Under the Hood, December 2019

A few years ago, I reported on our 2015 visit to the Goodwood Revival, which is basically a huge, glorious vintage race at the Goodwood racetrack in England. In part I had written about the fleet of 1963 ½ fastback Ford Galaxies powered by Ford's 427 engine that were sent to Europe to compete in the British race series against the Jaguars etc. At that 2015 race event a 1964 427 powered Fairlane (driven by Tom Kristensen) came from the last place start to win the St Mary's Trophy in the most thrilling race I have ever witnessed. Well, you should know that Ford wasn't necessarily the first American manufacturer to send cars to England. The Chevy effort started in 1961 when Dan Gurney took a 409 Impala to Silverstone and was leading the race until a broken wheel ended Gurney's race. The Brits didn't take too kindly to a Yank car beating the best Britain had to offer, so immediately extra restrictions were placed on the Impala to make it non-competitive for the rest of the season. Now remember that this was the period where all the US car makers had signed on to a non-racing pledge, so most of Chevy's and Ford's race efforts were somewhat under the table. In 1962, Chevy tried a different tack. The Chevy II had been introduced in 1962 and was powered by either a 153 ci 4 cylinder or 194 ci 6-cylinder engine. The 6-cylinder was rated at 120 hp (the old gross rating, perhaps 105 hp by today's standards). Road tests of the period showed a 0-60 time of 12.1 seconds, hardly earth shattering. Do you remember reading my comments about Bill Thomas race cars, his Cheetah race car and his Chevy 409s built for drag racing? Well, Thomas immediately saw the advantage of putting a big engine in the lightweight Chevy II and started modifying them for racing. Conveniently, magically, special factory parts were made available to make this a simple engine swap, together with other race changes. Two 1962 Chevy IIs were sent to England to race. Both were Corvette 327 powered, one with a carburetor (driver Peter Sachs) and the second was a 360 hp fuelie engine (driver Chuck Helsey). Imagine 3 times the horsepower of the stock Chevy II. The fuelie car was prepared by Bill Thomas in California and the carburetor car was prepared by stock car legend Smokey Yunick. After some early problems being out-braked by the British race cars, much larger drum brakes from Chevy's full size sedan and 15" wheels were added. There were some early podium successes, but in May, 1962 Kelsey took his fuelie car to an outright victory at Brands Hatch besting Roy Salvadori in a Jaguar. You might remember that Roy Salvadori and co-driver Carroll Shelby were the overall winners of the 1959 24 hours of Le Mans, so beating Salvadori in his Jaguar was a huge win for Chevy. Again, the Brits were not happy with their Jaguars being relegated to 2nd place, and at the next race Kelsey's 3rd place finish was cancelled when the car was disqualified for running without mufflers. Apparently, the teams then welded cans around the exhaust pipes to simulate mufflers. The swan song for the Chevy IIs came in September with Sach winning the saloon car class at Crystal Palace by less than a second. After the season, both cars were shipped back to the USA to avoid paying import taxes in Britain. The Sachs car was then used as a tow car for Sach's SCCA F Modified 1963 championship season and was later lost in a garage fire. Kelsey took his car back to Indianapolis, but the whereabouts of this car are unknown. Kelsey later started the firearms company, Devel. He disappeared in 2003 and his burned remains were found a month later, with the death being ruled a homicide. Thus, ending another chapter of Chevy racing around the world. Last thought on this American invasion of Britain. That 64 427 Ford Fairlane that dominated at the 2015 Goodwood is now offered for sale for only $295,000 fully sorted with a boatload of spares. No one claims that the new buyer will dominate the next vintage race, but we can all dream.

For those that you that read "Autoweek", I suspect that many of you turn to the back page before you read anything else. For those that don't read the magazine, the back page is called "But Wait, There's

More" and will usually feature oddball tidbits of our automobile world. One recent feature showed a Jeep/Willys meet. A 1953 Willys Jeep had been re-powered with a 670cc Harbor Freight Predator engine. I don't think it is a stretch to think the owner was daring to be different, because the owner then added a turbo to the engine. I must admit that I routinely read all the Harbor Freight catalogs and am a frequent shopper at their store in Bellevue. I have told Judy more than once that I wished I had a good use for one of their Predator engines because I cannot believe how inexpensive they are. A single cylinder 212cc rated at 6.5 hp can be bought for $120. That should help make a nice go-cart to drive around my neighborhood. The much larger V-twin 670cc, rated at 22 hp (without the owner installed turbo) costs $750. Compare that $750 to what one of the original Willys flathead 4-cylinder engines would cost. Somehow, I doubt that the owner of the 53 Willys was planning on driving it for another 100,000 miles, so the Predator engine might well last as long as the owner. This got me thinking about more car history. The King Midget had the appearance of a shrunken Willys Jeepster, although the King Midget was first introduced in 1946 and the Jeepster in 1948. The King Midget (KM) was produced from 1946 to 1969. A total of about 5,000 vehicles were produced and they were road legal at the time. If you read "Popular Mechanics" in the 50s or 60s you would typically find an advertisement for KM in the back pages. As the name implies the KM was diminutive. Near the end of the production period, the KM was being built with a length of 117" and width of 52" (not much larger than a sheet of plywood) and a weight of about 700 lbs. Power was furnished by an air-cooled single cylinder Kohler engine rated at 12 hp. The KM had an interesting two speed automatic transmission. If you have ever been in a gas powered go cart, I expect that it had a centrifugal clutch. The engine will idle without providing any forward motion. As the engine speed increases, centrifugal force pushes the friction surface to the outside cylinder of the clutch and the go cart starts to move. The KM had a two-stage centrifugal clutch which started the vehicle just like the go cart but when the vehicle speed reached a certain point, the second clutch engaged, so you had a two-speed automatic transmission. The engine only powered the right rear wheel, similar to the go cart chain drive. Now KM owners can be hot rodders as well as the rest of us and if you do an internet search you will find all sorts of re-powered KMs. Some will have one of those 22 hp Predator engines with twice the cylinder count and almost twice the horsepower of the stock engine. I have even found some with Honda VTEC engines (death wish?). Perhaps a dozen years ago, Judy and I were traveling on a very rural back road and came across a King Midget for sale sitting near the road at the entrance to the long driveway. We stopped to look and I bored Judy with the description, but she put her foot down when I indicated we should go talk to the owner. As I remember the price was less than $2,000. One recently sold in Pasco for $4,000, and if you check Hemmings you can routinely find them in the $6-10,000 range. The upper price range will get you tricked out custom paint, possibly even with Woodie sides and a C3 Vette luggage rack on the back. At a recent KM Jamboree in Indiana about 60 vehicles participated. I even noticed one with huge wheelie bars in the back (was this the Honda VTEC?). All King Midgets were convertibles, although they didn't all have fabric tops. I wonder if the CMCS parade chair would welcome me if I showed up with my KM convertible at the next year's Seafair parade? We are always looking for convertibles for the dignitaries, or perhaps one of the Seafair clowns.

Returning to more current racing news, the IMSA season has concluded. Since Corvette returned to fully sponsored racing in 1999, they have been active in IMSA type racing. They have had a win every season, except for 2019, and have had several overall season victories. When I think of recent Corvette racing drivers, the first names that come to mind are Ron Fellows and Andy Pilgrim. Perhaps next is Jan Magnussen. Jan and co-driver Antonio Garcia in the #3 C7R had overall victories in 2017 & 2018. The

second C7R, Car #4, was driven this year by Oliver Gavin & Tommy Milner. The final race of the 2019 season was the Petit Le Mans held at Road Atlanta. Petit is a 10 hour, approximately 1,000 miles race mostly run at night and held in mid-October. It was an exciting Corvette race, although the Corvettes never did really challenge the winner. The #3 car basically led the #4 car the entire race, although the #4 usually trailed by at least a lap. In the final 2 hours Garcia was driving the #3 car and with 28 minutes remaining came into the pits for a very quick stop just to get fresh tires, as they anticipated they had enough fuel to finish the race. They wanted to be able to use the fresh tires to challenge the GTLM (GT Le Mans) leader, to perhaps achieve a race class victory, as a fitting final tribute to the C7R saga. It was to no avail, as Garcia and team finished 23 seconds behind the winner. Imagine a 10 hour, 1,000 mile race and having 5 class cars on the lead lap and the #3 car being that close. The #4 car finished 2 laps behind. Just before the Petit, it was announced that Jan Magnussen, after 16 years with Corvette racing, would not return for the 2020 season with the new C8R. I suspect we will never know all the story, but early indications are that Jan was forced out by Chevy. After overall wins in 2017 & 2018, was this a case of "What have you done for me today?". Although 2019 was not very successful for Corvette, the C7R overall was very successful. Now, the C8R has been announced. Similar to the C7R, the new C8R looks like its stock counterpart, but has significant differences. The C8R will have 5.5 liter (non turbo or supercharged) engine producing approximately 500 hp and 480 ft-lbs of torque. We understand that this race engine will be overhead camshafts, rather than the normal Corvette pushrod design and also have a flat crank. Suspect that there will be a sound difference between the old and new race car due to the crankshaft design. Instead of an 8 speed DCT, the transmission will be a six speed sequential manual. Yes, the C8Rs will still be significantly yellow. I know we will all be watching to see how the C8R does in competition.