

Deer Caroline Gene Anderson, Elizabethtown, NC



It was about 1:00 a.m. when the deer slammed into the side of the Suburban, just east of Memphis on a six-lane stretch of I40. It slid down the side of the truck into the trailer, hitting with so much force that it not only dented the rock guard, but actually knocked the spare tire and its holder completely off the trailer. And in the process, the deer hit the Corvette...the beautiful Corvette.

This car is no ordinary one. It is a 25-year-old original 1974 Corvette with less than 2000 miles on it. It was in almost perfect condition, having qualified for Bloomington Gold and later flight judged at over 98%. Gene Anderson had just traded friend Roy Sinor a restored '64 for this beauty, and friend Jackie Kennedy was trailering her home to Elizabethtown, NC from Tulsa, OK.

"I saw a deer standing on the median," Jackie remembers as he shakes his head. "So I eased into the far lane to be safe. The deer that hit me came from the other side, out of nowhere. I guess he was trying to get to the deer I'd already seen."

Jackie pulled over as soon as he was able to negotiate through traffic. He surveyed the damage in disbelief. What were the odds, he thought, of a deer doing damage to the truck, the trailer, and the Corvette at one time? And how, he wondered, would he tell Gene?

Roy had shared the car's history with Gene and Jackie. They bought her from her original owner, he tells. Wade Grooms had purchased the car from Montgomery Chevrolet in Louisville, KY and given her to his wife as an anniversary gift. Grooms worked for an oil company, so when he was transferred to Houston, they drove the car 942 miles to their new home. Later they were transferred to Tulsa and drove her 510 miles. Mrs. Grooms was afraid the car would be scratched, so other than the 1452 moving miles, she rarely drove it except to take their son to the local swimming pool.



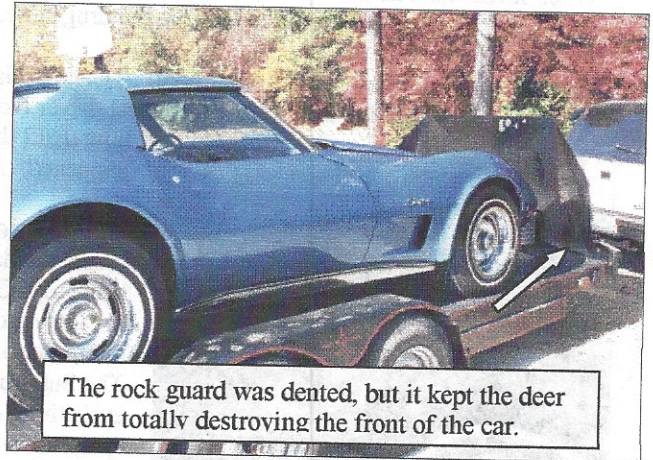
The spare tire was completely gone.

Sadly, the Grooms' son was diagnosed with leukemia. The resulting stress led to a divorce, and when the Sinors came across the car, Mrs. Grooms was selling it to help with medical bills. The car had only 1635 miles on her.

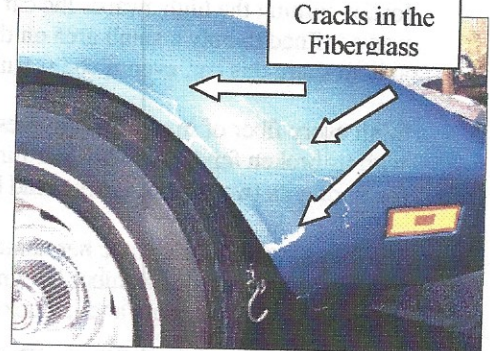
"When we first saw the car," Roy explains, "She was in a garage, covered with dust and cobwebs. So we purchased her in 1982, and cleaned her up and changed her oil the same day we picked her up."

In November 1984, two years after he bought her, Roy traded cars with Bob Atkins for a 1975 convertible with 9,000 miles. Bob kept the '74 in climate-controlled storage, ran her about 30 minutes each month, and changed her oil on a regular basis. During her stay with Bob, he trailered her to Bloomington where she qualified for a Bloomington Gold certificate before the Benchmark award became available.

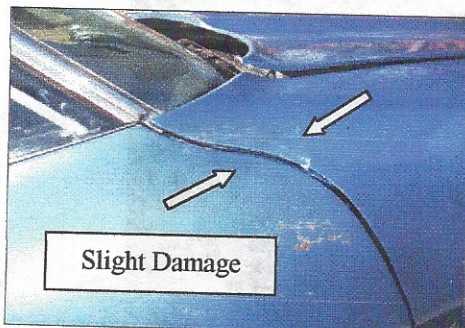
Then, when his 1998 convertible came in, Bob sold the car back to Roy in November 1997. The mileage on her had rolled up to only 1953, only about 300 miles in the 13 years Bob owned her.



The rock guard was dented, but it kept the deer from totally destroying the front of the car.



Cracks in the Fiberglass



Slight Damage

"We decided to take her to Joplin for flight judging," Roy relates, "so Marvin Burnett could compare her to the new '73-'74 NCRS Judging Manual. She scored over 98%. I waxed the car in Joplin," he goes on to say, "and I believe it was the first time she'd ever been waxed."

The car is exactly what a man would want for his wife in 1974. It has all the creature comforts including automatic transmission, air conditioning, power steering, brakes, and windows, a tilt-telescopic steering wheel, dual horns, and an AM-FM stereo radio.

The seats are leather in a striking silver color. The exterior color is medium blue metallic. The car has a base engine which would not only save gas – a serious consideration in the early seventies – but would also lower insurance costs.

After Gene and Roy decided to make the trade, before the car even got to her new home, Gene started making plans for her to travel the circuit. Since she was medium blue, the color of his alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he wanted to name her Caroline.

When Jackie arrived home late Saturday afternoon, he and his wife, Brenda, went to deliver the bad news in person to Gene at the drug store.



Silver Interior

“I kept waiting for him to say ‘April Fool!’,” Gene exclaims. “I just couldn’t believe it was true. Not all three... the truck, the trailer, and the Corvette too. Jackie’s the best driver I know. If he couldn’t avoid a deer, nobody could. As a matter of fact, now that I think about it, I guess we were lucky that Jackie was driving when it happened. Anybody else might’ve lost control and totaled it all.”

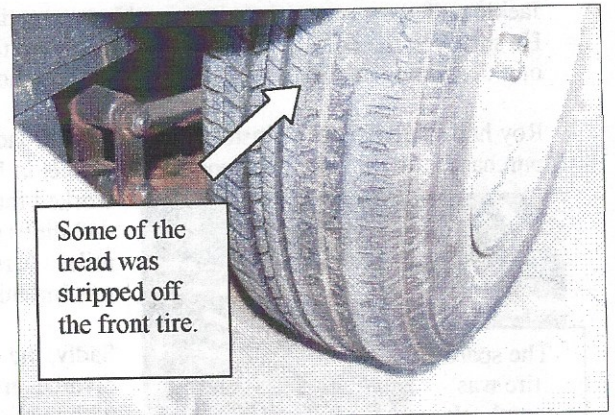


Fur was lodged between the hubcap and tire.

After the store closed Saturday night, Gene and friend, Susie, went to Jackie’s to assess the damage. “There was a piece of fur still stuck between the hubcap and the tire,” says Gene unbelievably, “and the fiberglass was broken in several places on the Corvette’s front fender. The spare tire was completely gone and the fender over the trailer tires had been dented enough to gouge one of the two tires on that side. The Suburban had a deep scratch all the way down the passenger side. And everything on that side was spattered with the remains of the deer.”

On Sunday, Gene took pictures of everything, and then carefully cleaned off the blood. He decided to leave the fur under the hubcap for now.

And he struggled with how to tell Roy.

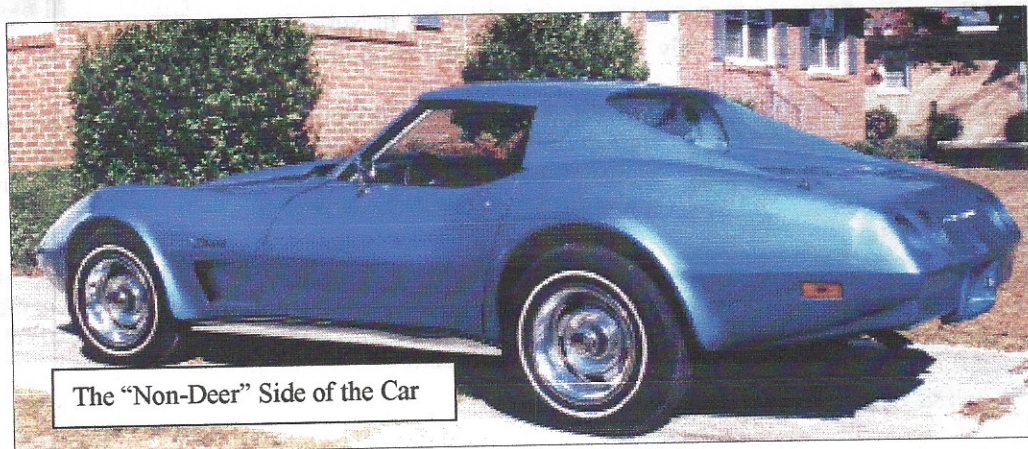


Some of the tread was stripped off the front tire.

Gene and Jackie studied the judging manuals to determine if all hope was lost of earning the high awards the car deserved. Maybe, since the damage was confined to only a small area on the exterior, she would lose only a few points. And shouldn’t other Corvette lovers be able to share this car, even if she wasn’t perfect any longer?

With every fiber of him trained to preserve Corvettes in near-perfect condition, Gene decided to show the car anyway, even with its broken fender and the deer fur stuck under the hubcap. He would tell the story about how this car been lovingly cared for during its twenty-five years. And he would tell the story of her adventure on the way home.

But Gene would also change her name. No longer would she be just “Caroline.” She had changed. She is still that beautiful Carolina blue, but to remember her grand adventure with the unlucky deer, he now calls her “Deer Caroline.” The car truly is a dear to Gene Anderson, and he looks forward with anticipation to their next adventure: the Corvette show circuit.



The “Non-Deer” Side of the Car