

seat covers likely concealed some ratty upholstery. If you want a top-down C4 for \$8K, be prepared to make such concessions.

Hoping to spend your eight grand on something a little curvier than the sharply creased 'C4? Don't despair: Third-gen Corvettes are also in the offering, albeit not all of the model's production range. Our searches turned up nothing before '77, the last year of the original C3 body style, and examples from that year are hard to find—though CM's Kroupa knows of one enthusiast who found his dream Corvette, a '77, for

less than \$8,000 (see sidebar below).

Hunting improves greatly with the '78 model. The face-lift gave the Corvette a slightly more modern look and the fastback layout provided the coupe with more luggage space. The engine was a carryover item, however, generating 180 bhp in base form and 210 with the L82 option.

Plenty of '79s also turn up in the market, which shouldn't come as a surprise since a record 53,000 were built. For this model year, Chevy incorporated the spoiler kit from the '78 Pace Car and boosted power slightly.

Beginning with the '80 model year, \$8K

C3s are harder to come by, at least those that aren't complete basket cases. Getting into an '82, which was the first year for the Cross-fire fuel injection, will be difficult. We found one that needed "minor work" (i.e., more repairs than you want) for \$10,000.

In the end, we were surprised by how many good \$8K Corvettes are out there. We knew there would be lots of C4s on offer, but we didn't expect to find as many late-model examples in our price range. These cars offer loads of performance for the money. But if old-school styling is higher on your agenda, C3s can also be had for eight grand. ○

\$8K SPOTLIGHT DREAM FULFILLMENT

I RECENTLY RECEIVED AN E-MAIL from George Lategla, who was in the process of attempting to become a first-time Corvette owner, a dream he'd had for a long time. "I'm 44, and have been wanting a Corvette for over 30 years now," he wrote.

In Lategla's original e-mail, he provided the following information: "I was wondering if you could give me an idea of a price for a 1977, L48, automatic California Blue Plate car that has just passed emissions, all power, all original, red/black, with 49,000 miles, original paint, has the original spare tire (never on the ground), new exhaust, tires, belts, hoses, alternator and starter. It needs an interior kit and a few small things."

My reply: "The value for this car as described is \$11,500. How did you locate it?"

Lategla: "I have been looking and looking for the right one for me. I looked locally first, then in the Sacramento area, where I noticed this car. I live about two hours from there. The owner was asking \$9K. I

looked at the car and went home to sleep on it. I called the owner in the morning and offered him \$7,500, and he took it. A week later, I went to pick her up.

"Thank you so much for the information. I love my new baby. I just got it home tonight. She is sleeping under her new cover. So, I guess \$7,500 was a great deal. Thanks again for the help. You rock, Bob!"

Fulfilling the dream of owning a special Corvette can certainly be a pleasurable experience. However, a word of caution: The search can be frustrating. On many occasions, I have driven untold miles to look at a Corvette that was described as a "nice driver" with the correct motor. Upon inspection, however, the car turned out to be a real dog, usually with the wrong motor!

But, as in Lategla's case, the hunt can result in finding a great buy. Usually, it is just a matter of time and patience until you too find the right one, just like Lategla did!—Bob Kroupa



PHOTO: JEFF GLENN