

Pair of C2 race cars presented with American Heritage awards at the 2018 NCRS national convention

The NCRS honors two vintage race cars

Jerry Heasley Aug 22, 2018

The highlight of the 2018 NCRS National Convention in Las Vegas this past July was the appearance of a pair of vintage race cars: one a 1964 fuel-injected small-block and one a 1966 big-block 427. Both are owned by Jonathan White of Newton, Massachusetts, and both won American Heritage awards, a great achievement considering the NCRS has handed out just 44 of these awards since they were instituted in 1998.



White was on cloud nine with the wins, as was Joe Scafidi, whose Bowtie Shop in Billerica, Massachusetts, restored both cars. And then there was Gary Gove, who hadn't seen his old ride since the glory days of the 1960s.

When Gove fired up the 427 heavy-duty engine on Thursday July 19, 2018, the deep crackle through unmuffled exhausts filled the convention room at the Southpoint Hotel in Las Vegas as the former race car driver alternatively clutched to rev the 427 in the 1966 coupe, no doubt to bring back deeper memories of races long past.

“At Riverside, we were up against the 427 Cobras. I was doing 170 mph down the back straightaway. The 427 Cobra was doing 183, and he could leave black streaks on the ground,” Gove said. “Those were the days when 427 Corvettes weighing 2,950-3,050 pounds raced against 427 Shelby Cobras that were 800 pounds lighter,” Gove said, in SCCA A Production road racing.

Compared to the Gove ride, which was sponsored by Alan Green Chevrolet in Seattle, the red 1964 was much more of a privateer entry, purchased new by John “Red” Lewis of Manchester, Kentucky. If only Lewis could have been at the show to tell stories.

In 2014, White and Scafidi flew to Kentucky to interview Lewis about his racing exploits in the red car. Yes, a 289 Cobra was lighter and faster on the straights, but Lewis could out drive them, and other makes—including Porsche—in the corners and had numerous wins in his two years racing his red coupe.

At the end of the 1965 season, Lewis bought a Modified car named the Scorpion. He put the engine and transmission out of the 1964 Corvette into the Scorpion and drove it to the Florida Region championship for 1966.

Lewis sold his red Corvette, and the new owner put the car back on the street. Soon, the race history was all but forgotten until White and Scafidi rescued the old race car. Luckily, the original big tank was still there. (see Rare Finds)

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In 1998, the NCRS developed their American Heritage award to recognize “unique Corvettes” that their judging manuals could not accommodate, but which they wanted to recognize and honor. Examples are GM Styling

Cars, GM Experimental Cars and Factory or Vintage Race Cars. Since these Corvettes are a significant part of Corvette history, the NCRS wants to encourage their restoration and preservation. The presence of these cars is an honor for any NCRS show, but the American Heritage award is presented only at a National Convention. White's pair of mid-year racing coupes obviously fell into the category of Vintage Race Cars, not Factory.

Both cars, however, have strong factory racing developed options, starting with NO3, which is the 36 1/2-gallon fuel tank (36 in 1966), filling an obvious need for less pit stops for fuel. Both cars came with the J56 Heavy Duty Brake Equipment. Both cars came with the F41 Special Front/Rear Suspension. Both have four-speed manual transmissions, with the super rare M22 in the '66.

Chevrolet wasn't funding an overt, public racing program, unlike Ford, which had jumped in with both feet in the summer of 1962, funding Carroll Shelby and his Shelby-American company. Instead, Chevrolet provided actual factory option codes for enthusiasts to get out there and race.

Also, Alan Green Chevrolet did finance the 1966 Corvette driven by Gary Gove. Lewis' race car was much more of an enthusiast endeavor, which by 1966 had stepped up to compete against Shelby-American, and moved from small-block 327s to big-block 427s that culminated with the L88.



From left to right are Joe Scafidi (restorer), Gary Gove (driver) and Jonathan White (owner) at the 2018 NCRS National Convention. To their left is the 1966 Corvette race car, and in the background is the 1964 Corvette race car.



Gary Gove came to the NCRS National Convention as a guest of Jonathan White to reunite with his old ride, this '66 Corvette.

The 1966 came factory stock with a 425-horse 427, which is the L72 option. This is a very powerful engine, but Chevrolet needed more to compete against an even more powerful Cobra, that moved from a 289 to a 427. Zora Arkus-Duntov had answered that challenge against the lightweight Cobra with his Grand Sport in 1963. Although he did not fail, Duntov did get shot down by his own company, plus in the final analysis the SCCA ruled the Grand Sport a modified.

Gove told us about “nice help from Chevrolet, Gib Hufstader and Vince Piggins,” both famous names.

Obviously, Alan Green Chevrolet and Gove could call for technical support and parts.

Scafidi, as much a researcher as a restorer, calls the 427 an “HD 427,” with 560 horsepower, 135 horsepower more than the stock 425-horse L72, and “a predecessor to L88.”

“Higher compression – 12:1, heavier-duty rods, special camshaft and improved oiling is what I’m told.”

Scafidi’s research pegs the HD 427 as an “L88 spec, with iron heads,” whereas L88 had aluminum heads.

The Alan Green-sponsored 1966 Corvette went through “three engines alone racing in 1966,” so the original block and heads were long gone when Jonathan White bought the car.

After one racing season, Alan Green Chevrolet sold the 1966 to racer Dale Samuelson, who Scafidi said “was very competitive” and “was Northeast Champion a few years.” He drove the Corvette into the late 1970s.

Samuelson’s son held onto the 1966 for many years, until he finally decided on a restoration; sadly, a restoration back to stock. Luckily, about halfway through the restoration he sold the coupe to a high-performance muscle car dealer in the Seattle area.

One of Scafidi’s friends asked him if he was interested in “another race car.” Jonathan White had already purchased the Red Lewis 1964 coupe, which Scafidi restored. Scafidi asked White about the 1966. White was interested in a second mid-year, and Scafidi had another race car project, which is what he does.

The Alan Green name was one that both Scafidi and White respected for that dealership’s racing heritage, which went back to the ’57 fuelies, the very first 1963 Z06 race cars, the Cheetah, a hand built, Bill Thomas modified, and the mid-years of the 1960s.

The yellow 1966, unlike the 1964, never went into hiding. It was never a barn find. In contrast, the second owner of the 1964 put the car back to stock and it bounced around the country as a street car until recently. Today, both are restored back to their racing roots, thanks to the enthusiasm of Jonathan White and restorer Joe Scafidi.



At the start of the '64 racing season, "Red" Lewis did not have his long-distance racing license, and he called on GC Spencer and Cale Yarborough for the 1964 Daytona Continental and the 1964 American Challenge Cup at Daytona.



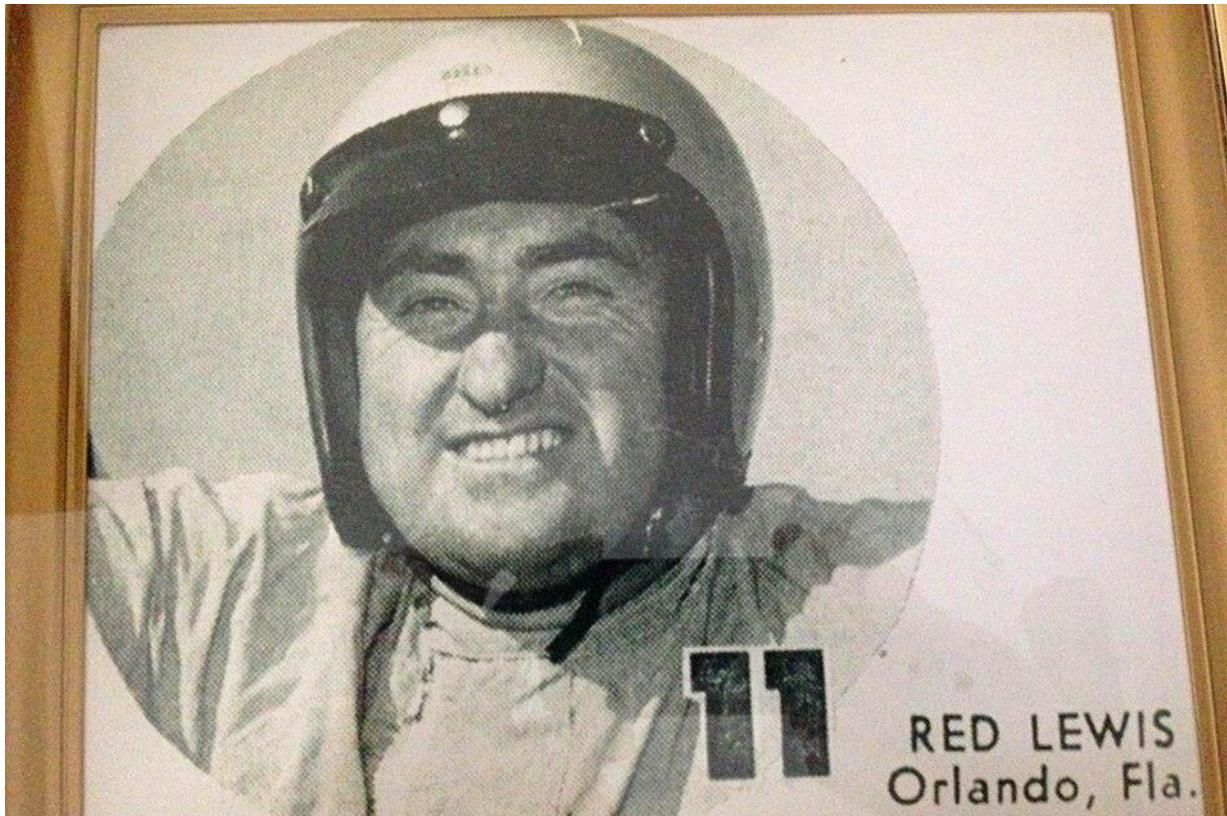
Lewis ordered this 1964 Corvette coupe with the NO3 big tank, F41 suspension and fuel injection.



"Somebody" (Lewis doesn't recall who) called to ask him if he was going racing with the car. He said yes.



Before the car was built in late 1963, Chevrolet suggested (after they received the order) that since he was going to Daytona to race the car, to add heavy-duty brakes and radio delete, which he followed.



“Red” Lewis, seen here in a vintage photo, raced his 1964 Corvette for two seasons with great success. Jonathan White’s interviews revealed that Lewis never crashed or even scratched the car in a race.



The original roll bar was gone, but restorer Joe Scafidi could see the original roll bar mounts.



The fuel-injected 327 appears in its stock, 375-horsepower tune for racing.



The second owner that restored it back to its street configuration had changed the interior to black. However, the trim tag denoted white, which Scafidi put back.



The four-speed shifted for two years in racing in its stock configuration.



Alan Green Chevrolet, a well-known high-performance Corvette dealer on the West Coast, campaigned this '66 coupe with Gary Gove driving. The highlight of the 2018 NCRS Convention for us was listening to Gary Gove tell racing stories of the '66 season in this 427 Corvette. Even the special brakes from Chevrolet were not enough.



Gove drove the '66 in the "run-offs," which were shortened to two-three laps when Tom Gerber drove a Mustang into the pit wall.



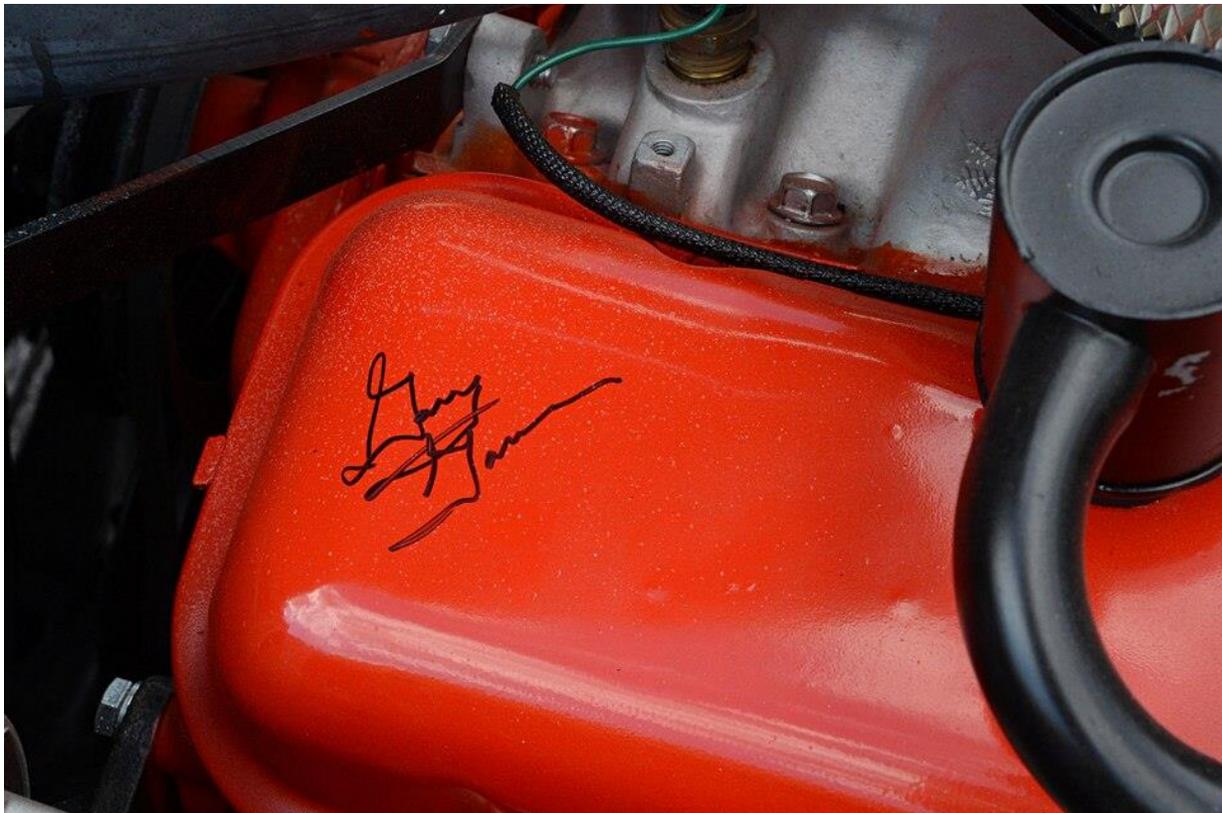
Fender emblems are stock.



The bulge in the '66 hood is stock, but the sides are open for better airflow.



Alan Green pulled a 425-horse 427 (L72) off the lot to go racing. Joe Scafidi said, "Chevrolet sent them one of the HD 427 engines," which featured "12:1 compression ratio, heavy-duty rods, special camshaft and improved oiling."



Gary Gove signed the valve cover.



The interior, except for the roll bar and shoulder harness, is very stock looking.



It's hard to imagine racing with the thin steering wheel.



The prestigious American Heritage award from the NCRS features a photo the 1964 Corvette race car.



The prestigious American Heritage award for the 1966 Corvette race car.

Photography by Jerry Heasley