

# CHAPTER ONE



## THE EARLY YEARS 1953 to 1962

*Daytona Speed Week, 1956. The flagman prepares Betty Skelton's Corvette for its record attempt.  
[Photo: Used with permission of GM Media Archives.]*

*Left: Another view of one of the three 1956 Corvettes at the Daytona Speed Week in February 1956.  
[Photo: Used with permission of GM Media Archives.]*

these more powerful engines, Duntov reached over 150mph on the beach at Daytona during January in 1956. The Standing Mile record was taken at 89.363mph. John Fitch drove an SR Corvette (Sports Racing) and set the Flying Mile record at 145.543mph.

From 1956, the production Corvette, as the V8 powered sports/GT car that we know today, was up and running. It should be said that the 1956-57 single-headlight Corvette is a

*Below: Betty Skelton in the "Production" Corvette pace car during the 1956 Daytona Speed Week.  
[Photo: Used with permission of GM Media Archives.]*



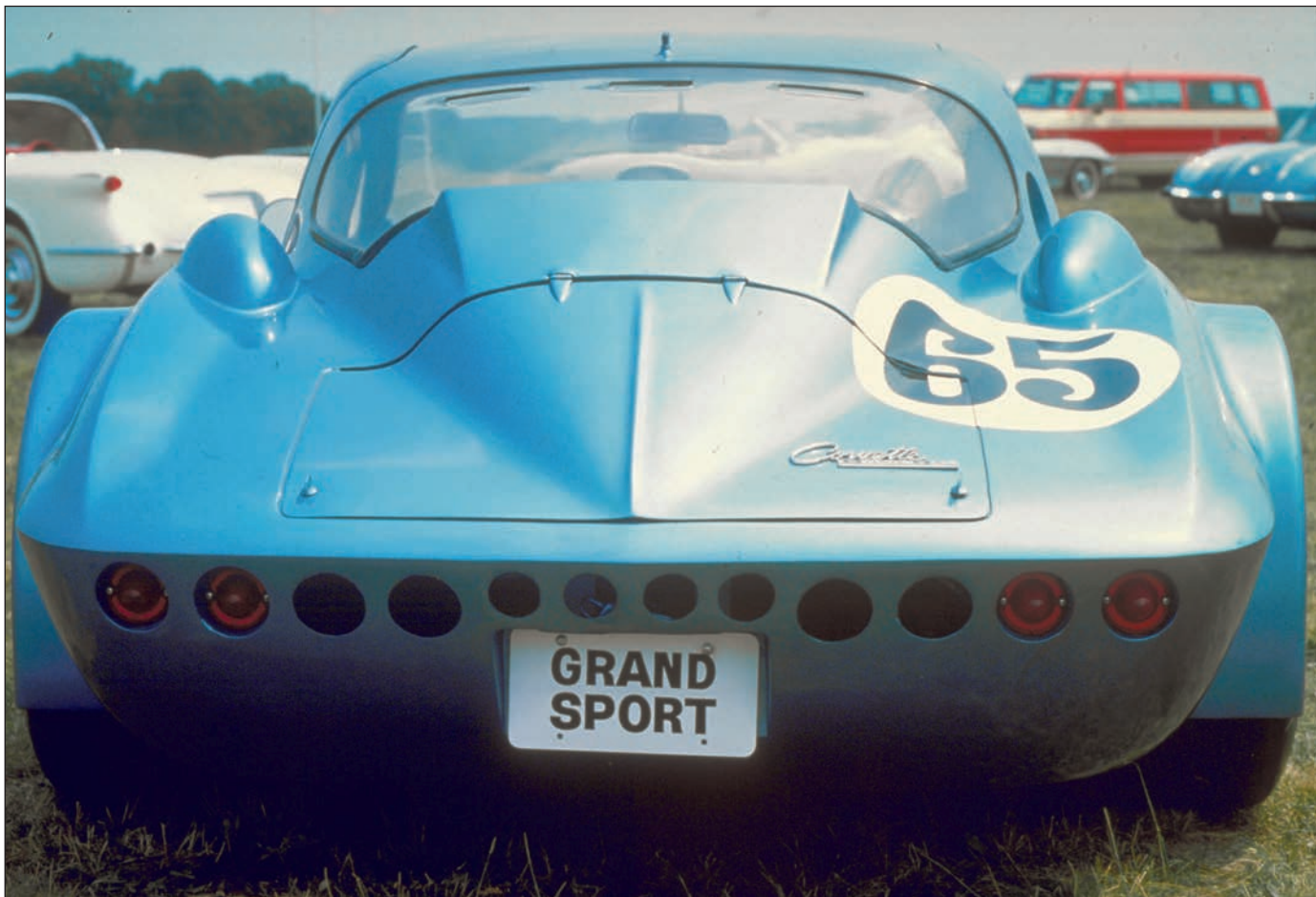


*Zora Arkus-Duntov could not help but try to develop cars for GM to race with. Here he is with Cerv-1, a single-seater that he designed and had built in 1960. [Photo: Used with permission of GM Media Archives.]*

beat it by twenty laps. On top of this superb result, the SR-2 finished in 16th place, winning the Modified Production class. Duntov's "Sebring SS" had been tried in practice by such luminaries as Juan Manuel Fangio and Stirling Moss who commented favorably but in the race proper, it lasted just twenty three laps, before dropping out with suspension problems.

The gestation and reasoning behind this "Sports-prototype" SS are interesting and bear recounting. Duntov had quickly realized that, whilst the "standard" Corvette (with a little tuning help!) was a good bet in the long-distance endurance races in the GT class, there was no way in which it could be competitive with, say, a Jaguar D type or a Ferrari 290, 335S or Maserati 300S.

We need to backtrack a little. Harley Earl, GM's Chief Stylist, had bought a Jaguar D Type in the late spring of 1956. His idea was to substitute a Chevrolet V8 for the Jaguar straight six engine and, together with some styling modifications (including swapping it over



*Opportunity lost. The 1963 Corvette Grand Sport. If only Chevrolet's management had allowed them to be built as a run of the 125 planned, it is doubtful if Ferrari's famed GTO would have beaten them. [Photo: 2001 General Motors Corporation. Used with permission of GM Media Archives.]*

to be built in 1963, in order to homologate them into the Production GT car class. At the last moment, Chevrolet management realized that this Grand Sport would violate their "no racing" agreement with the other major factories and the project was cancelled, after which just five cars were built from the parts already amassed. And what a car!

Although the basic chassis layout was still a "ladder" frame, round, seamless steel tubing instead of the more usual rectangular steel tubing was used. This gave greater strength than the normal production chassis. Whilst following the production car in its suspension layout, every item was hand-made to lighten it and increase its durability. The Grand Sport



## 1953

**Engine:**

Overhead-valve cast-iron six, 235.5 cid, bore and stroke 3.56 x 3.93 ins, compression ratio 8:1, 150bhp @4,200rpm.

**Chassis:**

Box-section ladder-type. IFS via coil springs and wishbones, live rear axle with leaf springs. Wheelbase 102in, overall length 167 ins, track 57/59in front/rear, tires 6.70 x 15in. Chassis numbers: E53F001001 through E53F001300. 300 built.

**Transmission:**

Standard Powerglide two-speed automatic with floor shift.

**Options:**

Signal-seeking AM radio \$145, heater-demister \$91, whitewall tires \$25.

## 1954

**Engine:**

As per 1953; new camshaft increased power to 155 bhp in mid-model year.

**Chassis:**

As per 1953. Chassis numbers: E54S001001 through E54S004640. 3,640 built.

**Options:**

As per 1953, plus windshield washer \$12 and parking brake alarm \$6.

## 1955

**Engine:**

As per 1953, but few six-cylinder engines fitted. Most cars used optional (\$134) overhead-valve cast-iron V8, 265cid, bore and stroke 3.75 x 3.00in, CR 8:1, 195bhp @ 5,000rpm.

**Chassis:**

As per 1953. Chassis numbers: VE55S001001 through VE55S001700. 700 built.

**Options:**

As per 1954. Electrical system for V8 cars updated from 6 to 12 volts. 3-speed manual transmission offered for first time. 70-80 cars built with this option.

## 1956

**Engine:**

Overhead-valve cast-iron V8, 265cid, bore and stroke 3.75 x 3.00in, CR 9.25:1. 210bhp @ 5,200rpm (225bhp \$175, 240bhp \$160).

**Chassis:**

Wheelbase 102in, overall length 168in, track 57/59in front/rear, tires 6.70 x 15in. Chassis numbers: E56S001001 through E56S004467. 3,467 built. Note: Major body redesign.

**Transmission:**

Three-speed manual gearbox (Powerglide \$175).

**Options:**

Power top \$100, power windows \$60, windshield washer \$11, detachable hardtop \$200, signal-seeking AM radio \$185, heater-demister \$115, whitewall tires \$25.