

Under the Hood Oct 2022

Many of those that went on the Brothers Collection tour also visited the Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum. We toured the two main buildings: Aircraft and Rockets/Space. Of course, we all arrived in Corvettes and many of us were wearing Corvette shirts/jackets/hats, so it was pretty obvious that we were a Corvette club. When we were in the Space collection, I asked the docent if he knew that many of the astronauts were given Corvettes by General Motors. The docent had never heard that story and I would hope that they would do a bit of research and be able to offer those details, as I think it makes the astronauts seem a bit more human. During those first space flights and up to the last moon landing, all astronauts were recognized as daring heroes. Ed Cole of GM recognized the positive exposure that would exist if these astronauts were seen driving Chevrolets. In conjunction with a Florida dealer the astronauts were offered a one-year lease of any Chevrolet for the grand cost of \$1. Since the astronauts were definitely daring is it any wonder that many of them chose to drive a Corvette? James Lovell, commander of Apollo 13, apparently had three different Corvettes. After the lease period, the Corvettes were returned to the dealer and basically sold to the public as used cars. There are several Corvette collectors that have been searching out the astronaut driven Corvettes to add to their collections and perhaps to flip. At the 2022 Barrett Jackson Scottsdale auction Allan Sheppard's 1968 Corvette was on the auction block. This was a white with brown leather, 427/4 speed convertible. The car had plenty of scratches and stains. On the rear bumper was a rectangular spot that looked like there was no chrome. Was a NASA parking pass glued to the bumper? The Corvette sold for \$280K and including the 10% buyer premium, the buyer paid \$308K. Will the Corvette be left as is as a survivor or will it get a new restoration? You be the judge over whether that seems like a lot of money for a car that was driven for a year by an astronaut and then has probably had multiple owners over the next 50+ years.

Autocross as a gateway drug? SCCA has always treated autocross, or Solo 2, as the gateway to club racing. Those of us that autocross often repeat that autocross is a gateway drug to the much more expensive forms of automotive competition. Famed 60s and 70s driver John Greenwood certainly followed that example. In 1968 he got his start by winning an autocross. He then participated in a driving school and was soon involved in club racing. Two years later he won his first SCCA A Production championship with his C3 Corvette. He repeated the A Production championship in 1971. He became well known for his stars and stripes paint schemes. By 1974 Greenwood had introduced his IMSA "out of the world" wide body Corvette with super wide rear fenders and huge tires. By now he had a different paint layout, but it still featured the stars and stripes. Greenwood soon had started his own racing parts business. For \$4,500 you could buy an A Production racing chassis. For \$5,500 he offered a GT chassis that was complete with a full safety cage and so complete that it even had a windshield wiper motor. For another \$1,500 you could add a wide body Corvette body shell. I believe Greenwood started the extreme wide body look, but there were soon copies. GM got some help from a major shop to build the Chevrolet Monza into a major racer. Although the Monza was a decent small grocery getter, GM had it converted into an IMSA racer with a tube frame, belching fire 350 V8 and again those huge fender flares and tires. Al Hobert had back-to-back championships with his IMSA Monza in 1976 and 77.

Before long we could see customized Monzas on the street with wide body kits, but most without the 350 V8. Locally, there is a car collection near Fisherman's Terminal that has at least one Greenwood wide body C3 in the collection.