

Cathi & Randy Clark

1966 Yenko Stinger Stage II YS105



I'm a Corvair fanatic from way back. The first Corvair I ever met was a red Spyder coupe my parents bought new in 1964. My first car, in 1972, was a 1965 Corsa convertible-fun to drive but incredibly undependable. Because Dad was a passionate gearhead, just one of any type of motor vehicle was never enough. We endured a succession of Corvairs which like my Corsa were reliability-challenged. They were beaters for sure and might or might not run on any given day or for any extended period of time, but that was part of their charm. Dad belonged to CORSA, and from what I can deduce, he must have found the Yenko in the May, 1975 Corsa communiqués. My brother Fred and I went and fetched it from Madison, WI and drove it home to Indy. I distinctly remember white-knuckling it through that trip, in part because of Chicago's grueling rush hour traffic, and in part because based on personal experience, I wasn't so sure ANY Corvair would survive a road

trip of that length. Fred and I drove the car intermittently over the next couple of years. In 1977 it failed the State Vehicle Inspection due to a bad exhaust system. Since it had also developed a significant oil leak, and since there were plenty of other vehicles available to drive, and since we couldn't find anyone who could or would take on the task of fixing the exhaust and engine, we did what we had done with so many cars before- ditched it in the garage and left it there-out of sight, out of mind. (This was during the era when the Corvair had about as good a reputation as the Ford Pinto. At least where we lived, mechanics didn't seem to know much about Corvairs, nor did they care to. Parts availability was an issue, and since the Yenko was not even a "normal" Corvair, that just compounded the problem. Corvairs in general weren't collectible, and while Yenkos were scarce, they were not nearly as uncommon as one might think. So parking it and leaving it parked wasn't nearly the travesty it might seem today. Thus it sat in Mom's garage-and sat and sat and sat.) I can't thank her enough for allowing me to leave it there-rent free, mind you- for so very long. Sometime during the decades that it sat neglected, I borrowed a sum of money from my brother and gave him the Yenko's title as collateral. Being less than a responsible sister, I never repaid him that debt. Rather than keep the car for himself or sell it, he generously returned the car to me anyway. I thank him for that generous gesture and appreciate it more than I can say. It was not until after Mom passed away in 2003 that I finally moved the car from her garage to mine. Soon I contracted a severe case of Corvair fever and decided to start investigating the possibility of getting the car running. Expecting the same results as 25 years previously, I figured there was less than a snowball's chance in Hell of finding anyone to work on the car. On a whim I got out the phone book anyway and started looking. I was positively dumbfounded to find an ad for Gray's Automotive – Corvair Specialists- only 30 miles away in Carmel, IN. Still not too hopeful, I called and asked the man who answered the phone if he'd ever heard of a Yenko Stinger. Silly me-little did I know. "Is your name Cathi?" were the first words out of his mouth. "Is it YS105?" were the next. This was how I met Don Gray. Not only did he know the car and that I had owned it, but he remembered my Dad from those early CORSA days. As it turned out, I met not only a skilled and knowledgeable Corvair mechanic, but also someone who had known Dad and had shared his passion for Corvairs. I always regretted that Dad and I were estranged at the time of his death in 1978. As Don shared his recollections of Dad, I began to feel that our once-close relationship was at last being restored. It was a nostalgic time for me as I began to understand and appreciate my dad in a way I had never been able to before. Over the next couple of years, Don Gray put in countless hours resurrecting the Yenko's engine, which had become basically petrified. I'd go visit him and his gracious wife Nancy at the shop, and he'd show me the progress he was making or the latest boxes of parts he'd gotten for it from Clark's. It was clear that this was an enormous labor of love for him, and I am grateful for his dedication to the project. Unfortunately, Don did not live to see the Yenko back on the road, as he passed away before it was completely reassembled. The remainder of the reconstruction was taken on and ably carried out by Gray's mechanics Jeremiah Eskew and Paul Fox. I got the car back just in time for the 2006 Hoosier Auto Show. At Nancy Gray's urging, I had entered it in the show. I was certainly not expecting the reception the Yenko received. Just like Don Gray, a number of people remembered or had heard of the car and had been curious about what had become of it. I had absolutely no idea that it held such historic significance, what with it being unretouched** and all, so I was surprised at the attention it got and continues to get. The warm welcome my husband Randy and I received from the Circle City Corvair folks was an added bonus, and I am grateful to them for their kindness and hospitality, not to mention the tech tips and advice they've so generously shared. The Yenko is now in the best mechanical shape ever and is more fun to drive than should be allowable by law. It has a bit of surface rust and a few cracks and chips in the paint, but the chrome and interior are in good shape. It's definitely not a concourse car, not by a long shot, but I don't know that that's what I'm after at this point. For now I think I'll do some rust-preventative maintenance on it, drive it a bit-carefully, and continue to take it to shows and club events as long as it is of interest. Randy and I look forward to taking it to Iowa in 2010. *It is a well-documented original (other than the engine rebuild-which was done to specs) unmolested Stage II Stinger. It has all the Stage II accessories and features as described in the Yenko Stinger manual that came with the car, right down to the original rich imitation wood grain contact paper on the instrument panel and the fine cabinetry magnets that hold the rear deck air flaps open. It now has 54,000 miles.