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AUTOS

Chevrolet Corvair and a Ride Back in Time

The Corvair Was Revolutionary When It Was Unveiled in 1959

By **A.J. BAIME**

Aug. 19, 2014 4:54 p.m. ET

PHOTOS: BACK IN TIME WITH THE CORVAIR



Dave Wenzlick at home in Arizona with two of his Chevy Corvairs. *MARK PETERMAN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Dave Wenzlick, 54, manager of a Tempe, Ariz., manufacturing facility. on his 1965 Chevrolet Corvair, as told to A.J. Baime.

Growing up, my brother and I would spend Saturday nights at my grandmother's house, so my folks could go square dancing. We would go to church on Sunday in her Corvair.

Even at 7 years old, I knew there was something different about the car because the engine noise came from the back.

The Corvair was revolutionary when it was unveiled in 1959. Chevrolet General Manager Ed Cole was influenced by European cars like the Volkswagen, and he thought: America could use a car like that. The Corvair was unlike any Chevy ever produced—rear-engined, air-cooled, with four-wheel independent suspension.

It is remembered today, in part, because of Ralph Nader's 1965 book "Unsafe at Any Speed." He singled out the Corvair as being unsafe, but a government study later found it wasn't any less safe than any other contemporary car.

Today, I own eight Corvairs, including a 1965 Corvair Corsa, almost identical to the one my grandmother owned. (The Corsa is a Corvair with upgraded performance and power; I don't know how my grandmother ended up with one.) The car has the same feel, smells and noises.

Any excuse to go the hardware store, and I hop in. I don't know how many times strangers have given me the thumbs up.

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