

## **“The Single Most Important Corvette Ever Built.”**

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Only one **CORVETTE** may carry that moniker, the one that enabled Corvette’s racing history legacy, and on top of that, it was a privateer project and not an official GM or Chevrolet Engineering Test Vehicle.

This extraordinary 1953 **CORVETTE** was conceived, designed, built, and tested between January and April 1955. It was intended for Chevrolet Chief Engineer Edward N. Cole's edification as to the necessity of a more powerful V-8 engine coupled with a four-speed manual gearbox for successful Corvette racing that was being planned for the 1956 Corvette at Sebring.



*Harry Dumville's 1953 Corvette Circa April-May 1955*

The original owner of the 1953 Corvette Serial Number #123 was Harry C. Dumville Jr., the GM Technical Center's Director of the New Devices Section (Engineering's prelude supporting U.S. Patent Applications at GM Legal). Harry Dumville's two accomplices were none other than Zora Arkus-Duntov and Dean Albert Draper, Harry's Bloomfield Hills, Michigan residence neighbor.

Harry Dumville was a Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Detroit Region founding member and officer in 1948. When Zora was hired at Chevrolet Engineering in May 1953, he became an SCCA-Detroit member and an acquaintance of Harry. Dean Draper was a U.S. Outboard National Champion in 1935 and owned Draper Speed and Marine on 12 Mile Road, directly south of the GM Tech Center.

Zora test-drove Harry's specially prepared 1953 Corvette #123 at GM's Milford Proving Ground in early April 1955 up to 134-MPH propelled by its prototype Chevrolet 265-in<sup>3</sup> V-8 engine circa July 1953. Harry said the powerful prototype V-8 engine he secured had Zora's first camshaft although not quite the infamous production 1956 "Duntov SR" Type a year later.

Harry Dumville also secured prototype 1956 Corvette Carter Dual Quad WCFB carburetors on a Winter's foundry aluminum intake manifold and all the necessary Delco-Remy 12-Volt equipment in the way of a generator, ignition distributor, and voltage regulator complimented by Stewart-Warner 12-volt instrumentation. Zora's addition of dual exhaust side pipes painted in high-heat white became a hallmark of Zora's future experimental Corvettes throughout his glorious GM career, especially the 1960s Mark IV "Big Blocks". But the key to the Corvette #123's success with Ed Cole was Harry's 1928 W.O. Bentley 4-speed non-synchronized manual transmission like the one Woolf Barnato used to WIN the 1928 Le Mans!

Ed Cole was overwhelmed by 134-MPH and thoroughly convinced. Cole instructed Chevrolet Engineering with Zora's oversight to initiate a 4-Speed "Make or Buy" program with an emphasis on "Buy European". However, none of the European manufacturers would supply the world's largest automobile manufacturer with racing transmissions at virtually any cost. Ed Cole's only option became "Make".

Chevrolet Engineering worked with the Borg Warner Corporation to develop the World Class mid-1957 Corvette's RPO-685 T-10 four-speed transmission. The very first four pre-production T-10 Transmissions were air-freighted to SEDCO in Atlanta, Georgia where two were installed in the Red, White & Blue livery 1957 Corvettes, (with one spare for each) mere days before the Sebring race. The perplexing infamous GM Racing Ban took effect on June 16, 1957, immediately after the conclusion of the 1957 Sebring 12-Hour Endurance where Dr. Richard Thompson and Gaston Andrey's #4 Corvette finished First in GT Class followed by #3 Corvette in 2nd Place runner-up.

Ed Cole promptly rewarded Harry Dumville, who led the Chevrolet Timing Group at the 1957 Sebring, with one of the two spare T-10 four-speeds. Incredibility today, over 50 years later, it's still buttoned up to the back of the 1953 "Duntov" prototype V-8 engine inside the 1953 Corvette #123.

**This is the story of Harry, Zora, and Dean's unbelievable  
and as yet unheralded legendary Corvette accomplishment  
*The Most Important Corvette Ever Built!***

First, because had Harry not been in a position to know the Corvette inside and out through its design and development, second, had he not purchased the 1953 Corvette, third, had he not envisioned the "Four-Speed", and fourth, had he not possessed the financial where-with-all and GM insider contact with Ed Cole and Zora; the 1957 Sebring Corvette One-Two Fantastic FINISH may well never have happened!

The amazing 1957 Corvette 283 horsepower V-8 and four-speed GT victory at Sebring became an instant legend, establishing CORVETTE as a Bonafede race car over the following four "race-idle" decades until the resurrected Corvette C5R's #3 and #4 went racing with GM's backing in 1998.



*Zora & Walter at GM Styling Courtyard Circa 1983*



*Walter Becker with 1953 Corvette #123 Circa 1988*

Walter Becker met Zora in 1983 at the GM Styling Technical Center Courtyard where Zora excitedly reminisced his exploits with Harry Dumville's 1953 Corvette for a solid half hour.

*Zora's dream of a "Mid-Ship" Corvette finally came true  
with the 2020 C8 Corvette.*

*The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 2023 Corvette Z06 with its flat-plane V-8 engine  
Certainly excels upon Harry Dumville's powerful  
1953 Corvette #123 V-8 Four-speed initiative.*

*It is also the story of Walter Becker's nearly sixty-year family ownership  
and their loving conservation of 1953 Corvette #123 since 1965.*