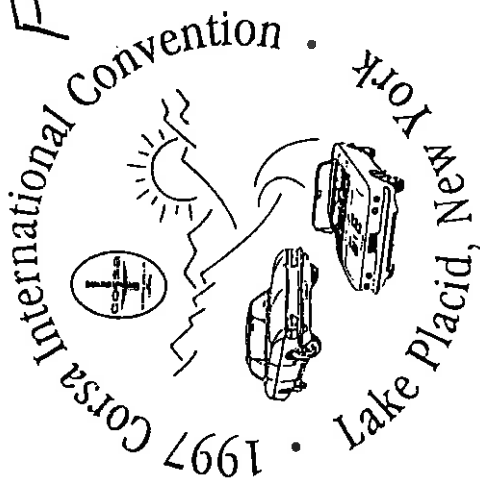


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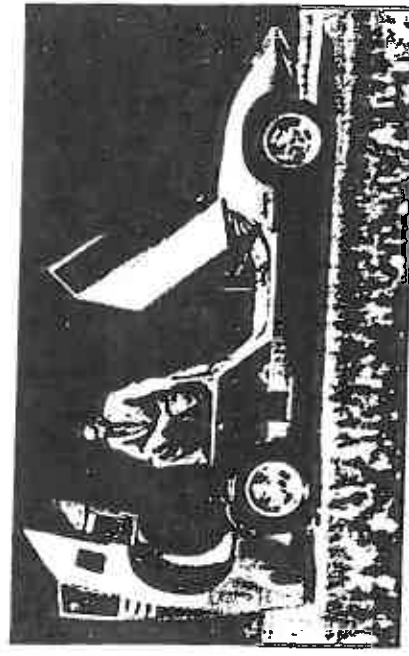
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FEB. 97

The Corvair Monza GT was designer Larry Shinoda's most beautiful car

By Wally Wyss

Back in the '60s, General Motors vice president in charge of design, William Mitchell, believed in the rear-engine design.



This photo shows how the entire rear section of the Monza GT's body lifted to reveal its innards. The rear section might have been impractical.

top, but was slightly more practical than previous bubble-top cars. It had its roof covered, so passengers wouldn't "fry" in the sun. The whole cockpit lifted to allow ingress and exit.

The car's headlights were hidden, but unlike the Corvette's hidden headlights, they did not revolve. Instead, they opened via "clam shell" doors. These doors probably would have blown off at speeds above 130 mph, but it's unlikely that anyone ever got this prototype up to such a speed.

The Monza GT had side air intakes. They were handy, but not necessary, since the engine was air cooled. Presumably, its cooling fan would have kept it cool. The exhausts came through the body sides, in back of the rear wheels.

The wheels were Halibrand-style wheels, if not genuine Halibrands. Curiously, they were bolted on with four lug nuts, and had fake knock-off hubs (probably because Corvair axles were used). John Fitch - the race driver - offered these same wheels on his hot Corvairs.

The rear roof line of the Monza GT was odd in that it had louvers that would go flat at the touch of a button. One can blame this on Mitchell's love of "James Bond" gimmicks. Somehow, he figured that if you make the slats

go flat, no one would see you. This must be the same thing ostriches think when they stick their faces in the sand.

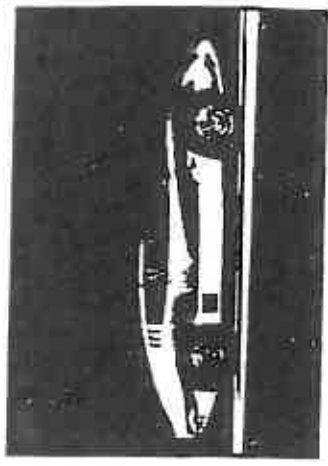
The entire rear section of the Monza GT's body lifted to reveal its innards. This was similar to the way that the Ford GT40, of one year later, opened up. However, the Corvair design was more precarious since, with rear hinging, there was always the danger the driver might not fasten things right, and the wind would catch a loose body section and rip it off.

There was also a rear-engined, open-roadster version of the same body style designed by Shinoda. It was called the Corvair SS, and had a hotter, four-carburetor engine. Shinoda even designed a kid's version of that car (maybe for his children, who are now grown).

The name Monza came from a race track in Europe where Corvairs never raced. GM was infamous, among Europeans, for appropriating names from race tracks where it had not scored victories. It was European tradition to name cars after the tracks that you won races at. GM persisted, however, and also named the Pontiac LeMans after a race it never won.

Neither of these Corvair show cars ever reached reality. We enthusiasts can blame Ralph Nader for that. A young lawyer at the time, Nader was looking for a cause and found it in the Corvair. His book *Unsafe at Any Speed*

implied that the Corvair was a car with dangerous handling. Even though the second-generation Corvairs corrected any hints of handling deficiencies, the car was doomed in the public's mind. Even Larry Shinoda's slick redos couldn't save it.



The Monza GT was based on the Corvair, but had a lot of the looks of the European ATS, a sports car made by ex-Ferrari designers.

To its credit, GM saved the Corvair show cars, even though the Corvair itself was officially "erased" from corporate history books. Both show cars survive, and they occasionally reappear at car events. They were at Monterey Historic Races a few years ago. Chevrolet was the honored marque that year, and this writer had the pleasure of meeting Shinoda and his charming wife, and riding in the parade lap in the most beautiful car the designer had ever created.

From the July 20, 1996 Almanac - Twenty-four years ago, the Corvair, a longtime target of Ralph Nader, was given a defect-free endorsement by a Transportation Department study. Sent in by Rich Panizza.

to study. His group bought one of the earliest ATS mid-engined coupes. The ATS was a sports car made by some engineers who walked out of Ferrari in protest over Enrico Ferrari's iron rule.

Predictably, GM produced a mid-engined show car that was similar in size, and shape, to the ATS. It was powered by a Corvair flat six, while the ATS had a small V-8.

Called the Corvair Monza GT, the show car was designed by Larry Shinoda who was, in effect, Mitchell's private designer. Shinoda worked in a basement studio where people from the other GM studios - like Cadillac's and Oldsmobile's - were not allowed to tread.

Shinoda is also famous for designing the original Corvette Stingray race car, and the Sting Ray production model.

Shinoda's Corvair Monza GT was very radical for its time. It had the Detroit "dream car" theme of a bubble