



Total Motivation

Joel Rosen's Awesome Motion 454 Phase III GT Corvette

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Photography by Bill Erdman

Eighteen years before Reeves Callaway built his first Twin-Turbo Corvette, Joel Rosen was putting the finishing touches on Corvette that would delight Zora Arkus-Duntov and leave an indelible mark, however brief, in the pages of Corvette history.



That car was the Motion Phase III GT Corvette, a thundering combination of big-block power, agile suspension, and exotic bodywork that took the stock Corvette's already good looks and elevated it to world-class status.

Rosen had already developed a reputation as a top engine builder when he linked up with a progressive dealership on Long Island named Baldwin Chevrolet in the late 1960s. He was able to do what Chevrolet couldn't: create 550-horsepower 427 Camaros and Chevelles that came with warranties. His secret: Assemble the most efficient combinations of carburetion, camshaft, intake manifold, and exhaust header.

By 1969, Rosen had already fielded his Phase III engines and was ready to design a body for the Corvette that would put the finishing touches on a complete package. What the Phase III GT Corvette combined was Rosen's European inspired front end, featuring Ferrari-like headlamps with Plexiglas covers and a wild big-block hood while still incorporating the Stingray's front bumper and grille. The gills were restyled and the fenders were flared to accept wider wheels and tires. A fastback rear window (which enhanced interior storage space) and L88 rear flares were blended into the

Corvette's handsome rear quarters and included a Monza-style fuel filler. A wide rear stripe ran the width of the car.

The heart of the Phase III was a blueprinted and balanced 454 with aluminum heads, solid lifter camshaft, tricked carburetion and bulletproof bottom end. The engine produced in excess of 550 horsepower on the dyno and exhaled through a set of Hooker side pipes.

The entire package was expensive, costing close to \$13,000 for the most powerful big-block and all the body panels. Sales were slow because of the big ticket and the very small buyer market.

To enhance the Corvette's suspension, Rosen retuned the geometry and added special shocks, springs, and a traction bar to curb rear wheelhop. Other amenities included AM/FM radio, tilt-telescoping column, power steering and brakes, and air conditioning. These were luxuries not necessarily found on exotic European sports cars.

Priced at \$12,900, the 1970 Phase III was the most expensive car sold by Baldwin/Motion, and buyers were scarce. "I had hoped to sell at least 10 per year," Rosen remembered. "Instead I sold 10 between 1969 and 1971."

Since the Phase IIIs were custom built (it took about 90 days to produce each one), Rosen took liberties with the stripes. Hoods and scoops were also changed as Rosen experimented to find the perfect look.

While all the Phase III GT Corvettes were unique, this particular Daytona Yellow '70 is special to Rosen. "I had built this car for a real-estate broker in Beverly Hills," Rosen said. "It was mechanically finished and was parked next to the body shop when it or the car next to it caught fire." The Corvette burned to the ground and Rosen had to build another car for the customer. Because of some creative insurance claims on the part of Baldwin, Rosen was never paid for the car, but the second Corvette was delivered to the California buyer. The Corvette made its way to a Hollywood movie lot where it was painted black ("It looked like it was painted with a brush," Rosen said) and appeared in several movies. From there it moved to Mooreland, Minnesota, where, after spending five years tracking down the car, Rosen purchased it from the owner. "I flew in to make sure it was the right car. You could see the stripes under the black paint." It took six months to finally convince the reluctant owner to part with the 29,000-mile Phase III GT.

It's hard to say how many of the Phase III GT Corvettes remain of the original 10. Rosen estimates that perhaps three others still exist. Fortunately, he retained all the VIN numbers and can verify a legitimate Phase III GT as well as the other Motion 427 Camaros, Chevelles, V-8 Vegas, and big Chevrolets. He has some other Motion cars in his possession, cars he built over 20 years ago before government intervention shut him down because of emissions regulations, but the Phase III GT Corvette remains his favorite. Perhaps that's because with the Phase III GT Corvette, Joel Rosen achieved his dream of building the most sophisticated sports car of its time. And he did it for half the price of an Aston Martin or a Ferrari. Just try to imagine that.