

# RARE VIEW

## INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEED





## Vetting the Goods

Mike Yager successfully mixes business with pleasure. In the mid-1970s, he sold Corvette T-shirts to fellow 'Vette enthusiasts out of his 1967 Sting Ray.

A quarter-century later, the 51-year-old entrepreneur has developed Mid America Direct into a \$35 million auto parts and accessories company in Effingham, Ill. He has a real office now, but he still works surrounded by Corvettes. "We use these cars quite extensively to check the authenticity of the fit and finish of reproduction parts we manufacture," he says. "We also photograph them for our catalogs and advertising."

A 15,000-square-foot museum on the premises, open six days a week at no charge, houses his collection of about 50 unique and historic cars. A stroll down the main street of MY (Mike Yager) Garage not only depicts the Corvette's development and history, it also reveals Yager's roots. "Yagerville" represents small-town America circa the 1950s and '60s, the era when Yager caught Corvette fever from his five older brothers.

The garage's mock town buildings serve as a backdrop for the generations of low-mileage original Corvettes and their racing counterparts that date from 1954: a Chevy dealership with cutaway engine displays, signs, catalogs, and other showroom mementos; a tavern recalling one owned by Yager's father; a reproduction of Effingham's movie theater; and a jewelry store representing his in-laws' business. A special display honors Zora Arkus-Duntov, the General Motors engineer who may not have invented the Corvette but certainly gave it life.

Yager describes his collection as "just a whole bunch of Corvettes," but it includes the rare 1960 CERV I, Arkus-Duntov's experimental vehicle with the prototype suspension later used on Corvettes built from 1963 to 1982. A 1954 Corvette with barely 3,000 miles on it sits by the pumps at a period gas station complete with road maps and display racks from the '60s.

Yager, who likes to collect original, low-mileage, unrestored cars, has the first C5 ever built. And he's also been known to act like a proud father: He filmed the last C4 Corvette, which he owns, to roll off the assembly line.

—Patrick C. Paternie

Mike Yager (far left) has an affinity for Corvettes and created a museum on his work premises that houses 'Vettes ranging from the last C4 ever built (bottom middle) to the Corvette used in the 1978 film *Corvette Summer* (left).