



# A Change in Direction

From caretaker to driver, Tim Giannini pursues a new path with his '67 restomod

| BY JOE GREEVES | PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR |

AUTO ENTHUSIASTS HAVE BEEN INTRIGUED with the Corvette since the day the first one rolled off a makeshift Flint, Michigan, assembly line nearly 70 years ago. More than 1.5 million cars later, it's possible to discern three basic ways in which these enthusiasts choose to celebrate America's favorite sports car.

The first owner group—call them the Pragmatists—simply buy the latest Vette, drive the wheels off of it, and eventually trade up to a model. The second group, the Traditionalists, choose a vintage model, restore it, and turn the car into a trailered showpiece that tends to see minimal road time.

Members of the third category, the Customizers, prefer a hybrid approach, one that involves combining vintage looks and style with enough modern upgrades to yield a fun, reliable driver. Each of these approaches has its merits, but making the transition from one to another can sometimes be difficult.

Tim Giannini from Yonkers, New York, is familiar with the phenomenon. He became a Corvette lover at age 13, when his guitar teacher gave him a ride in his red 1962 convertible. The top was down, and Giannini recalls that the experience was like “accelerating in a cloud.” From that moment on, he attended car shows to learn more about the brand, dreaming that he would eventually own a Vette of his own.

Several cars came and went in the interim, but in 1998 he finally became the proud owner of a matching-numbers, '67 Marina Blue edition boasting a big-block 427 that pumped out a healthy 435 horsepower. After a year of fine-tuning, the car hit the show circuit, earning accolades that included NCRS Top Flight status, Bloomington Gold certification, and the Chevy Vettefest Gold Spinner Award, culminating in the highly exclusive Triple Crown. But while Giannini loved everything about the car during his 20 years of ownership, eventually his preferences led him in another direction. For while he embraced his role as caretaker for a rarely driven classic, he wanted a Corvette he could enjoy on the road without fear of damage or mechanical failure.



(Facing page and above) Gianni's C2 restomod embodies a skillful blend of old—such as the original-style seats—and new—including the upgraded rolling stock, brake hardware, and suspension.



**BORN TO RUN:** Show-quality appearance notwithstanding, this '67 is built to excel on the open road. A 525-hp LS3, teamed with a five-speed manual transmission, serves up supercar-quality speed.

Since at least the 1980s, “restomod” Corvettes have been the ideal way for conflicted marque enthusiasts to experience the best of both worlds. But the barriers to ownership—specifically, finding a trusted customizer and paying for the work—can prove difficult to overcome.

Fortunately, Giannini has family near Brooksville, Florida, home of J&M Enterprizes, a Corvette specialty shop owned by John and Tim Ames. John Ames grew up in the car business, taking over his father’s shop in 1972 and opening the Brooksville location 10 years later. He teamed up with his son Tim and began specializing in Chevy’s flagship two-seater back in 2000.

Having come from an NCRS background, where historical fidelity was everything, the Ames family are now loving the freedom of the restomod world. “It’s one thing if someone has owned the car for 50 years and it has sentimental value. Then, you restore it accurately,” says Tim. “With a restomod, however, you don’t have to look at a book to find out what color a washer is supposed to be.” He adds that,

together, he and his father have been creating three or four hand-built customs a year.

After seeing some of the Ames family’s builds in various stages, and speaking with them at numerous shows, Giannini knew the father-and-son team had the talent to create his ultimate ride. With that challenge surmounted, he addressed the fiscal hurdle by selling his highly credentialed ’67.

### **Build a Bare (Chassis)**

The first step for the Ames team was locating a similar 1967 body, something they managed to do at a nearby NCRS show in Lakeland, Florida. The car was a perfect donor, with no chassis and missing lots of parts that wouldn’t have been reused anyway. They bought the bare shell along with the bumpers, gauge cluster, dash, pedals, vent windows, door tracks, and other parts necessary to create the car. Most important, the Corvette came with a VIN and a title.



Over the years, Tim Ames has developed a standard approach with every new build. In order to create a truly personalized version of the car, he believes that there needs to be a fusion of ideas between owner and builder—what to keep, what to toss, and what to emphasize. He goes over the details with the client, itemizing everything on the wish list, tallying a price, and estimating how long the project will take. He reports that his early conversations with Giannini were fairly standard, resulting in ticked boxes for power windows, air conditioning, a new radio, and a few other changes. It didn't take long, however, for Giannini to significantly expand the list, opting for an all-new suspension and powertrain.

When it came time for the chassis selection, the Ames duo had a solution in mind. They had met Tray Walden of Street Shop, Inc. years before at a Corvettes at Carlisle show, and quickly concluded that his frame work stood out from the rest. While others used tubes or flat stock welded together, Walden made his frames from 2x4-inch mandrel-formed steel. These solid rails were strong, and ground clearance was not an issue.

The second attraction to Walden and Street Shop was the fact that J&M could order a complete rolling powertrain from the facility. “[That way,] we don't have to do a whole lot as far as the chassis is concerned,” Tim Ames explains. “At our shop, we concentrate on the body, making all the disparate items on the customer's ‘dream sheet’ blend seamlessly together. We provide the specs [on the other parts], and Walden handles the rest.”

Giannini's original powertrain list began with a 505-hp Gen IV LS7, but the Ameses suggested a Chevy Performance Parts LS376 crate engine instead. In addition to pumping out 525 hp, this engine costs less, is arguably more robust, and is guaranteed to accelerate the lightweight C2 like a rocket sled. A robust Tremec five-speed from Keisler was selected to get the power to the Street Shop 12-bolt rear and 3.42 gears.

When the powder-coated black Street Shop chassis arrived, it was already fitted with the engine, transmission, driveshaft, rear end, and C7 suspension components. Hyperco coil springs and QA1 Ultra Ride adjustable coil-over shocks were used to stabilize all four corners, while Z06 brakes were installed to provide modern clamping force.

Taking the upgrades a step further, the rolling chassis arrived with air-conditioning, a tilting steering column, a pushbutton emergency brake, a stainless-steel gas tank fitted with an LS pump and fuel filters, and full fuel and brake lines in place. Custom headers and a 3-inch exhaust system dumping into Sweet Thunder 2.5-inch side pipes were selected for an appropriate performance rumble.

Blending an old body with a new chassis almost always entails making space for wider rubber. To accommodate modern perform-

ance tires, J&M created a set of molds that flared the rear fenders by 1.5 inches, followed by a second mold that modified the rear package tray, raising it about three inches to allow the use of mini tubs. These changes allowed for the installation of fat Cray Spider 20x12-inch rims and P335/25ZR20 Michelin Pilot Super Sport rubber in the rear, without affecting the functionality of the convertible top. Up front, 19x10-inch Crays and P285/30ZR19 Michelins fit without additional modifications.

Other subtle changes to the Corvette's exterior included a Detroit Speed headlight and LED brake-light kit, re-chromed front and rear bumpers by J&M Stainless in Bunnell, Florida, and wiper grilles reworked to provide a flush fit.

The raised rear package tray served a second function, becoming the perfect site for the rear components of a high-end stereo system. The setup is controlled by a vertical Antique Audio head unit that looks factory but is loaded with modern features, including a 700-watt JL Audio amp, pairs of speakers in both the front and rear of the car, and a JL Audio 8-inch subwoofer encased in a custom enclosure. According to Giannini, the system serves up enough power and clarity to provide studio-quality sound in the open roadster.

Giannini's ever-growing list of upgrades further refined the car with each passing day, beginning inside with a Flaming River tilt steering column and wood-rimmed wheel. A new center console was outfitted with buttons to control the heated seats and power windows, while the dash was loaded with Dakota Digital VHX instruments and vents for the Vintage Air HVAC system. The stock '67 seats were blended with six-way C4 power seat tracks and heat coils, while the lap belts from Seatbelt Solutions keep driver and passenger safe and secure.

When it came time to refurbish the upholstery, Giannini enlisted Al Knoch Interiors in Canutillo, Texas, to supply the black-leather dash pad, white-leather door panels and seat covers, seat foam, convertible top, convertible deck strip, and visors. Blevins Auto in Brooksville, Florida, was then called on to cover the seats, fit the carpet, fabricate the center console, wrap the sub enclosure and rear speaker board, and complete the convertible top.

Determining the final look of the car took time, as Giannini readily admits. “Many hours were spent pondering the best color combination, [but] I decided on G9900 Axalta Super Jet Black with a white '67 big-block hood stinger, along with an all-white interior for a classic look.

“As I reflect on the process from beginning to end, I realized the importance of choosing the right shop and working with people who understand what you want and can meet your goals,” he continues. “Now I have a Corvette...with modern-day performance that is reminiscent of bygone days—the best of both worlds.” ○

