaw puzzle, fainted dead away on the spot. It took waving three Li'l Skunky industrial strength air fresheners under his nose, and Ron's assurance that he knew the precise location of every single component, to snap the rabbit back to consciousness.

Roger soon decided he wanted to get his paws dirty. He talked me into helping him strip the paint. What a disaster! The chemicals Ron uses are virtually identical to the acetone and benzine composition of DIP. Roger took one swipe at the car and left half his yellow glove behind. That put a quick end to our hands-on (or glove-off!) experience. From that point on, we restricted ourselves to strictly high-level managerial tasks. Like selecting the color for the shop logo polo shirts Ron gave us.

Up until this project, the extent of our automotive decision making consisted of telling the kid at the pump what octane we wanted. Suddenly we were being asked to decide on stuff that actually mattered. Original chrome or replated. (Original.) Clear lacquer coating over the paint? (No. The factory didn't, we wouldn't either.) New glass or original? (Original.) Repro rearview mirror or restored original? (Original.) Same for the radio aerial, the ashtray, the shifter, on and on. Original. Original. Original. Roger finally lettered *Original* on a piece of cardboard and stood it on the dashboard the way I do with my *No Radio* sign. If we were going to do it, we figured we might as well do it right.

Roger and I took charge of getting the car's 1959 license plates restored.

We started with the manufacturer, a burly hard case named Spike serving one to five at Walpole State Prison. He'd long since gotten out of the license plate business. A check of *Hemmings* uncovered numerous people who hadn't. The plates (Massachusetts 190 455) came out perfect. Spike himself couldn't have done better.

We made only one alteration to the car. We replaced the original 3-speed transmission with a correctly dated four. Ron, a purist, tried to dissuade us. In his opinion—and it's a hard one to argue against—the car started life as a 3-speed, and that's how it should remain. But Roger and I are shiftless, not shifters. A 3-speed's lack of synchro-mech in first gear makes for some very unpleasant grinding noises, especially when you're a 5-foot-6 rabbit depressing the clutch with a clodhopper the size of a snowshoe.

Roger had one other semi-good reason for replacing the transmission. He shifts by keeping track of the gears on his fingers. Since he has four, he figured why waste a thumb. Good thing he wasn't born with six digits, or we'd be hocking 8 pounds of our solid gold Mr. T neck chains to pay for a ZR1.

Ron's crew also generated one outstanding bit of automotive humor. They painted a sign and hung it on the bare frame. It showed two people talking. First person: "Who's frame?" Second person: "Roger Rabbit." Get it? It took me a minute, too.

Six months to the day after we drove our Corvette into Ron's garage, Ron phoned and told us it was done.

We scooted over for our first look at the finished product. Ron had a car cover draped over it. He lifted it off with the drama of Bob Stempel unveiling a statue of Zora Arkus-Duntov in GM Square. For the first time in all the years I've known Roger, words failed him. He was speechless. The car was simply gorgeous! Exactly as beautiful as the first one I ever saw way back in 1959. Who says you can't ever go home? Thanks to Roger Rabbit and Ron Bunnell, I was 17 years old again, except this time without the need for Clearasil.

Roger slipped on his driving gloves and his new crash helmet, and crawled behind the wheel. He wanted to take this factory-authentic baby out on the highway and see what it could do.

"Hold on," said Ron. "You can't drive this car on the road. Bloomington judges don't like to see dirt." So how were we going to get it there? Roger and I had a Route 66 fantasy. A wild and crazy guy and a rabbit driving the high-

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Roger Rabbit

from page 68

ways and byways to Bloomington.

No way, said Ron. The car travels in a dust-free, smoke-free, moisture-free, noise-free, germ-free, hermetically sealed, padded, enclosed bank vault on wheels. He made it sound as if Roger and I were roughing it by flying to Illinois first class on American Airlines.


For the next few months, the car sat unused on Ron's showroom floor. We visited it three times a week and on weekends, pretty much the same schedule we set up to see Roger's cousin Dodger, the black rabbit of the family who spent a few years breaking big rocks into little rocks for the state.

We fulfilled our urge to drive fast and reckless by signing up for Skip Barber's course at the Lime Rock track in Connecticut. Our instructor nearly went into cardiac arrest when he saw a wimp and a rabbit running toward his M3s, their faces covered with glee and drool respectively.

We came back from Lime Rock ready to put our Corvette through the same paces James Bond did in his Aston Martin. Including using our spinners to slice up the tires of drivers in the next lane. Roger suggested that one. Believe it or not, I was for it. If you want to know why, try driving in Boston during rush hour. You'd wish for a Sherman tank and ack-ack guns. Roger tried persuading Ron to make the alteration. He even resorted to the earthenware jug dodge. The drivers of New England can thank their lucky stars that Ron Bunnell doesn't drink.

The big day finally arrived. March 16. When Dave Burroughs draws the names of the lucky 10. We sat by the telephone. Roger chewed his fingernails off and started on mine. The phone rang. Our number hit! We were going to Bloomington. Roger and I couldn't have been happier if we'd won Megabucks. (Well, maybe a little happier.)

One final note. Roger insists on naming *everything* he owns. (He has his Tommy Toothbrush, Barney Bowtie and Olivia Overalls.) Naturally, he had to name the Corvette. We boiled it down to two choices, mine and his. We couldn't decide between them. So we tossed them both into a hat. My selection, *Corvette From Heck*, got snagged in the hat band. Henceforth, our '59 will be, as you probably could have guessed, *Roger's Rocket*.

If you're in the Bloomington area toward the end of June, stop by, see the car and say hello. Roger loves shaking paws with his fans. 

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