

Tales of a Weekend Warrior



Paul Reinhart's Corvette shows battle scars at a Cal-Club event in '62.



PHOTO JULIAN VEDVICH



WITHOUT FANFARE, DRIVERS LIKE PAUL REINHART RACED AGAINST THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS AND SHOWED THE WAY FOR THE LIMITED BUDGET RACER.

BY Tom Madigan



Reinhart raced as a novice in 1960, here rounding a turn at the Sacramento County Fairgrounds.

PHOTO PAUL REINHART COLLECTION

By the late 1950s and early '60s, America was beginning to warm to the idea of professional sports car road racing on a serious level; this was especially true in California. This is not to say that sports car racing had not taken a foothold around the country; after all, nearly 100,000 spectators had jammed Golden Gate Park in San Francisco to witness SCCA races in 1952 and racing through Watkins Glen, N.Y. experienced equal enthusiasm from the public. National magazines like *Road & Track* grew in popularity by the month and by the end of 1957, Southern California sported two purpose-built road courses.

The first was Willow Springs, built in 1954 and located near the desert oasis of Rosamond, California, and in 1957 an expansive road course was constructed just outside the city of Riverside. During this period there was a considerable leap forward in sports car racing machines and their performance. Competitors now drove Ferrari, Maserati, Cooper, Porsche, Jaguar and a new breed of Specials. Famed Indianapolis car builders Troutman-Barnes, Frank Kurtis and speed king Mickey Thompson-built Specials powered by domestic V8 engines. American drivers like Phil Hill, Dan Gurney, Carroll Shelby, Richie Ginther, Chuck Daigh and Lance Reventlow began gaining international recognition. Old school oval track racers, who once called sports car drivers "tea cuppers," were also now driving road courses and bringing with them thousands of new fans.

None of this was lost on Detroit, by this time supporting stock car racing (after the American Manufacturers Association racing ban June 6, 1957, to a more limited degree), although when it came to sports cars the only viable domestic candidate was the Corvette, that is, until Carroll Shelby arrived on the scene with his newly created Cobra in 1962. Weighing in at 1000 lb. less than the Corvette, fitted with disc brakes and a

260cid engine against the Corvette's 327, the Cobra was an instant contender and a serious threat to the all-new Sting Ray, thanks to its favorable power-to-weight ratio.

The stage was set. On October 13, 1962, the SCCA held an Invitational 3-Hour Enduro as part of the 5th Annual L.A. Times GP weekend. A lone Cobra would go up against four new race-prepped Sting Rays equipped with the \$1818.45 Z06 option intended specifically for racing. Dave MacDonald, Bob Bondurant, Doug Hooper and Jerry Grant would race the Corvettes. Bill Krause drove Shelby's Cobra. All the pre-race hype went down the drain when the Cobra broke a rear hub carrier and retired, leaving the four Corvettes to overcome brake and suspension issues. However, the Cobra had shown what was in store for the Corvettes while it was running. In the end, Doug Hooper in the Mickey Thompson-owned Z06 won the race.

So, how does the 1962 Cobra/Corvette Riverside shootout play a role in this story? Standing in the wings was a Corvette racer named Paul Reinhart. A weekend warrior who had been racing a '57 model, Reinhart was scheduled to take delivery of the fifth production Z06-equipped Sting Ray but the car hadn't arrived in time for Riverside, so he ran his '57, which broke in practice. He watched the race from the grandstands sitting next to the legendary Corvette engineer Zora Arkus-Duntov, both of whom were blown away by the potential shown in the Cobra.

"No doubt about it," remembers Reinhart. "With a new Z06 on order, I was worried."

Speed Calls

Paul Reinhart's racing interests began in the early 1950s. Born in Iowa in 1929, Reinhart raced a '35 Ford for one

PHOTO PETE BIRD



season at Iowa short tracks before going into the military in 1950. Stationed in California for four years, he settled in the northern portion of the state after his discharge. In time he became a partner in a Union 76 service station and garage. By 1957, Paul had resumed his interest in racing and decided to invest in a new Corvette, waiting until the 4-speed was introduced before taking delivery. The Corvette was used as a daily driver until early 1960. Reinhart could no longer resist the urge to compete and he tells about the conversion to a race car.

Back in the day, the weekend warrior could go racing on a budget, with the help of a few friends.

"It didn't take much; a roll bar, seat belts, new shocks and recapped tires and you were ready. I did make the car a real eye catcher by painting it bright orange and purple, the official colors of Union Oil 76."

Paul continues, "I joined the SCCA, went through their driving school, slapped yellow stripes (novice) on the rear bumper and ran three local events before being allowed to race regional races. I stayed in Northern California running tracks like Stockton, Vacaville, Cotati and Sacramento. I got my first major win in September of 1960 at Cotati Raceway. The joke was that I started eighth with seven other Corvettes in front of me.

Somehow, all seven cars either blew an engine or crashed and handed me the victory. For me, the big deal about winning was I got to kiss the movie actress, Jayne Mansfield who was the trophy queen. I ended the season by being awarded Rookie of the Year."

During the 1961 season and leading up to the 1962 Z06 Riverside clash, Reinhart got very serious about racing and branched out from Northern California to Salt Lake City, Seattle, Tucson and Southern California. Reinhart posted 26 victories and won the B-Production SCCA Divisional Championship both years.

As mentioned, Reinhart became the fifth driver to run the new Z06 Corvette. Reinhart says, "I picked up my Z06 in St.

By 1962, Reinhart had won two SCCA divisional championships in his '57 Corvette.

Louis and drove it back to California. I was supposed to run the following weekend but by the time I got the car home, I was forced to hold off until November. When I finally ran the car I quickly discovered that the brakes were junk and the suspension system was suspect, so Chevrolet sent out a crate filled with parts to cure the problems—new brakes and suspension parts, new heat-treated u-joints and 36-gallon fuel tanks.

"By the start of the 1963 season the handwriting was on the wall and at the first race in February, the Cobras killed us. Z06 drivers could run with the Cobras for a while then they would just blow us off. I ended up winning one race where the Cobra team didn't show up. But during the rest of the season I never finished better

than second. Things got so bad that Shelby sent each of the Z06 drivers a snakebite kit as a gag. Chevrolet didn't think it was funny. To make matters worse, long-time Corvette pilots Dave MacDonald and Bob Bondurant began racing Cobras. Their defection hurt all of the Corvette guys because they were the two drivers who could have beaten the Cobras out west."

In reality, the Z06 did not live up to its press clippings when it came to racing with the Cobras and Reinhart struggled to keep up the pace throughout the 1963 season. He discovered later in his career, that the Z06 drivers in the east, like Dr. Dick Thompson and Don Yenko were getting more factory help than the West Coast racers and they in turn did better against the Cobras. As Reinhart puts it, "Getting beat all the time was not in my nature so I gave up and decided to move on. I sold



Reinhart moved to the big leagues with his purchase of a Huffaker Genie Mk8 in 1963.



PHOTO ACTION PHOTO SERVICE

my Z06 for about \$3000. I went looking for a new race car and with my background I wanted something using a Chevy small block. It was the one engine I knew I could maintain on my own."

A Real Race Car

The move that Reinhart made was massive by comparison to his previous efforts advancing his learning curve from production-based machines to a real race car. Reinhart says, "I bought a BMC Genie Mark 8 from Joe Huffaker in San Rafael, California. I had no big secret about my choice; I just liked the looks of the car. The original Genie was a 2.0-liter race car but Joe had modified the Genie chassis

to accept the small block Chevy. Initially the car had been built for Pedro Rodriguez and was the Genie fitted with a Chevy. There had been a couple of Mark 8 models using the Oldsmobile F-85 aluminum block engine, but not a Chevy. There was not much involved in preparation. The engine was a stock 327cid (360hp) equipped with factory fuel injection; basically it was a crate motor. All I had to do was give the engine a tune-up and I was ready to race."

Reinhart ran the Genie for the first time at an amateur race held in the parking lot of Candlestick Park in San Francisco. Although the race was nothing more than an exercise in novice enthusiasm, it did give Reinhart an opportunity to work the bugs out of the car and get used to handling a rear-engine machine.

The move from non-professional to the big leagues came when Reinhart traveled to Kent, Washington for a USRRC race over the September 28-29 weekend. Reinhart qualified his Genie a surprising seventh, but admitted that as the cars lined up for the feature event, he couldn't believe his eyes. Reinhart remembers, "I was getting ready to race with Dan Gurney, Lloyd Ruby, Bob Holbert, Rodger Ward and Parnelli Jones. They didn't have to worry about me. I blew a head gasket near the end of the race but still finished better than I had hoped. Suddenly it hit me. I was in the big leagues and things were about to become very interesting."

In October of 1963 Reinhart ran the 6th annual L.A. Times Grand Prix at Riverside. It was now sanctioned by the FIA, USAC and the Cal Club, paying more than \$35,000 in prize money. If Paul thought that Kent, Washington, had big names, this race was to prove even

more impressive. Among the legendary drivers filling the starting grid that October included Jim Clark, Roger Penske, Jim Hall, Graham Hill, John Surtees as well as the Indy car racers Lloyd Ruby, Rodger Ward, Parnelli Jones and A.J. Foyt.

Formidable Competition

Racing the world's best with a car powered by a near stock engine did not prove rewarding and by the time the 1964 season rolled around, it was obvious that something had to be done to make the Genie more competitive. The task would be a difficult one because any type of sponsor money was very hard to come by, only the biggest races paid decent prize money and Reinhart built all his own engines and paid all of his

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A head gasket blew at Kent, Washington on one of the Genie's first outings. Reinhart was running a stock Corvette 327 V8.



PHOTO: JULIAN VEDVICH

experience as a driver. Reinhart says, "At the time I would run a lot of amateur races in Northern California as part of a research and development program for Joe Huffaker. I decided to run a race at Vacaville and during practice I lost the crankshaft and blew the engine so I parked the car.

"A friend came up and asked if I wanted to drive his Corvette in the modified race. I agreed and took the car out for practice. About halfway through the session something didn't feel right so I

expenses out of pocket. He was a true weekend warrior.

As Reinhart puts it, "Sponsors were nearly impossible to find and money was tight. I don't believe that the Genie ever ran on new sticker tires. I would buy recaps or get slightly used test tires from the Goodyear crew. For an independent racer trying to run with the big dogs, every race was a struggle."

Throughout the 1964 season Reinhart refined the Mark 8 by flaring the rear fenders to allow for larger wheels and

brought the car into the pits to check. Back then the pit area was just off the track surface with no protective wall or barrier of any kind.

"I climbed out of the car and opened the hood to check the engine. Suddenly I heard a terrible screech of tires and an engine over revving. Instinct told me to start running but I only moved about six feet. The next thing I knew I was flying through the air. A driver in a Genie sports racer just like my Mk 8 had lost control and slammed into the back of the Corvette I was driving, killing the driver and a spectator instantly. Ten other people were injured and one of those hit was a young boy named Willie T. Ribbs. Little Willie was thrown under a parked car; scared and scuffed up he could have very easily been another fatality. The crash caused the SCCA and other racing organizations to institute far-reaching safety regulations including protective barriers around pit areas, with very strict rules about credentials and placing an age limit for children in the pits."

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tires, adding a rear spoiler and doing body modifications to help improve the aero package. During that same year, the new Genie Mark 10 was introduced featuring a much improved suspension system, better engine cooling and smoother overall body work. Still the competition was getting stronger and more sophisticated. The new breed of racing machines carried names like Brabham, Lotus, Cooper, Lola, McLaren and Chaparral. Money was beginning to cause the weekend racer serious problems. Reinhart had to budget; he ran only some of the USRRC events saving money to run the biggest California events at Laguna Seca and Riverside.

Reinhart remarked that he had very mixed emotions during the 1964 season. On one hand, he liked the idea of seeing his name listed with the likes of McLaren, Gurney, Clark, Foyt, Jones, Miles and Unser. On the flip side he realized that money and technology was going to leave the budget racer in the dust.

Reinhart finished 15th at the '64 Riverside event; Parnelli Jones won in a modified Shelby Cooper. There was something else about the 1964 season that Reinhart recalls as being his worst



PHOTO: PAUL REINHART COLLECTION

In SCCA regional events, Reinhart had some wins in the Genie Mk8.

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A Little Help

With the opening of the 1965 season, things started to look up for Reinhart, now getting support from Cochran & Celli, an Oakland, California, Chevrolet dealership. They provided parts, tires and a few sponsorship dollars. Reinhart won a couple of local events, and had a big moment at Laguna Seca. During the race, Reinhart was running third and gaining on Jim Hall and his new Chaparral II. But just as he was about to mount a charge, he was run off the track by a back-marker. It was another rough weekend.

At the 1965 Times GP, Reinhart qualified 20th and again faced an overwhelming line up of "world class" drivers at Riverside. As he sat waiting for the signal to start engines, he gazed around at the competition. Jim Hall and Hap Sharp in two Chaparrals were directly in front while Gurney in a



PHOTO © RANDY RIGGS

Reinhart campaigned his Z06 for many years in vintage racing.

McLaren Ford and Ken Miles in the Ford GT40 waited two rows up. Behind him were John Cannon, David Hobbs, Mario Andretti and Graham Hill. Scattered throughout the field were superstars like, Foyt, Jones, Bondurant, Walt Hansgen, Gurney and Jackie Stewart. Aside from the great drivers, it was apparent that money had taken over sports car racing in a big way and that the "weekend warrior" was in serious danger of becoming extinct.

Reinhart recalls that Sunday in 1965. "As the order to fire the engines was given, I felt the usual thunder behind my head and tasted the exhaust from all the starters. All eyes looked to the starter anticipating the upcoming standing start. With a reflex action I depressed the clutch and probed the selector for first gear. My car sat next to the pit wall with 13 cars behind me. Suddenly I went cold, the slave unit on the clutch had broken and I couldn't get the car in gear. I waved my arm in distress. I couldn't move so officials had to start moving cars out of line in order to get me to safety. At

PHOTO PAUL REINHART COLLECTION



Made famous during the war between the Corvette and the Cobra, Paul Reinhart's No. 6 Z06 could be found in the middle of every fight.



By 1964, Reinhart had modified his Genie with bigger wheels and tires. PHOTO ACTION LTD.

the front of the grid drivers were going crazy wanting to know what the hell was going on. The big-bore engines began to overheat as the field waited for me to be extracted. It was a safe bet to say that I pissed off most of the world's greatest drivers.

"Finally I was out of line and told to start last after the field had taken the green flag; course workers could push me so I could jam the car in gear. As the green flag dropped, the start seemed extremely angry as the drivers vented frustrations at being held up because of me.

As the field reached Turn 2 all hell broke loose; there was a monstrous crash involving six or eight cars—many that had been surrounding me on the starting grid. I missed the whole mess and ended up finishing 15th. After the race several drivers came by to offer some verbal abuse, blaming the delay I created in causing the crash."

In 1966 Reinhart was forced to make major cutbacks in his racing program. He managed to run the Monterey Grand Prix at Laguna Seca but not the Riverside race. Budget constraints forced him to race locally and he was unable to tow back east to contest any of the races that might have paid expenses. Reinhart continued to challenge the odds but it was getting more difficult. He ran a USRRC race at Laguna Seca finishing in the top 20 but many of the biggest names did not run. Armed with a fresh engine and new soft compound Goodyear tires Reinhart ran the Golden Gate Grand Prix at Cotati, starting in the back of the pack and charging to the front. He was running for the lead, challenging George Follmer and Lothar



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Motschenbacher who were in newer equipment. Just as it appeared that he was going to prove that money wasn't everything and that driving talent counted, his engine blew.

From that race on, engine problems became a major issue. It was nearly impossible for a budget racer to get the horsepower needed to run up front with engines built in a backyard shop. The lack of sponsor money forced Reinhart to park the Genie for good and at the Stardust Grand Prix in Las Vegas he took over the driving chores in a modified big-block Corvette. He tried to finish out the season on an up beat, but it just didn't happen.

Before going totally broke trying to run the Genie against the big dogs, Reinhart began the 1968 racing season driving a Camaro for a friend.

But, according to Paul, "After a couple of events, I realized how much I missed the thrill of racing with the greatest drivers in the world and I conceded that if I couldn't race at the top, it was time to move on to other things."

Returning to the Track With an Old Friend

Paul Reinhart returned to racing in 1983 via the world of vintage racing. Reinhart found and bought back his original 1963 Z06 from a guy racing it in autocross. His first intention was to use the Corvette as a fun street machine but instead went vintage racing with it from the mid-'80s to 2000. That year, he sold the car to Tom and Susan Armstrong, who still race it on the vintage circuit. "It went to a good home," Reinhart says.

"Meanwhile, I discovered vintage racing

to be so much fun that I convinced myself to go back to my roots and rebuild my first Corvette. Although I had some parts from my original '57, the reality was that the project ended up being more of a recreation of the original. Still, the car is true to the original right down to the suspension, engine and wild purple and orange paint scheme. I have been racing the Union Oil 76 Corvette since 2002. I still love racing as

much as I did when it all started."

Now nearly 80, Paul Reinhart remains an icon for the weekend warrior and a very familiar face in California vintage events and at the Monterey Historics. In his time, he raced with the biggest names in the world of motorsports without asking or getting any concessions. He never had a big budget and was forced to do most of the mechanical work

on his own. But he always ran as hard as he could and every once in awhile would put a little fear into the hearts of the big names.

When asked about his career, Reinhart sums things up, "Back in those days, there were not many sponsors available so if you didn't have a personal fortune or a deep pocket "sugar daddy" it was nearly impossible to run up front with the big boys. In fact, the weekend warrior became an endangered species during the period I raced the Genie. I had to raise a family and pay my bills. However, I never regretted one single moment. To sit in a race car waiting for the green flag to drop, surrounded by names like Jim Clark, Bruce McLaren, A.J. Foyt, Parnelli Jones, Dan Gurney and Graham Hill is one of the greatest thrills a driver can have. I have those memories and I can enjoy them everyday."



PHOTO D. RANDY RIGGS

A welcome face on the West Coast vintage scene is Reinhart's.



Just like the old days, Reinhart still races his Union 76 solid-axle Corvette.

PHOTO BOB DUNSMORE