

Classic Corvettes rebuilt part by part

Company takes up to 900 hours to lovingly restore the road legends

By NATALIE BOEHME

of The Associated Press

GILLESPIE — Classic Corvettes have rolled off the production line at D&A Corvette for the past two decades the same way General Motors originally built the cars — part by part.

But the 800 to 900 hours needed to remanufacture these road legends limit production to less than two dozen cars a year. During that time, the salvaged car will be taken down to a fiberglass shell and chassis, all the parts will be rebuilt, and the entire thing will be reassembled.

The time investment has not hampered Dick Ferrando's ability to turn an after-hours job into a nationally known business, grossing \$1 million in 1997. And orders — which average \$60,000 to \$70,000 a car — are backlogged for 18 months.

But Ferrando, who has been doing this for two decades, would never think of rushing a job.

"You have to do everything they (the manufacturer) did to turn the clock backwards," Ferrando said, as he strolled the workshop floor, where six Corvettes awaited in various stages of repair. "When we're done with them, they're better than when the manufacturer sold them."

It's a quality Connecticut businessmen Ron and Alvin Steinman can appreciate.

The Steinmans have relied on D&A Corvette in their pursuit of a collection of the rarest Corvettes. Ferrando has reconstructed 14 cars for the brothers and has another five vehicles for them in line to be repaired.

"You can pick his work out of a crowd," Ron Steinman said. "We feel his work is the best and that's why we keep going back."

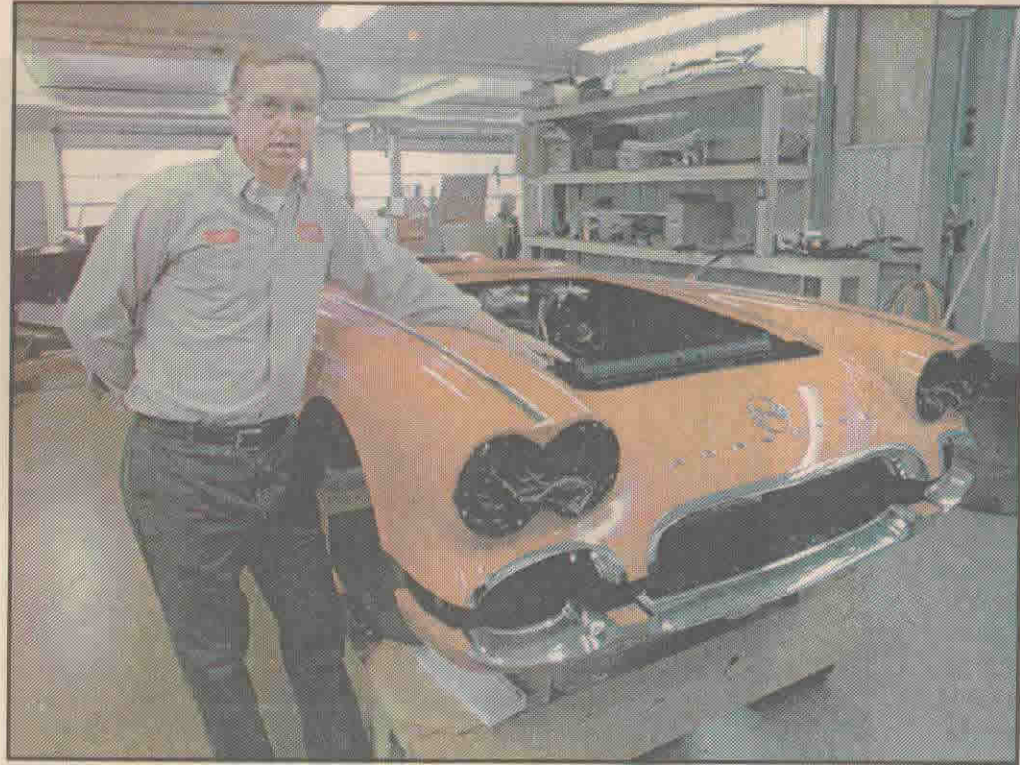
Photo albums Ferrando keeps on each Corvette tell this story.

There is a rare but mangled 1957 Corvette that had been left to age in a California man's back yard. The car was one of only five ever made with a special fuel injection and brake system. And there is a weather-beaten 1960 Corvette that had been stashed years earlier in a barn near the Arkansas-Missouri border.

Progressive photos show the vehicles being stripped bare and then lovingly reconstructed.

Ferrando opened D&A Corvette in 1975, when his moonlighting started paying more than his full-time job. At that time, the company rebuilt 30 to 40 Corvettes a year and completely restored one or two cars annually.

A declining moment for the business came in the late '70s when Illinois tinkered with vehicle



Dick Ferrando stands in his shop where his company, D&A Corvette, remanufactures about 18 Corvettes a year in Gillespie in this photo taken last week. Ferrando turned an after-hours job into a nationally known business, grossing \$1 million in 1997.

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title laws, thereby wrecking the market for rebuilding damaged vehicles.

Instead of giving up, Ferrando refocused the business solely on remanufacturing Corvettes to order.

D&A Corvette's new focus came at the same time the cars became desirable investments.

Ironically, Ferrando's shop is still relatively unknown by locals.

The shop, just south of Gillespie, does nothing to give the well-kept secret away.

The ground floor looks like the average auto shop, while upstairs is office space and storage.

The storage area is lined with shelves, each one holding the dismantled parts of an entire car that will eventually be someone's pride and joy.

Ferrando said that is what drives him

"It's a major ego trip seeing them grin when they get their new toy."