

1958, A YEAR OF CHANGE!

By Dan Holstein

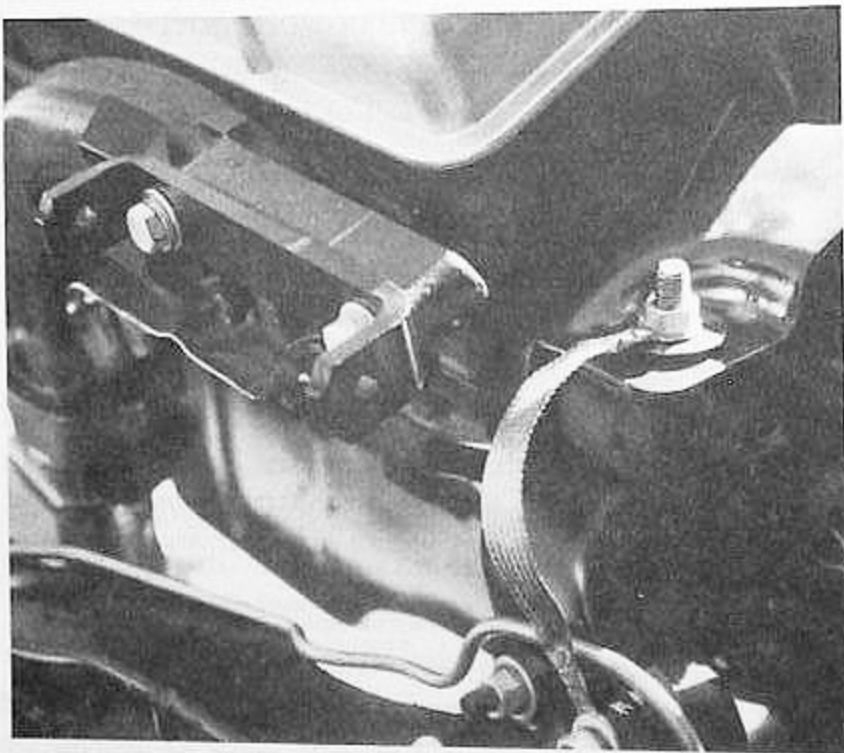
When most Corvette enthusiasts think of 1958, they dub it as the year the Corvette went from two to four headlights, frame mounted bumpers, and moving the instruments in front of the driver for better visibility. Yes, it was a year for vast changes and what's really confusing is the changes continued throughout the year which really confuses many judges and restorers alike.

I had owned two 1959 Corvettes which were fairly consistent in their characteristics. Whenever I encountered a 1958 model however, it usually varied from the previous one I had seen in many details. Finally, I purchased a 1958 which was identical to one I had driven back in 1960, a Charcoal on red, four-speed car which made a lasting impression on me.

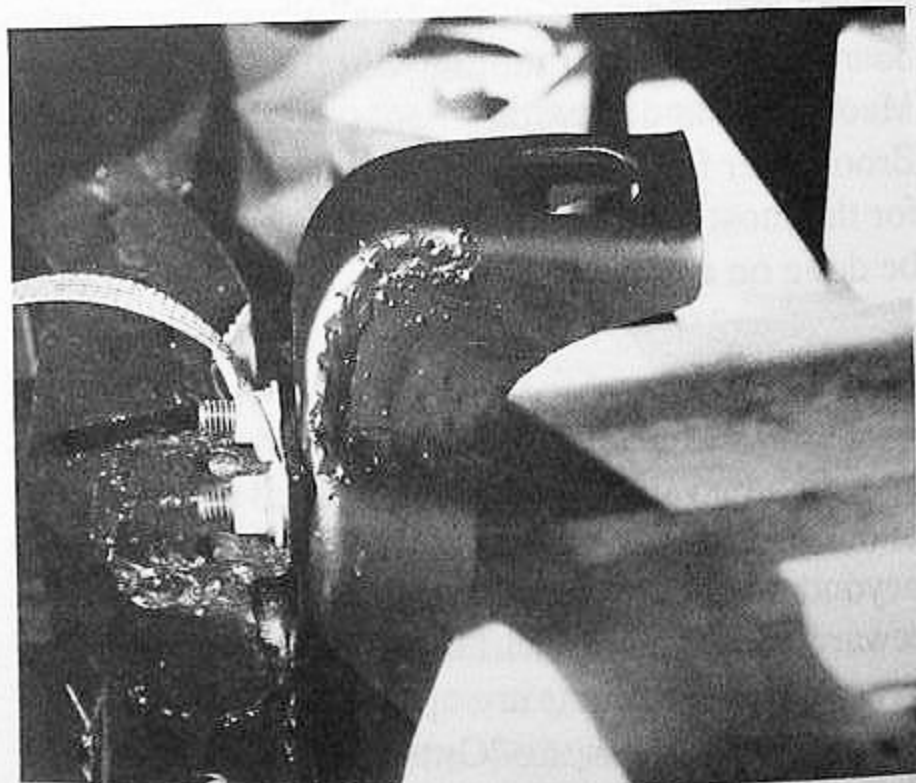
Early 1958 Corvettes had some problems which I'll trace through the changes made to correct them. Also, many minor changes were

made during the model year which distinguish early and later cars in 1958.

The first area we'll look at is the placement of the hood support. Up until about mid-production, the hood support was mounted on the right-hand side of the hood and anchored to the radiator support's top two bolts. This was a very solid mounting point and made perfect sense. The problem which was encountered was the need to keep the generator very low so the hood support would not contact it upon closing the hood. To accomplish this the generator was mounted directly to the exhaust manifold with its U-shaped bracket. 1957 pulleys for the water pump (part number 3713974), and the crankshaft (part number 3742991), were used. Since the right-hand exhaust manifold is slightly rearward, a special offset pulley (part number 3750545) was used to move the fan belt track forward and align it with the 1957 pulleys. This system was used on all carbureted and low (250) horsepower fuel injected engines. The solid-lifter (290



Early '58 generator "U" mount bolted directly to exhaust manifold. Heat shield is also in place behind U-mount.



Early '58 hand-reworked engine mounting bracket provided needed fan belt track clearance.

horsepower) fuel injected engine mounted its non-tachometer-drive generator (part number 1102059) farther forward and used the 4.1-inch flush-mounted pulley (part number 3711685) which aligned with the other pulleys.

However, interference arose between the fan belt track and the right-hand engine mount bracket (part number 3711640) attached to the chassis frame. This problem was temporarily resolved by heating and hammering a depression for fan belt clearance into the front of the 3711640 (1957-style) engine mount bracket. All right-hand hood support equipped 1958 cars have this not-so-delicate modification. Later, a redesigned right-hand bracket (#3749190) was introduced and used through 1962 production.

An additional high-tech factory fix was the use of a hose clamp around the lower radiator hose which was also being rubbed by the fan belt. The addition of the hose clamp securing the lower hose to the fuel line provided the necessary extra fan belt clearance. Obviously, this was a problem area to be corrected. At about mid production, the cure was implemented. It consisted of: Moving the hood support to the left-hand side of the hood; redesigning the (lower) hood panel; adding a support spacer (part number 3755555) which moved the generator up and forward approximately 3/4 inch; a new water pump pulley (part number 3724816), and crankshaft pulley (part number 3756328), both of which moved the fan belt 3/4-inch forward providing clearance for the lower radiator hose. The generator pulleys remained the same as before.

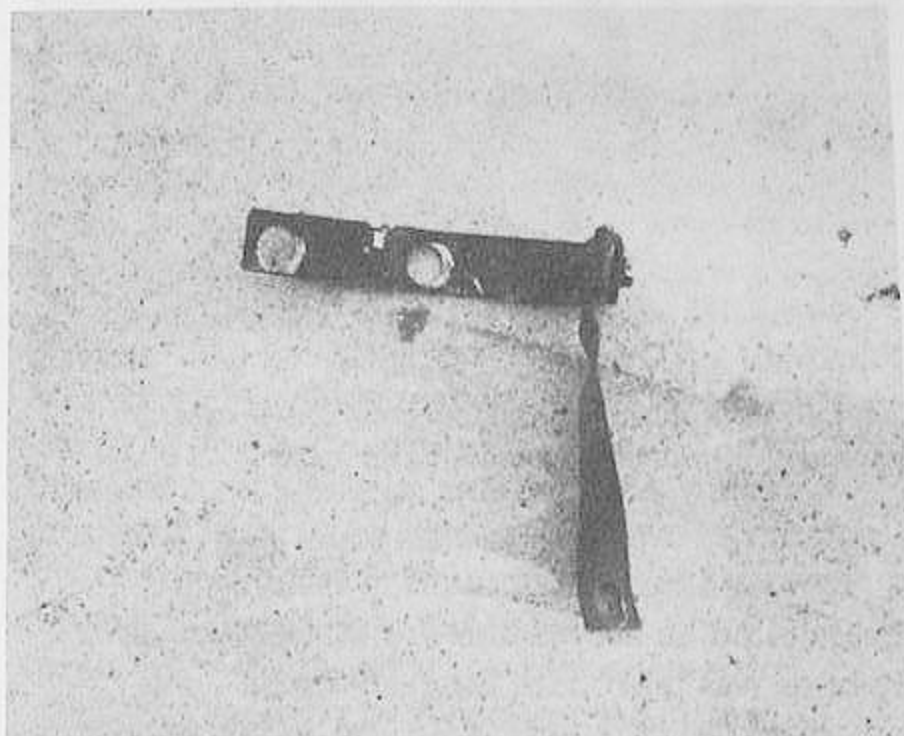
Another minor change was the generator support brace which was changed to allow the generator to be moved 3/4-inch forward (a much flatter profile for the brace).

Another area which saw improvements was the female hood catches. Originally, on at least the first few thousand cars, a short lever female catch was used and different supports for the release cables. These proved to be very hard to release the hood, so a later improved longer-lever model was incorporated. This was used the rest of 1958, and through 1959, with improved cable bracing. The short early levers

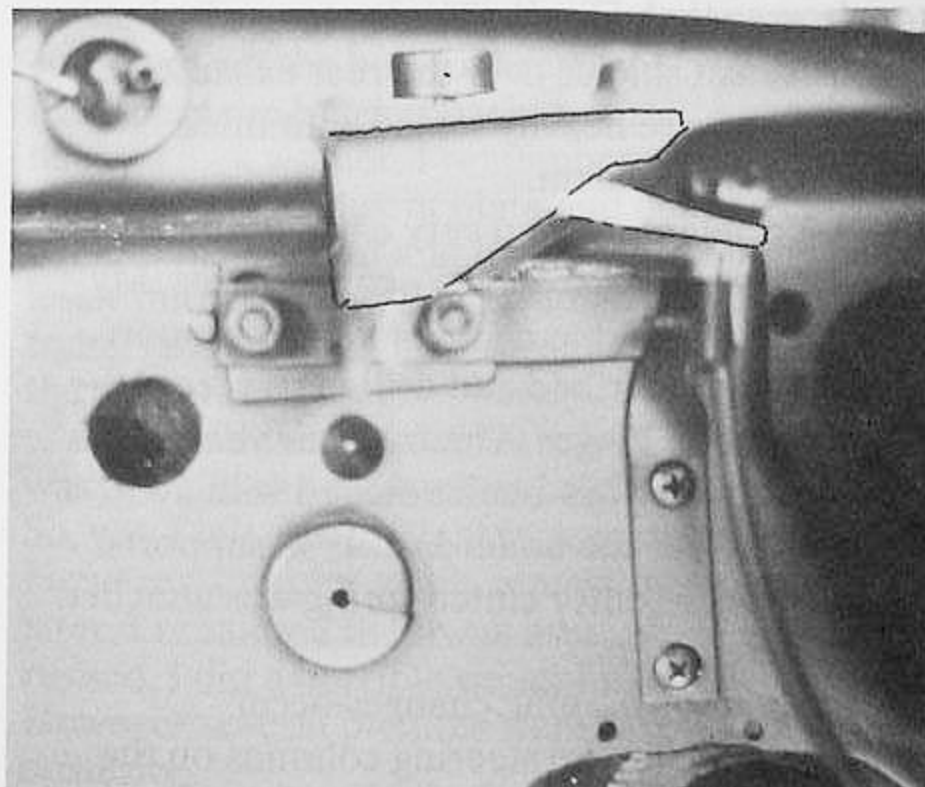
measured 2-7/8-inch with squared-off ends and no bevel as on the later levers.

The rear bumper brackets are unique to 1958 which used two bolts to secure them directly to the frame. Later 1959 and 1960 rear bumper braces attached to a frame mounted angle bracket.

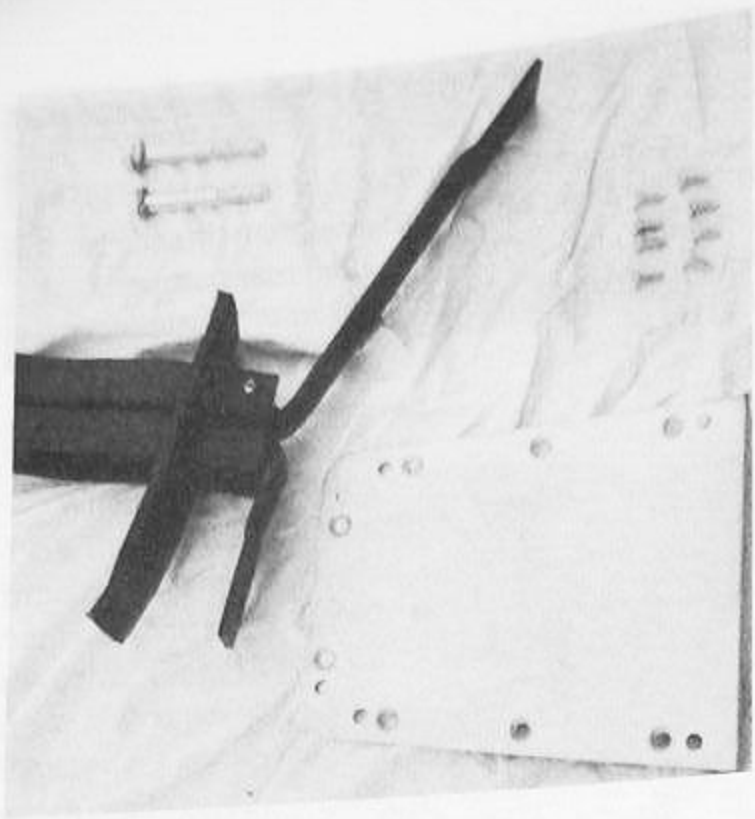
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Female hood catch support from early '58 style with short levers.



Left-hand female hood catch from an early '58 in place showing short handle, with brace screwed to firewall. Both left and right-hand supports were identical.



Early '58 rear bumper brace, access cover and fastener hardware. Note rubber seal mounted on brace.

The 1958 bumper mounting system necessitated an access hole for installation after the body was placed on the frame.

Approximately the first thousand 1958's used a metal cover plate to seal this access hole. All later 1958's used a large fiberglass floor plate which not only covered the access hole but also the area behind the wheel well making a wider storage area in the trunk. These plates also served as heat shields over the rear exhaust tunnels and were heavily sealed with thick undercoat type sealant.

Of special interest on very early 1958 Corvettes was the use of 1957 components. My 1958, J58S100297, has a 1957 radiator support which has been scribed and drilled to accept the 1958 style hood hinges. The fresh air vent also is a 1957 part which has been notched with a hacksaw to clear the underdash 1958 supports. The large over-center clutch spring was attached with 1957 retainers.

Many minor running changes occur throughout 1958. The steering columns on the early 1958's were painted beige, but then painted over with interior color all the way to the steering gear box including the small wire cover which retained the turn signal harness as it

emerged from the steering column. Later 1958's had their columns painted black as in 1959 and 1960.

The radio knobs are different on early 1958's and did not use the chrome backing bezel, but mounted directly against the console with the plastic bezels. Later 1958's used the same bezels as 1959 and 1960 with the chrome backing bezel against the console.

The Positraction caution label on early 1958's was the same as 1957 and began with the words "This car...", with later 1958's reading "This vehicle...", obviously done so the same label could be used on trucks.

A feature of all early- through mid-1958's was the use of front fender metal support reinforcements rivetted to the underside center of the fender directly below the top fender molding strips. These served two functions, one of which was to strengthen the top of the fender, and to serve as support points for the RPO 684 big brake cooling ducts on cars so equipped. Once eliminated from standard 1958's, these reinforcements continued to be used only on RPO 684 models.

The (acrylic) paint warning label migrated around the engine compartment and finally, on later 1958's, settled onto the inner lid of the glove box. Early 1958's placed the paint warning label on the middle of the fan shroud of all places! It has also been observed glued to the top of a fuel injection air cleaner.

In conclusion, the point I'm trying to make is to keep an open mind when judging or restoring a 1958 Corvette. Look at similar serial number cars to see what marvelous engineering cures were in effect at the time, and for painting and detailing changes which went on throughout 1958. Please write me with comments and any information on 1958's to further improve our knowledge of these truly changing cars.

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