

A Corvair as a daily driver?

I recently read an article in an old car magazine that addressed the issue of using a vintage car as a daily driver and it motivated me to think about how some of the items they discussed were relevant to Corvair driving. I have used a Corvair as a daily driver continuously since my first one in 1963; 50 great years! My wife Sandy also currently has a Corvair as a daily driver and has driven one every year since 1966 with the exception of 1970-1977 when she drove a Malibu and a Monte Carlo. Why do we do this? The reason is probably a combination of all of the ideas in this article.

The issues I look at in order of importance to me are: safety, reliability, enjoyment, comfort, and financial impact.

Safety: Maintenance of the braking, steering, suspension and tires has to be an absolute priority. The Corvair systems can be fully restored to original or better in some areas, and once you have done that and do not over drive the capabilities of the car, it should serve you well. If desirable, you can add dual master cylinders, disc brakes, brighter lights, bigger tires or other items. All the parts necessary to maintain or upgrade are readily available and not all that expensive. Be sure you have good seat belts and maybe add a shoulder harness as some in our club have. Don't look for air bags; they will probably never be available on the aftermarket. And lastly, the crushable front end on a Corvair has been a saving factor in crashes I have read about in other club newsletters, as well as incidents over the years in this area.

Reliability: Again, bringing a 50 year old car up to acceptable maintenance standards is a priority for safety and for reliability. A car rolls on four wheel bearings; repack them all. It has 2 or 4 U-joints; inspect or replace them. Your Corvair has a fan bearing, idler bearing and generator/alternator bearings, repack or replace those bearings. Fix fluid leaks, do complete tune ups, filter changes and either use a 2012 or newer mechanical fuel pump or an electric pump. Maybe add electronic ignition. If you have an original gas tank it might be wise to replace it before it leaks or fills your filters with rust. Make a list and when you complete it you should feel comfortable driving it anywhere. A cell phone and a credit card round out the list and move you in to the comfort zone.

Enjoyment: A Corvair can be a joy to drive daily if you are comfortable with the first two items above. It handles well in traffic, is easy to see out of in any direction and easy to find in a parking lot full of cars that either look dreary or resemble large insects. I never get tired of folks coming up and telling me stories about Corvairs in their past and I know Sandy enjoys all the guys that talk to her in the store parking lots or gas stations.

Comfort: A lot can be done in this area to suit your taste; consoles, cruise control, wiper delays, GPS systems, audio, hands free phone, etc. Remember wing windows and floor vents? Corvairs have them and they work great. For winter you need a perfect heater system (yes it can be done) and you may want to look at a Vintage Air A/C system if you

can't drive without A/C. Two HACOIA members currently have those systems installed. It is your baby, it needs to suit you.

Financial Impact: For starters, Sandy & I have 5 Corvairs on the tax rolls and our property tax for 2012 was \$40.90 in Cass County for all 5. Gas mileage should be in the 18-25 mpg range if you do everything to improve that item. If you maintain the car it will hold its value or more likely will appreciate. We have two Corvairs insured for daily driving with the maximum liability available for \$608.00 a year total. I have not carried collision or comprehensive on daily drivers for 30 years; we are self insured in that area. We do carry an umbrella policy for liability on cars and home for an additional \$263 a year. Our other three Corvairs are licensed as Historic Vehicles and we carry Collector Car Insurance on them. This is extremely reasonable as anyone who has that insurance knows, and at one time I calculated we could easily own, insure, and drive five Corvairs for less than the cost of one new car. Maintenance costs: first you can do it yourself and second everything is readily available and inexpensive compared to dropping off a newer car at the repair shop.

One of our former members worked at an advertising agency and drove a red '66 convertible when she called on clients; they would invariably either greet her in the parking lot or follow her out to her car when she left. No way to measure the impact but she did that for a lot of years. We currently have members using their Corvairs to advertise vintage radio & clock repair, DJ catering, and our Corvair Club. There are probably others I do not know about (let me know!).

Old Corvairs can fill a transportation need, provide a hobby, give you access to a great social group, fill you with pride when you polish it, give you a testosterone rush when you race it, make you feel like you are in charge when you fix it and maybe even provide you with a little investment income. Not bad for a 50 year old inanimate object without a single line of code.