

How getting a classic red Corvette can make a guy feel like he's 18 again

A sure sign of spring is when car aficionados take the covers off their cherished vehicles, rev up the engines and spend hours cleaning and polishing them to a sheen before taking that first spring ride.

That's what Darryl Greene of Belgium, president of the Ozaukee Corvette Club, did on one of the few days it wasn't raining last week. His prized red 1984 Corvette coupe with red leather seats and a black targa top was a Valentine's gift from his wife Margaret three years ago.



"I took off the cover and it started right up," he said. "The first time I drove this car with the top off, it immediately took me back to 1968. I was 18 again."

In 1968, Mr. Greene paid \$800 for a red 1960 Corvette convertible. He traded it after a couple years for a GTO muscle car.

"It (the Corvette) didn't have the collector status it has now. Now, it would be worth \$50,000," he said.

It was his dream to own another Corvette someday, something he told his wife repeatedly in the 30 years they were married. But it was too impractical, Mr. Greene said, while they were raising three children and he was climbing the ladder in his marketing career.

Instead, he drove sedate, boring company-leased sedans. One year, he was given a mini-van, something he swore he would never drive, and his family teased him mercilessly, his wife said.

Mrs. Greene would just smile when her husband drove slowly past the Ernie Von Schledorn Chevrolet car lot in Saukville every week, eyeing the Corvettes on display. Actually, he still does that.

When Mr. Greene spotted the 1984 Corvette at a Milwaukee dealership, Mrs. Greene went to see it and agreed it was beautiful and in pristine condition.

She saw how happy her husband was looking at it and said, "It's my Valentine gift to you."

Corvette love

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“It was a very sudden, wonderful surprise,” Mr. Greene said.

Several things factored into her decision — their 24-year-old daughter died the previous year in Tennessee and both were grieving, her husband turned 60 that year and it was close to Valentine’s Day.

It was with love, and perhaps a spiritual nudge from her daughter, that Mrs. Greene bought the car.

“It wasn’t a real thought-out plan,” she said. “I had become hyper-vigilant worrying about something happening to Darryl and our other children. I thought anything can happen to anybody at any moment, so if this is what he really wants, he should have it.

“Of course, material things are ephemeral, but I wanted him to be happy.” Perhaps a little bit of his happiness would rub off on her, she said.

The Corvette, which cost \$12,000, turned out to be more of a gift than either expected when they joined the Ozaukee Corvette Club.

“We became immersed in the culture and met a lot of really fun people,” Mr. Greene said.

At the time, Mrs. Greene didn’t feel like socializing, but she figured if she went once, her husband would be satisfied and she wouldn’t have to go again.

Instead, she ended up becoming the parade chairman, a role she still holds.

“They needed a parade chairperson and I thought I should start becoming more involved and try to have some fun,” Mrs. Greene explained.

It worked, and she’s involved in most club activities. Last year, she won a chili cook-off held with five other Corvette clubs. That meant the Ozaukee club hosted this year’s cook-off and auction, which was held in March, and raised \$2,100 for Family Sharing in Grafton.

Mr. Greene redesigned and maintains the club’s website, composes the monthly newsletter and last year was elected president.

On Saturday, the club will hold its first event of the season — a mystery cruise. Members will line up their Corvettes at 11 a.m. in the parking lot at the Target store in Grafton.

From now through mid-October, members will drive their polished vehicles in area parades, including the Fish Day parade in Port Washington, display them at community events and car shows and go on organized and spontaneous cruises.

The club meets the third Sunday of every month at Flipside Cafe in Grafton, where members talk about their vehicles and how much horsepower the cars have, argue over which generation and year is the best, share photos, offer advice and plan events.

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“People have very strong feelings about different generations. The new one (2014) will be the seventh generation Corvette,” Mr. Greene said.

“Margaret and I like the older models. If we didn’t have this one, we might have one that is older.

“We feel red is really the only true color for a Corvette. Of course, there are a lot of members who don’t agree with us, and you see pretty much all colors.”

But all agree on one thing — the pure joy of driving a Corvette, which Mr. Greene called the only true American sports car.

“Most Corvette owners will tell you they drive their cars because it puts a smile on their faces,” he said.

“Our car is the first generation of its model. It was the best handling car in the world at the time. We have the Z51 option race suspension. We just love it. You’re very involved every second you’re driving the car. You really feel the road, and that’s one of the things we enjoy about it.

“After ’74, they softened the suspension to placate those who want a comfortable ride.”

The speed is intoxicating, as is the sound of the engine.

“It goes from zero to 100 mph like that,” Mr. Greene said with a snap of his finger.

“Most people think you have to be rich to own a Corvette. But you can get a nice one for \$5,000 to \$6,000.”

Mrs. Greene and their children have driven the 1968 Corvette, which has only 40,000 miles on it, but Mr. Greene is usually behind the wheel.

Last year, Mrs. Greene organized the club’s first ladies’ cruise to Kohler. They took country roads, had lunch and did some shopping before returning home to their anxious husbands.

“I was really nervous,” Mrs. Greene said. “I love driving it, but it was the first time I drove alone.”

She loved it.

“I can tell you a lot of men had anxiety,” Mr. Greene said. “It was an exercise in detachment for me.”

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Image Information: THE CHERISHED CORVETTE was polished by Darryl and Margaret Greene in preparation for the Ozaukee Corvette Club's first event of the season, a mystery cruise this Saturday. Photo by Sam Arendt