

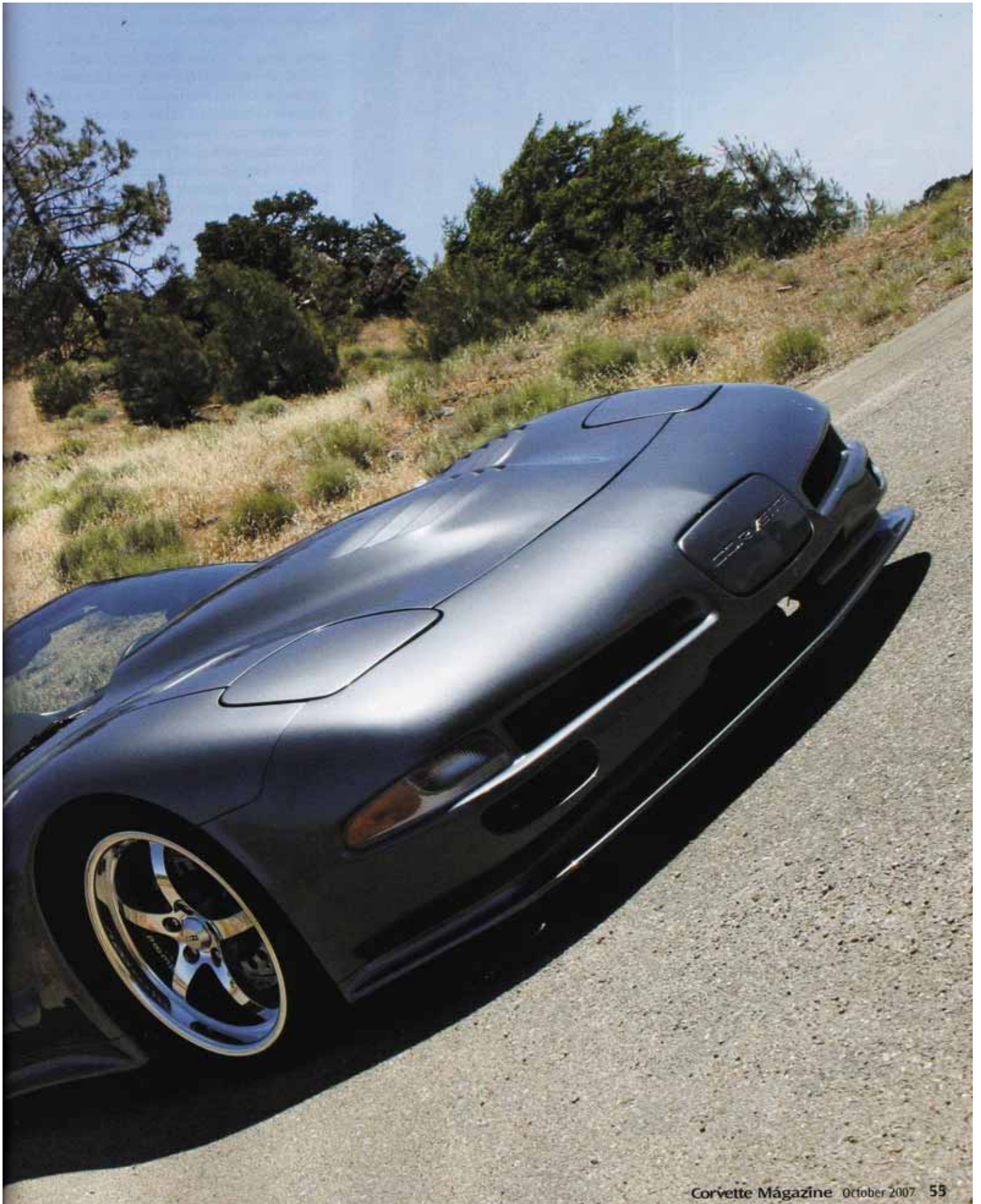
# ◆ in the Hole Fire

To battle the Ferraris and Porsches of his Silicon Valley colleagues, one Corvette nut has been willing to walk through flames. Jeff Glenn looks at the TTI Twin Turbo Corvette; pix by the author.

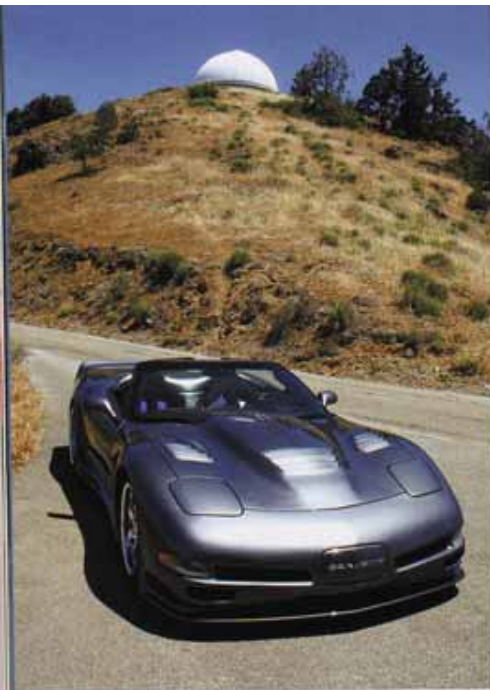
**G**rowing up next door to the Eckler family in Titusville, Florida, a taste for modified Corvettes entered Dave McNamee's life early. "We'd go down and look at the stuff at their shop, and they were always bring home interesting cars with body kits." Even so, building his own custom Corvette didn't just happen: It took some bad luck.











figured I could test the car out that way and see how it did before committing to buying a rollbar and everything else.

"When I showed up, there were maybe a dozen cars and about six drivers. Everybody just left the keys in their cars, and whatever you wanted to try, you just got in and took to the track to have fun." Dave and some others came away very impressed with the Corvette's performance, particularly in light of its cost, but he still could see room for improvement. Before the garage-sale accident, in other words, he was already thinking about mods.

**F**ollowing the accident the car wound up at Dennis's Auto Body and Speed Shop in Hollister, California. Well, Dave figured, no time like the present: "The C5 did not seem to have the wide stance I'd seen on some C4s, and I'd already studied a few articles on 'bolt-on' widebody kits. I figured this was an obvious opportunity to flare out the fenders and get some wider tires in there. Little did I know how much work is really involved with 'bolt-on' fenders." Dave selected a widebody kit from ACP, a Magna Extractor hood, Z06 rocker intakes, and a big ACP spoiler. He also took the opportunity to jazz up some of the other parts hurt in the crash. "I figured if I'm buying new brakes anyway, why not upgrade

Dave bought his '03 convertible new, after first looking at cheaper machines like the Nissan 350Z. "My wife and I were looking at Zs when we happened to go to a dealership that had a used Corvette convertible. She said she liked it, so I jumped up and said, 'Hey...how about we get a new one of these?'" Before losing his chance, Dave had talked them both into visiting the Chevy dealer. "I'd always wanted a Corvette, of course. It became our cruise-up-the-coast fun car."

The C5 remained stock until 9 April 2005, when a garage sale changed its life—or, more accurately, when the driver of a Chevy S10 pickup was checking the sale out from the street and "...failed to see me coming as he turned left across the road." The impact punched out the Corvette's left-front wheel and forced McNamee into a ditch.

To most owners, an incident like that is a tragedy. To McNamee, it was an opportunity. He'd already taken the car, complete with OE run-flats and Magnetic Selective Ride Control, to a track day with some of his car-crazy co-workers, and that experience left him thinking. An exec with the networking giant Cisco Systems, Dave had already gotten hooked in with the company's "fast crowd"—those fellow employees whose sports cars and exotics he had constantly seen in the parking lot. Through those folks Dave had been able to sample some of the fastest new cars on the road, including a good spread of European and Japanese hotrods. When one exotic-car-owning senior VP began putting private track days together, Dave decided to "...see what my car would do. I'd been doing motorcycle track days for years, and when my wife became pregnant with our son I had to back off. But I knew my boss did these private car track days, so I asked him about running the next one. I

Above: Virtually nothing betrays the twin turbos from above; hood venting and coffin blister make sure the same mistake doesn't carry over to the outside.

Below: Track-day seats help keep exuberant testers from sliding themselves right out of the car.

Bottom: Full-floating rotors work to smooth braking.





the whole system?" His main goals were to make the convertible handle and stop better, in case he decided to add extra horsepower down the road.

"I already knew I needed to eliminate the body roll, for example. I'd seen a lot of this from the motorcycle perspective, so I knew that a lot of the gains you make [at the track] come from suspension tuning, not horsepower." Another early decision was T1 suspension with matching Sachs shocks. "I wanted to keep it simple, and I knew if I went to coilovers I might have to really start playing with it to dial it in. That's hard enough to figure out on a two-wheeler—for a four-wheeler, it was just more work than I wanted to do."

For brakes he chose 14-inch Wilwood rotors front and rear and six-piston front calipers with ceramic pads, braided lines, and Doug Rippie Motorsports air ducts. To fill out the new wheelwells McNamee opted for 19-inch CCW rims in 11- and 13-inch widths wearing Pirelli P Zero tires.

Not that power enhancements were totally out of the question. "First I talked with Randy Rippie at Doug Rippie Motorsports. I'd been thinking about heads initially, but after hearing what I was trying to accomplish Randy suggested that for what I was doing I might want to think about blowers instead. He rec-

ommended consulting with Andy Green at A&A Corvette Performance. After talking to Andy I decided to start it out simple: just Borla exhaust and a MagnaFlow crosspipe initially. Then, while I was contemplating the supercharger issues, the bodywork bill kept getting higher and higher." That made the whole en-

roll, and lateral acceleration had increased to the point that "...with the stock seats, I had to keep my knee wedged in the door so I didn't slide right out."

With the handling sorted out, the last thing that became clear was that the Corvette still lacked the zip on the straights of its rivals. "It

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gine discussion moot. Five months after the wreck the newly widened Corvette was back on the road, and in short order Dave had also secured Kooks long-tube headers, a new cold-air intake box, and a full Synergy Motorsports dyno tune.

Not surprisingly, the biggest change came the next track day was the car's giant increase in suspension performance. "It was *huge*. I didn't get as much as I hoped out of the brake change—drilled and slotted rotors look great, but I'm not sure they perform as well as slotted rotors—but the car was really keeping up in the corners now." The racetrack-designed T1/Sachs setup had banished the C5's earlier

had the low-end torque, but overall I wasn't able to keep up." After considering a Kenne Bell supercharger Dave heard that Turbo Technology Incorporated was having a sale on its twin-turbo LS1 systems that made the kits pretty affordable. After looking into the company and its hardware, Dave ordered a copy and went back to Synergy for the installation.

That build, which was profiled in *CM34*'s how-to section, took about a week of intense labor and demanded various on-the-fly mods. Even so, Dave was pleased by the final result. "The performance is pretty cool. With twin-turbo Porsches, you really have to plan for it: If you're low in the rpm, first there's nothing





and then all of a sudden you get whiplash. Putting twin turbos on the Corvette feels a lot smoother because you've got all that low-end torque to begin with." Dave accurately calls it a "deceptive" buildup of power: "You hear them start to kick in around 2700, and from three grand on you really feel them. The next thing you know you're at redline and you have

it hard the first time, I was chasing a Ford GT and it couldn't pull away."

Unfortunately, that wasn't the end of the story. While he was chasing that Ford, a warning light came on telling Dave the oil temp was climbing fast. He backed off and went right to the pits. "It was smelling a bit hot, so I parked it next to Tazio's Ferrari and opened the hood.

"It was smelling a bit hot, so I parked it next to Tazio's Ferrari and opened the hood. All of a sudden there were flames all over the headers."

to shift. It sounds like the air brakes on a bus when that wastegate lets go—there's this really big explosion of air."

**A**rmed with 'F430 Killer' personalized plates, McNamee's first post-turbo track day was at Thunderhill Raceway in Willows, California. "The plate is mainly a joke for the Cisco VPs who have Ferraris and run these track events. One of the guys, Tazio, from Italy, has a 360 Stradale and a 430. He really loved it: He took pictures of his 430 sitting next to the Corvette." But could the new configuration really live up to this boast on the straightaways? "It could. In fact, when I ran

Then, just as I was walking around the engine, all of a sudden there were flames all over right-side headers." Tazio's cockpit-mounted extinguisher was hastily put into use on the burning Corvette. "We joked later that all you have to do is park the 430 Killer next to a Ferrari: It'll burst into flames, the fire will spread, and there you go—that's how you kill an 430."

Through it all, Dave says he kept his head. "From what I could see it didn't look like anything important was burning. The lines down there, mostly just a/c and starter wires, are pretty well shielded, and I just assumed it was blowout from the dipstick. I called up Rick at Synergy, and he thought that was probably

right." With the fire out, Dave cleaned the extinguisher powder and headed back to the track for some calm runs to assess any damage. Even without getting hard into the turbos he saw the oil temp rise every lap. "Under daily-driving conditions you just don't see any of that," he notes, pointing out that track use is a totally different environment—and that this is precisely the reason that so many enthusiasts find it valuable. The next item on the mod list is a giant oil cooler.

**L**ike all track-day cars, Dave's TTI-powered C5 is clearly a work still in progress. Since the Thunderhill trip he's added a competition seat and harness bar, and he's hot to fit upgraded rubber next. "The Pirellis look cool, but I'm not really happy with their track performance." One thing that's *not* on the list is more power. "I think 520 rear-wheel horses is all that I want. With more I'd be worried about breaking driveline components, meaning I'd have to get into a lot of hardening that I really don't want to get into. The things I still want to do are more on the lines of finishing the Caravaggio interior: I put a few pieces in already, so now the stock stuff doesn't look very good in comparison. There's also the underhood cosmetics to consider; I haven't done any of that yet." He's talking about finishing the dash and doing some audio upgrades, too. One thing Dave didn't wait any longer to install was a fire extinguisher. ○

