

WHAT A To SPORTS

New Jersey Dealer Stages European-type Rally from St. Louis to Newark

One warm evening last October, 50 passengers stepped off a big DC-7 and into the Lambert Field Airport Terminal in St. Louis, Missouri. Each passenger wanted to get started right back from where he had just come, Newark, New Jersey. There were 25 good reasons for this singleness of mind. These people made up 25 teams who were about to pilot and navigate their newly purchased Corvettes as they rallied 1,000 miles homeward. A practice originated by European automakers, this was to be the first rally for new sports car buyers ever held in the United States.

The idea started in Caldwell, New Jersey, with a discussion that took place in Chevrolet dealer Mal Konner's office. Mr. Konner happened to mention that he had recently received 25 orders for the '60 Corvette. He mentioned it to the right party. The right party was Jack Bell, Chevrolet City Manager in Newark. Bell, familiar with the European plan, asked, "Why not Corvette?" Konner responded, "Why not."

1. Flight #505 had fifty passengers with one-way tickets.



Way Buy a car!

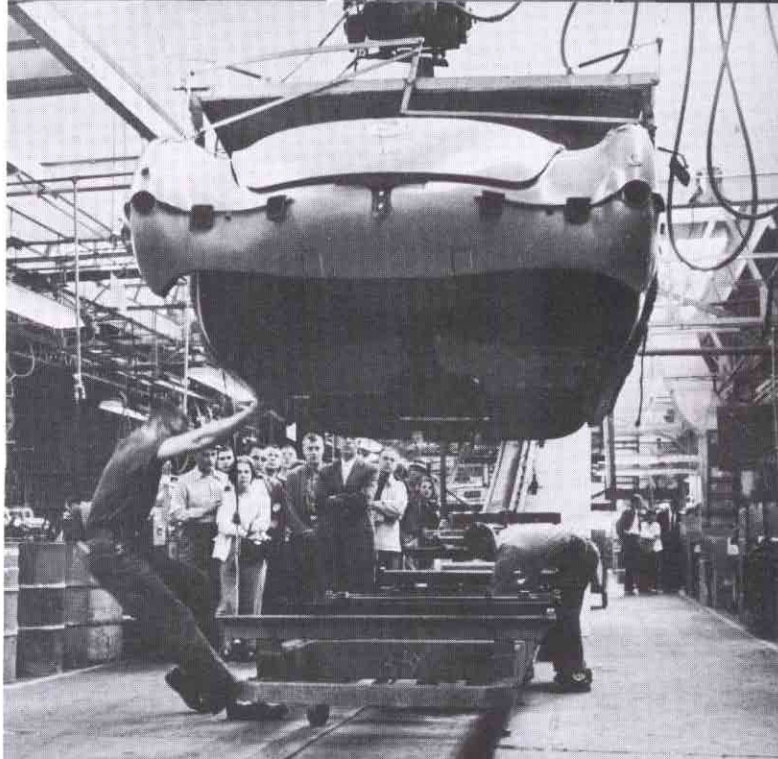
The first step was to plot the course. Corvettes are made at the Chevrolet plant in St. Louis. From this point the plan was simple: fly to St. Louis, pick up the cars from the factory and rally back to New Jersey.

Early in August, Bell, his wife Margie, and Skip and Pat Sofield, who were among those who had placed Corvette orders, set out from Newark to trace and retrace the rally route. Several thousand miles later they were satisfied. Mr. Konner, the St. Louis Plant and the soon-to-be Corvette owners were given the go-ahead to make final preparations for the trip.

Thus, plane reservations and accommodations were made, bags were packed and they were off. After arriving in St. Louis, the group was driven to the Holiday Inn motel for a good night's rest.

The next morning the rallyists went from the Holiday Inn on the outskirts of St. Louis to the Corvette Plant. As the specially chartered bus swung in the plant's main gate, someone shouted, "There they are." Fifty heads turned to see 25 freshly-minted Corvettes glistening in the warm St. Louis sunlight in perfect alignment.

The tour of the plant was planned to begin at 10 o'clock. But it took more than an hour and one-half for the new owners to inspect and compare their cars before they were ready to start. They were then happy to see how the new Corvettes had been created.



2. A special bus drove the rallyists to the plant.

3. This group keenly watched every phase of Corvette manufacture.

4. The plant tour started a little late.



The tour first led to the body shop where fiber glass panels were joined together to make the Corvette bodies. Next, in the paint shop, each new owner was able to see how his car had been repeatedly sanded, sprayed, and baked to achieve the Corvette high luster. After inspecting chassis and trim areas, all who desired sat in a Corvette as it passed through the rigorous water test. Those who did came out convinced of Corvette's tight and finished construction.

A special luncheon was held in the plant cafeteria where Plant Manager Elmer Rundell wished everyone, "Good luck and good rallying." It should be explained here that not one of the group had ever rallied before. When Jack Bell passed out first leg instructions, some were openly dubious about the importance of keeping a schedule. Dorothy Griffin whispered to her husband Bryant, "I despise deadlines. It doesn't look like I'm going to like this." Her wise husband replied, "We shall soon see."

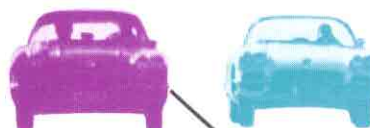
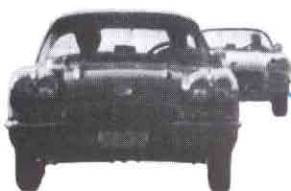
And see they soon did. Not fifteen minutes later the lead car driven by Dick Dubois and navigated by Bob Decker headed north on National Bridge Avenue to

begin the two and one-half days of rallying adventure. Exactly 25 minutes later Car Number 25 was the last car to leave the plant.

The route led out of St. Louis across the Chain of Rocks Bridge and into Illinois. Traffic jam, train and confusing intersections threw drivers into time and distance errors. But a care-free attitude prevailed. After all, there were nearly 1,000 miles left to make it up.

Veteran rallyists will see the danger in this kind of thinking. But the recent initiates knew not of the pitfalls. The weather was beautiful and several teams stopped to put convertible tops down. This is just fine if the navigator remembers to calculate the time it has taken. None did.

A few Corvette teams lost precious moments when they were stopped by a representative of the Indiana State Police. No one had been violating any traffic laws, but the officer had become suspicious of some sort of mass theft as Corvette after Corvette rolled by. Several of the unkind rallyists preferred to believe the trooper had wanted a closer look at the '60 Corvette. More time





was lost but the delay had its humorous aspects.

Those who dawdled or were careless in calculations found out how those seconds/points add up in rallying that night in Indianapolis. Most of the scores were rather high, to say the least.

Chevrolet's Indianapolis Zone Manager, H. E. Heathmen, greeted the rallyists that night with a party. Pilots and navigators began to exchange initial impressions as they fell easily into sports car conversation. A few of the comments overheard were: "You know, there's something to this rally business" or, "I think we're beginning to get the hang of this" or, "I don't understand how we could be so far off."

The change was more apparent the next morning. Breakfast consisted of ham, eggs, and educated guesses on the route. The consensus felt due east across US 40 was the only logical course. They had not counted on the diabolical logic of Messrs. Bell and Konner, who were thoroughly enjoying their roles as co-rallymasters.

The chosen course headed *northeast* on Indiana State Highway 67 past Anderson and Muncie. A brisk rain

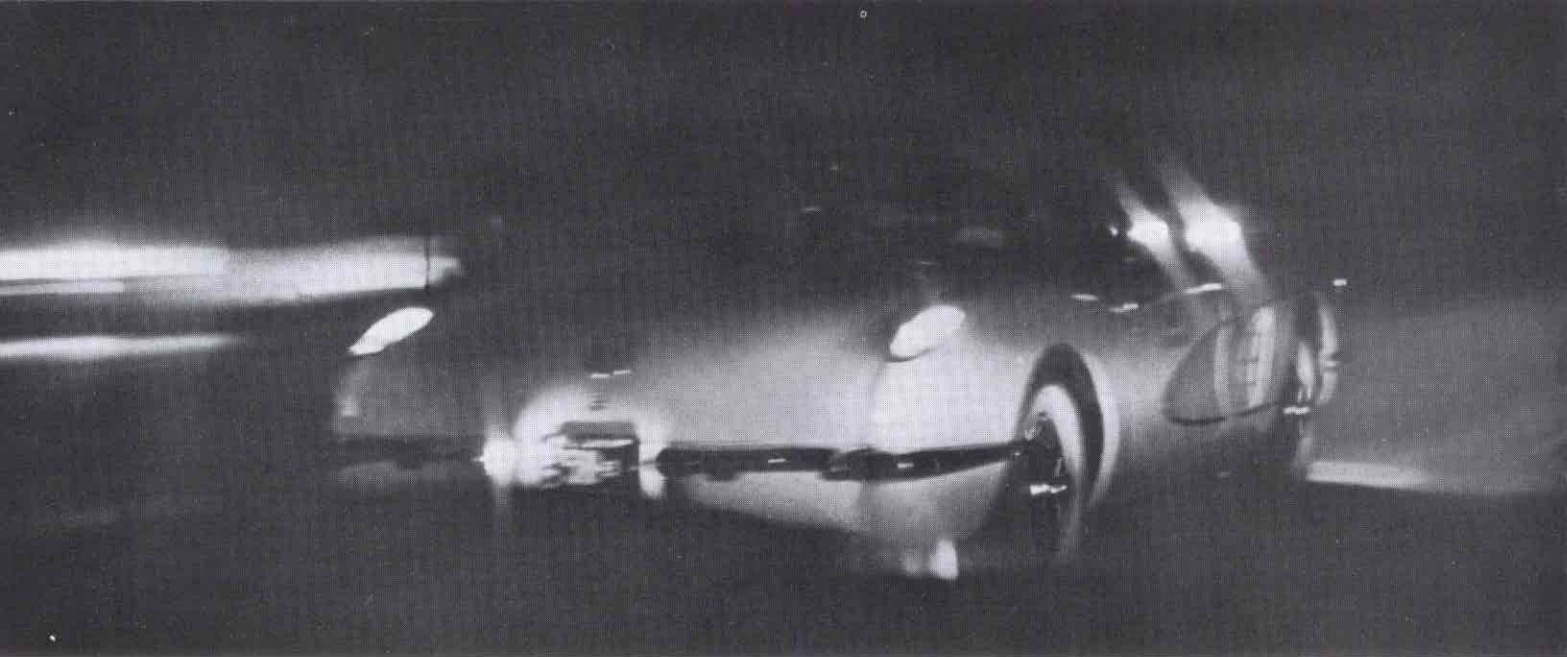
kept pilots alert and navigators busy with their computations. It was obvious that some of the group were now out to win. The teams had improved their skills and their scores as they passed the first checkpoint on the Ohio Turnpike that afternoon.

The remainder of the day was a straight regularity run across Ohio. An average speed of 60 miles per hour was required with stern warning about exceeding the 65 mph limit on the turnpike. It meant staying on the beam. When the last Corvette had checked into the Holiday Inn outside Youngstown, Ohio, a look at the timer's totals revealed that the Newark area was populated by some quick learners.

The final day's driving started early . . . *very early*. Twenty-five Corvettes and the rising mist were the only moving things along the Allegheny River at 5:30 a.m. that morning. It was to be a long day of driving.

The leaders, Marge and Marvin Krinner, were going to be tough to beat, but everyone was giving it the old sports car try as the rally entered the southern tip of New Jersey.





"We're a little late tonight, folks."

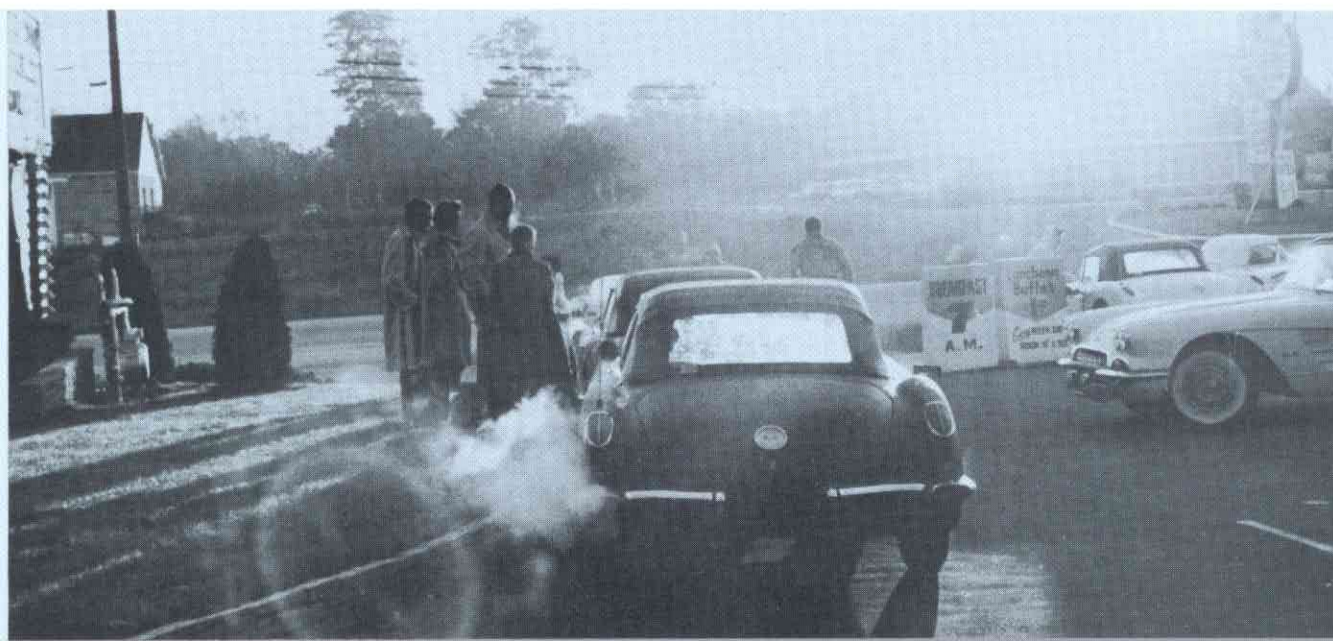
When the Corvettes received the checkered flag at the GM Training Center in Union, New Jersey, the driving was over. The fun was not. The man behind the checkered flag was Pat Boone and it looked like a party was going on inside.

The party turned out to be in honor of the rallyists

with Chevrolet officials and gentlemen of the press playing host. When singer Boone presented the winner's trophy to the Krinners, all felt it was an appropriate win for they had piloted their Corvette well. But when the second-place trophy was accepted by Dorothy ("I *used* to despise deadlines") Griffin, it summed up the change that had taken place in everyone.



The final day began early . . . very early.





Northeast through Indiana . . .

. . . into Ohio where the scoring began to improve.

Talk centered around the rally and future meets. Gymkhanas were mentioned, odometers discussed. In just two and one-half days, the list of red-hot sports car enthusiasts in New Jersey had grown by 50. All in all, it was quite a party, quite a rally, quite a way to buy a sports car.



Through Tuscarora and Kittatinny Mts. on the Pennsylvania Turnpike.



Winners Marge and Marvin Krinner and friend.

A party was going on inside.

