



*The '78 Pace Car's distinguishing "Black and Silver" paint was chosen over other alternative color schemes primarily because it photographed well. Back then, most magazine articles and ads were still done in Black & White! The Wall Street Journal ran a front page article about the 1978 Indy Pace Cars, indicating they would be an excellent investment.*

1978 Corvette Pace Car

A pace car is a car that leads the race cars around the track several laps maintaining a speed to the running start of a race. The Memorial Day Indianapolis 500 Race has been using pace cars since its beginning in 1911. Though Chevrolet has been selected to provide a pace car for the race in 1948 with a Fleetmaster convertible, 1955 with a Bel Air convertible, 1967 with a Camaro convertible, and 1969 with a Camaro SS, 1978 was the first year a Corvette was chosen, probably because it was the 25th anniversary of the Corvette model. There was nothing particularly innovative in the 1978 model except the bubble rear window and add-on fender flares and tail. However, it was the first pace car to use a completely stock drive train and the first one-piece fiberglass body. The '55 was completely new, as was the '67 Camaro. Corvette has paced the race several times since 1978 with the last trip around the track being last year with the 50th anniversary 2003 model in 2002. This was a very confusing event with auto publications blasting the poor timing.

As you may have figured out, the use of a particular car is quite a promotional opportunity for the manufacturer. General Motors took advantage of the event in 1978 and began by planning about 60 replica cars to go to selected dealers. As a result of a lawsuit by dealers, there were almost 7,000 cars built that year. Many had just the colors and decals but were L-48 models, others were the L-88 replicas. Consumers went crazy buying these cars for as much as \$5,000.00 over the list price of \$13,653.21. There are still quite a number of these cars with no miles on the odometers. Regular 1978 Corvettes at that time were selling at \$4,000 less than the Pace Car list price.

While enjoying a very nice '65 Corvette coupe as a daily driver, Sallie wished for something newer with a few luxury items and had occasionally remarked that the paint scheme and profile on the '78 Pace Car was very attractive, but only with a four-speed transmission. No automatics for my speed queen! Two weeks later at the Almost Spring Meet 1984 an acquaintance had such a car for sale. Later Sallie says she didn't think I'd ever find a pace car with a stick for sale. Sallie's car came from a bankrupt Kentucky dealer auction via the owner of the Bank of Ketchikan who traded the car to Skip Johnson as part payment for remodeling office buildings in Seattle. The car had been stored in Seattle. The pace car had 7,000 miles on it and was one of the later ones built. The fit and finish wasn't very good with stress cracks and poor quality paint and the anodizing buffed off the trim in places. It was a 4-speed with all the bells and whistles including accessory cloth and leather seats, AM-FM-CB radio. Of the almost 7,000 pace cars only 600 came with 4-speeds. With almost 70,000 miles of daily driving since 1984, I repainted the car, installed new carpets and added the decal package.

Now that 1978 is eligible in the VCCA, we will use it more at club events. The daily driver designation has switched to newer Corvette, so the pace car now holds a special place in our family of Chevrolets.

*Don and Sallie Comstock*