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THE HI-PERFORMANCE & CUSTOM MONTHLY

magazine

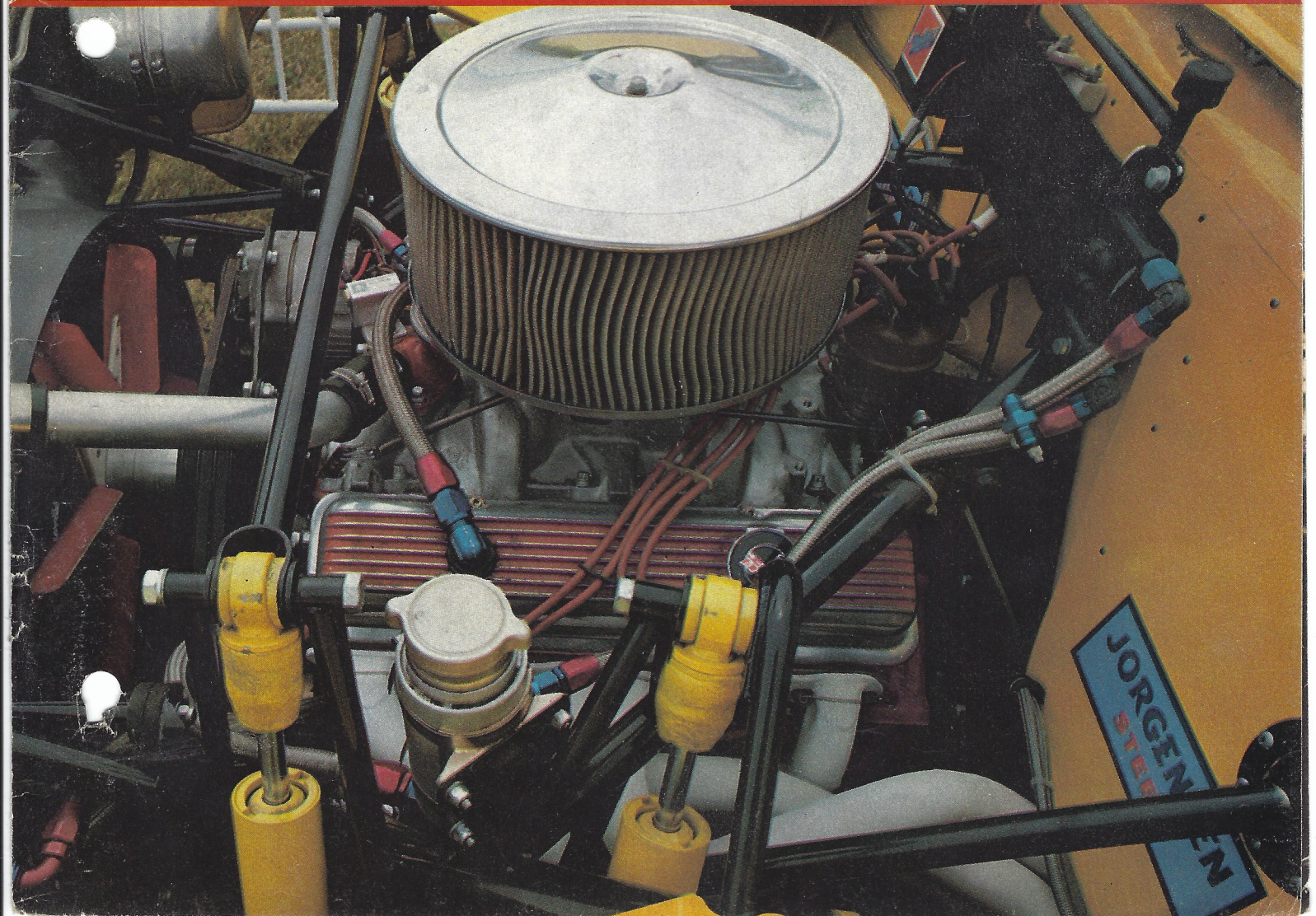
**CORVETTE  
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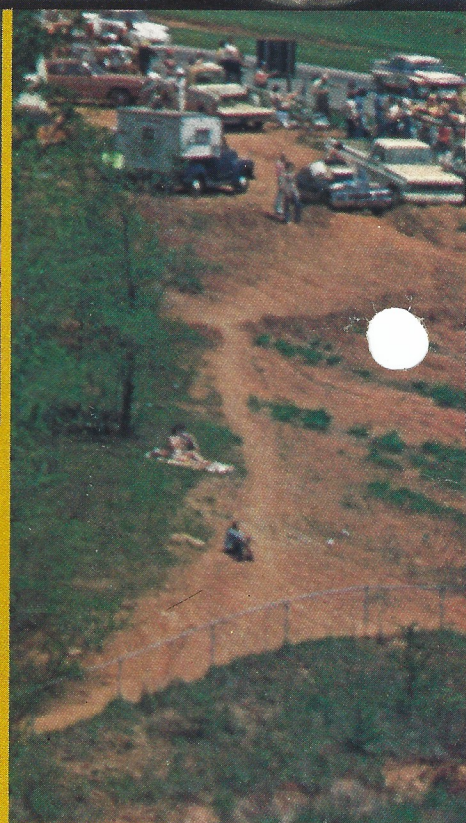


By 1967, the image had already been built. Now it had to be maintained

# CORVETTE RACING HISTORY:

## ROUND 2

BY GARY WITZENBURG



IF YOU were with us last month you'll recall that the mighty Corvette started life in Detroit as a rather mediocre 6-cylinder, two-seat sports car based on sedan components. That was back in 1953. Since then it's matured into a fire-breathing street and competition machine in the capable hands of the engineers at the Warren, Mich., Chevrolet Engineering center and a host of first-class drivers and car builders.

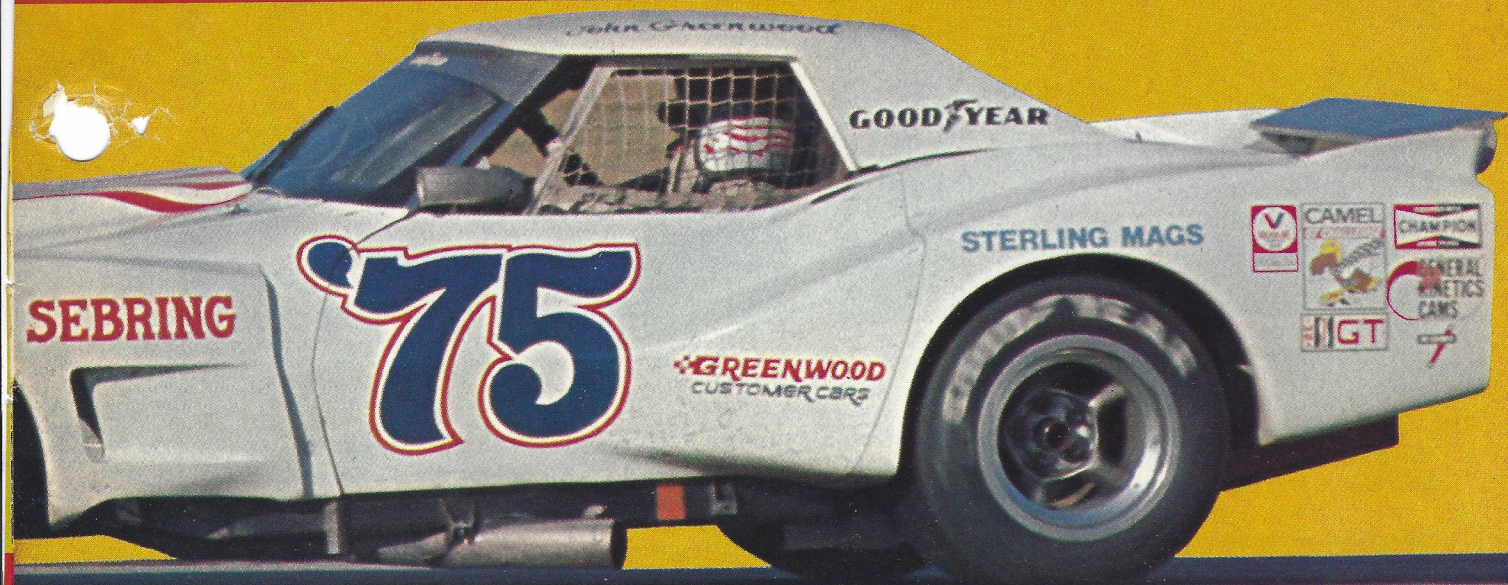
Just three years after its introduction the "fiberglass flyer" had already begun to dominate its class in international endurance racing and was well on its way to a long string of divisional and national titles in SCCA amateur competition. In the 11 years between the 1956 and 1967 racing seasons, the Corvette racked up no less than 10 class wins in such prestigious contests as the Daytona 24-Hour and the Sebring 12-Hour endurance contests, plus 12 SCCA National Championships in five different classes.

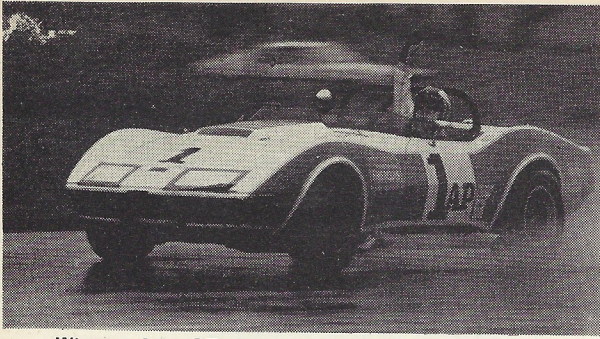
WITH THE INTRODUCTION of the sleek and sexy new '68 Vette came some additional suspension changes and wider tires, which combined to improve the street version's skidpad performance from the previous 0.75, to 0.84 Gs lateral acceleration — a fairly remarkable performance for a mass-production vehicle. And (are you ready?) the convertible was up to \$4,320, while the coupe listed for all of \$4,636.

According to Karl Ludvigsen in *Corvette, America's Star Spangled Sports Car, The Complete History*, a car prepared for the February, 1968, Daytona 24-Hour was clocked at 4.2 sec. — 0-60 mph, 8.0 sec. — 0-100 and 17.0 sec. — 0-140. With that kind of

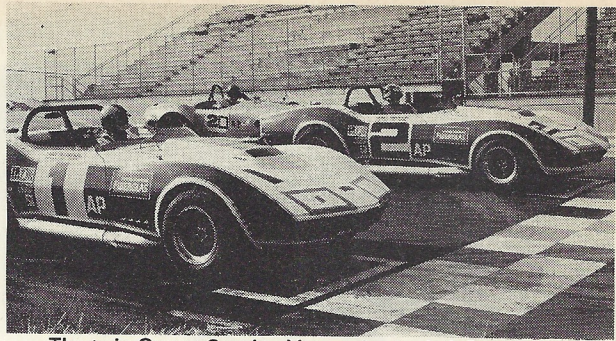


Gary Witzenburg is a freelance writer, photographer, and Corvette expert extraordinaire. His first installment on the history of the road racing Corvettes appeared in the September, 1975 issue of CARS.





Winner of the GT class at the 24-hour Daytona race in 1970 was the Thompson-Mahler Owens-Corning entry.



The twin Owens-Corning Vettes also took A-Production win at Watkins Glen in the August, 1969 event.

performance from the special L-88 427 CID engine, plus the new suspension refinements, the '68 Vette couldn't help but be an exciting competitor at Daytona.

Actor James Garner, who had been bitten by the racing bug while filming Grand Prix in 1966, entered the first three '68s under his American International Racing (A.I.R.) banner. These three were thought to be the only "new" racing Corvettes in existence, but a pair of Sunray DX-sponsored cars also turned up for the event. Tony DeLorenzo and Jerry Thompson had laboriously pieced together a '68 body on a year-old race-prepared chassis, and Don Yenke had built his car from a show-oom-new one. After 24-Hours of racing, a third Sunray DX car, a '67 driven by Jerry Grant and Dave Morgan took the class win and finished a creditable 10th overall.

A month later at Sebring, the A.I.R. cars were absent, but the Sunray team finished a trio of '68 Corvettes, and the Dave Morgan/Hap Sharp car scored a triumphant 6th overall along with their class victory — best yet for a Vette in international-class competition. On the amateur front the new Corvette wrested two (of seven) SCCA divisional A-Production class titles from the Shelby Ford-powered Cobras, plus three in the B-P category — but not the coveted National Championships. DeLorenzo managed a close 2nd in the big-bore race, and his Owens-Corning teammate, Jerry Thompson, did the same with the small-block car in B-P.

The '69 model got a stiffer frame and other improvements for better handling, plus a dynamite new engine option designated the ZL-1. Developed jointly by Chevrolet and McLaren Engineering for the all-conquering McLaren CanAm Championship sports cars, the ZL-1 featured an aluminum block and a special dry-sump oil pan — not to mention a \$3,000 price tag over and above the iron-block L-88. It was also 200 lbs. lighter than the L-88, which considerably improved the weight distribution in the heavy front-engine sports car.

Both 427s also got a number of refinements including better porting, larger (1.88-in.) exhaust valves, a higher lift, shorter duration cam and "open chamber" heads with 12.5-to-1 compression. The aluminum ZL-1 was the most incredibly powerful engine ever offered for sale to the public in a Chevrolet car — or possibly any other. With headers and a single Holley 4-bbl. carb, it developed 585 gross hp at 6,600 rpm.

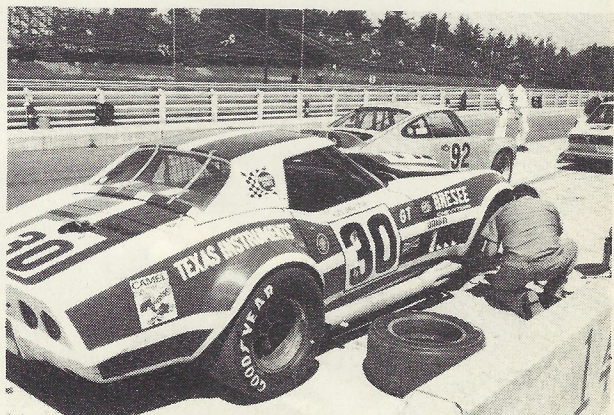
A 2,900 lb. road race-prepared ZL-1 Corvette with a 3.70:1 rear axle could turn a quarter mile in 12.1 seconds at 116 mph. A drag race-prepared version with a special turbo-hydrumatic transmission and 4.88:1 gearing did 127 mph in 11.0 seconds. And dropping the automatic into drive from neutral at the line yielded a slightly more amazing 130 mph and a 10.89 et. These racing ZL-1s also got a special lightweight hood with a higher-than-stock "power bump" and a fresh-air intake at the rear to take advantage of the high-pressure area at the base of the windshield.

While Corvettes again won their class at both Daytona and the Watkins Glen 6-Hour, the Gimondo/Trembley/Drolet/Belperch car finishing 16th overall at Daytona and the DeLorenzo/Lang machine placing an excellent 7th at the Glen, they did not take the prize at Sebring. There the Vette piloted by Dick Lang and Chevy engineer Gib Hufstader managed a 14th overall finish but came in only 4th in the GT class.

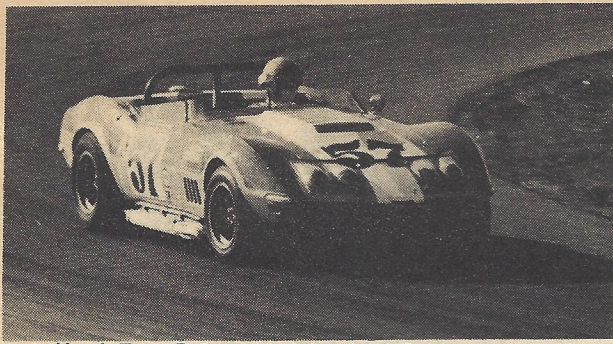
But when the amateur racers assembled at Daytona in the fall for the SCCA National Championship "runoffs," the Chevy contingent was ready for the Cobras. The O-C Fiberglas team of DeLorenzo and Thompson, which had dominated all 11 Central Division races it had entered, proceeded to walk off with the first A-P crown for Corvette since Dr. Dick Thompson's victory in 1962. Jerry Thompson (no relation to Dr. Dick, the "flying dentist") became the National Champ after DeLorenzo fell back with mechanical ills. Then Allan Barker made it a double whammy with the first of what would become four straight B-P National Championships for him. The last non-Cobra title in the small-block class had been won by Frank Dominianni in 1964.

Meanwhile, Henri Greder and other tenacious European drivers were furthering the Corvette reputation on the Continent in spite of a lot of bad luck and mechanical problems. Greder usually started from the pole position only to have his car break under him after many gruelling hours of racing. But it didn't break at LeMans during the Tour de France, where Greder crossed the line a stellar 2nd overall.

With the mighty ZL-1 firmly entrenched in the A-P winner's circle, the wizards of Warren turned some of their attention to the small-block class. The result was the LT-1, a very trick high-rpm 350 with the same big Holley carb and 2½-inch exhaust system as the 427s. It also got a transistorized ignition for reliable operation at 6500-plus rpm. The street LT-1 in the '70 Vette was



Alex Davidson's big-block endurance racing Corvette gets brake check during practice for '74 Watkins Glen.



Here's Tony DeLorenzo doing the A-Production number again at Indianapolis Raceway Park in 1968.

capable of 100-plus mph quarter miles and low 14-second ets.

At the same time, the big mill was receiving its own massaging as the LS-7 was created. But this 454 CID stormer made the magazines and the "heavy duty" catalogue but never the assembly line, as the LS-7 was killed in its incubation period by a GM anti-high-horsepower move combined with a concerted campaign to unload low-volume, low-profit options.

Undaunted, the Owens-Corning team started its season in the best possible way — with GT class wins in both of the country's major long-distance races, the Thompson/Mahler car scoring a very impressive 6th overall at Daytona and the DeLorenzo/Lang entry finishing 10th at Sebring. But the result of spreading themselves too thin (with a pair of Camaros in the TransAm pro sedan series) cost the team its divisional and its national SCCA amateur titles. Rising star John Greenwood stole both crowns to culminate an intense two-year rivalry between the two suburban Detroit-based teams. Thompson even set the fastest race lap in a valiant effort to defend his national championship at Road Atlanta, but Greenwood hung on for the A-P win while Allan Barker was busy taking his second B-P title.

**T**WO THINGS OCCURRED early in 1971 that would materially affect the future of "production car" racing in the U.S. — neither of them good for the fiberglass flyer. First, GM president Ed Cole decreed that, beginning with the '71 model year, all GM cars would be built to run on 91 octane gasoline in anticipation of the catalytic converters and unleaded fuels that were almost sure to come.

This meant that the "heavy duty" Corvette power plant suddenly became the 9.0-to-1 compression ratio 425 bhp LS-6 — or 325 hp using the SAE net rating system also insisted upon by Cole. The 350 CID LT-1

dropped to 330 bhp gross (275 net) with the low-compression treatment. Not too disastrous, but as we all know the worst was still around the corner.

Second, the fledgling International Motor Sports Association (IMSA) began staging road races for "GT" cars. These events picked up Camel cigarette sponsorship the following year and have matured and grown ever since into a premier professional series crossing the nation with first-rate sedan and sports car competition — and have been almost totally dominated by Porsche Carreras since 1973.

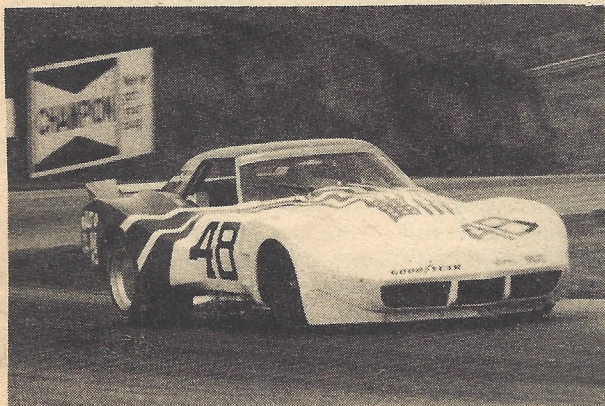
But the Corvettes nevertheless enjoyed a stellar season in '71. John Greenwood took his second straight A-P championship at Road Atlanta, icing a season which had included endurance wins at both Sebring (7th overall, with entertainer Dick Smothers co-driving) and Watkins Glen (5th overall, with Bob Johnson). Tony DeLorenzo co-drove with Don Yenke and John Mahler to win the Daytona 24-Hour, setting the all-time Corvette mark for international competition in this country at 4th overall in the process, and Allan Barker knocked off his third straight SCCA B-P title. Capping the year, Dave Heinz drove his rebel flat-striped Corvette (the red-neck answer to Greenwood's red-white-and-blue paint design) to victories in three of the six 1971 IMSA GT events, teamed with Don Yenke for one long-distance event and with Or Constanzo for another.

The next year brought the endurance racing tire war as Greenwood picked up a lucrative deal with B.F. Goodrich to run on that company's *street* radials, and Goodyear countered with some *racing* radial-ply slicks developed primarily to blow upstart BFG out of the tub. Of course both companies benefitted from the product exposure and learned a great deal about radial tires in the process.

Thompson and DeLorenzo lost their Owens-Corning Fiberglas sponsorship and were co-driving other peoples' cars while campaigning a pair of privately-backed Mustangs in the TransAm series. But the Goodyear-shod team of Dave Heinz and Bob Johnson took both Daytona and Sebring contests with 8th and 4th overall placings, respectively — the 4th at Sebring matching the best-ever Corvette finish achieved by the DeLorenzo/Yenke/Mahler effort at Daytona the year before.

While the Corvettes were still dominant in the amateur ranks (Jerry Hansen and Allan Barker walked away with the A-P and B-P crowns at Atlanta that year), the marque was already beginning to fade in IMSA Camel GT competition. Only three of 10 IMSA races in '72 produced a Vette in the winner's circle: Charlie Kemp

(Continued on page 73)



John Greenwood's "Batmobile" Corvette in its first appearance at Road Atlanta early in 1974 season.



The 1975 SCCA TransAm Series features professional events for big-bore fields like this one at Road America.

## CORVETTE HISTORY

(Continued from page 39)

and Dr. Wilbur Pickett teamed for one at Daytona, Denny Long persevered for one at Donnybrooke in Minnesota and Pickett won solo at Talladega, Alabama.

In '73 the SCCA gave up on "sedan" racing and changed the TransAm format to emulate the ever-popular IMSA series. John Greenwood scored the only two TransAm Corvette wins (of six races) and there were no Vette victories in the Camel GT — including the Sebring 12-Hour, which IMSA had incorporated as part of its series. Marshall Robbins' car was disqualified on a technicality after winning the SCCA runoff race at Atlanta, handing the A-P National Championship over to Sam Fineststein's 427 Cobra. And for the first time in five years a Corvette did not win the GT class at the Daytona 24-Hour, the Dave Heinz car finishing 2nd to a Ferrari. At least Bill Jobe came through at Atlanta for the SCCA B-P crown in a car he had bought from four-time winner Allan Barker.

**T**HE OIL EMBARGO turned everything upside down for a while in 1974 and neither the Daytona nor the Sebring long-distance events were run. After things were more or less back to normal, John Greenwood unveiled his super-trick new Corvette, which was practically a front-engine CanAm car under the "batmobile" bodywork, at the Road Atlanta 6-Hour that kicked off the delayed IMSA Camel GT season. After dusting off Bobby Allison's NASCAR Camaro in a special match race and qualifying the batmobile on the pole for the Six Hour, John managed to lead only the first two laps before falling back and eventually retiring with mechanical problems. That left the race, and most of the rest of the series, to the Porsche hordes.

The Greenwood car did win at Talladega, where John hired veteran Milt Minter to drive it so he could spend his time managing the team, and John scored an impressive win himself in the season's final race at Daytona in November. And the amateur runoffs produced a pair of Corvette victories, but only after Bill Jobe came from behind in a determined drive to put down Bob Tullius' factory V-12 Jaguar in B-P. The A-P championship went to Marshall Robbins, who was back to avenge his disqualification the year before. This time, the tech inspectors could find nothing to complain about on his car.

This year with the \$100,000-plus Greenwood machine the only really competitive Corvette in the IMSA series, the outlook is becoming in-

creasingly bleak as the lighter European cars have continued to dominate. The SCCA TransAm has undergone a third revision, however, and the Corvette crowd has found itself highly competitive there under the far less costly amateur preparation rules. In fact, John Greenwood has abandoned the IMSA trail momentarily to win three straight TransAms — in an A-P Corvette he had previously built and sold to a customer.

When the season slides to a close this winter, look for a Greenwood domination of the new TransAm and an easy Corvette series championship, but little success for the die-hard Vettes still running the IMSA races — although Greenwood has been working on a brand new creation with which he is confident of dusting off the Porsches and factory BMWs later in

the year. (We'll feature that car in a future article.)

The SCCA runoffs are anyone's guess, but it's probably safe to predict an A-P victory for one Corvette or another. But B-P may be another story since both the west coast and east coast versions of the super-quick Jag V-12 will be back with a vengeance and the intent of blowing Jobe and the other Corvettes completely out of the saddle.

If you can catch the TransAm race at Brainerd, Minn., Sept. 7, the Nov. 30 IMSA Camel GT at Daytona, the Nov. 1 Champion Spark Plug SCCA National Championship runoffs at Road Atlanta or any one of the SCCA National races at various road courses around the country, you'll see for yourself some excellent road racing Corvettes in action.

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