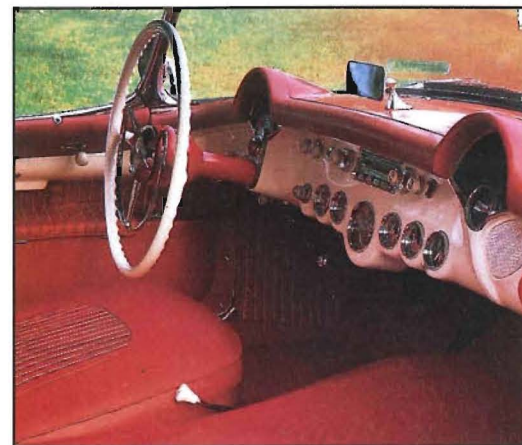




Masterpiece No. 043



Tom Garvin's 1953 Corvette is an ode to the art of restoration
text and photography by Thomas Glatch

Every artist has a masterpiece, a work so extraordinary it stands far above the rest. Beethoven had his *Fifth Symphony*, da Vinci his *Mona Lisa*, Steinbeck his *Grapes of Wrath*. Corvette No. 043 may well go down as Tom Gavin's masterpiece — of the restorer's art.

Webster's defines restoration as "to bring back to or put back into a former of original state." This was the challenge Tom faced when he began the restoration of 1953 Corvette No. 043, one of the oldest Corvettes in existence.

With the craftsmanship of an artist, the tenacity of a detective, and the hoarding of a miser, Tom began the task of bringing the 43rd Corvette ever produced back to its "original state." Tom had found the car disassembled in Bastrop, Louisiana. Like all of his restorations, he purchased the car, rough but essentially complete. At his shop, A Touch of Glass, in LeSueur, Minnesota, No. 043 was completely stripped and slowly, carefully brought back to life.

The result was good enough to earn a coveted Bloomington Gold Certificate in 1989, attesting that Corvette No. 043 was within 95 percent of as it was when it left the factory. But Tom's insistence on originality actually cost him points with the Bloomington Gold judges. Whenever possible, Tom used NOS replacement parts, or brought original parts back to like-new condition. For example, he installed a set of brand new, never used US Royal Air Ride tires manufactured in 1953. But, as you might expect, the whitewalls of these 38-year-old tires have small cracks. Reproduction tires would be "perfect" but would Corvette No. 043 then be in its "original state?"

Tom also used original side curtains (dated June 1953) instead of reproductions, and lost more points due to the condition of the plexiglass. Rather than install modern reproductions, the original hub caps were carefully straightened and hammered smooth. Only the weatherstripping, convertible top and some interior trim are modern reproductions.

The body of No. 043 seems less than perfect, too. The fiberglass mat shows through in places, and some panels are a little wavy. The 300 Corvettes built that first year were hand-assembled in Flint, Michigan, and the quality of those first fiberglass bodies was less than impeccable. Again, Tom resisted the temptation to improve upon history. Corvette No. 043 may not be absolutely perfect by some standards, but it is definitely "original state."

— Thomas Glatch is a free-lance automotive journalist. His work appears frequently in *Corvette Fever*.





Tom Garvin's No. 043 1953 Corvette

RPO	Price
2934 1953 Corvette	\$3,498
101A Heater	\$91.40
101B Signal-Seeking AM Radio	\$145.15
Total Price	\$3,734.55

Note: Although listed as options, all 1953 Corvettes were equipped with heater and radio.

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