

# 1964 CHEVROLET CORVAIR MONZA

1964 Chevrolet Corvair Monza

Donated by: Tom Henning, Kearney, NE

Original cost: \$2,270.00 (In 1964: Average car cost, \$3,500.00; average household income, \$6,000.00; average home cost, \$13,050.00; gallon of gas, 30 cents)

Number made: 88,440

Engine, etc.: 6 cyl.; 110 hp.; 164 cu. in.; 108 in. wheelbase

The Monza coupe was introduced in 1960 and had bucket seats and a deluxe interior. The Monza was the best-selling Corvair by 1961 and remained so until 1969. The name came from combining "Corvette" and "Bel Air", two familiar Chevrolet names.

The rear-mounted air-cooled engine was aluminum, making it very light weight and durable. It was described as very well designed by *Road and Track* but consumer advocate Ralph Nader disagreed. He published the book "Unsafe at Any Speed" that highlighted its many safety concerns and the lack of standards in the U. S. He attacked all U. S. cars but the Corvairs got special attention. He claimed that the rear wheels "tucked under" on turns, resulting in a vehicle roll. While Chevrolet addressed these issues in 1964, Nader still thought the Corvair was the "leading candidate for the unsafest car title". Sales of the Corvair dropped from 220,000 in 1965 to 14,800 in 1968. Production was canceled the following year.

One issue was its rigid steering column which was aimed just right to impale unlucky drivers when the cars were involved in a collision.

Its suspension design resulted in dangerous handling characteristics due to the use of a swing-arm rear suspension. Chevrolet modeled the Corvair after the Volkswagen's rear engine and suspension. Unforeseen however, was

the stress of a heavier car and much more powerful engine on the suspension system. Under hard cornering, the inside rear wheel had a tendency to “tuck” with little tire surface area touching the road. If this happened, the car became uncontrollable. Cars would spin-out or roll over when the suspension gave out in a turn.

However, there was much to like about the Corvair. Its styling was crisp and clean with a sporting look not seen on other American compacts. The front end was distinctive and fresh and the car’s lines were taut and athletic.

Later Corvairs, with improved suspensions, offered engaging driving dynamics with improved handling that made them fun to drive in corners. Several engines and trim levels were offered including a turbocharged option that could do a quarter mile in the 13-second range.

Chevrolet took a risk in making the Corvair and, even with its flaws, showed the American car industry was willing to step outside its comfort zone and create a distinctive new class of cars.

Although a large group of admirers continued to praise the car, over the cynics’ criticism, the Corvair became the car world’s most successful failure.

Sources: <http://www.classiccardatabase.com/specs.php?series=6466&year=1964&model=30343>

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