Twenty-First Season of Corvette Racing: From 1999 Into 2019

DETROIT – For more than 65 years, the Chevrolet Corvette has stood alone as America's sports car. And for the last two decades, Corvette Racing has helped push the development, performance and popularity of Chevrolet's top-line performance automobile on race tracks around the world. It's the hallmark of North American endurance racing's longest-running factory effort as the calendar turns to 2019 and the start of Corvette Racing's third decade.

Corvette Racing owns one of sports car racing's top pedigrees with victories in the biggest events and at the most famous tracks around the world. It also represents the highest level of technology transfer between racing and the showroom with an increasing number of common elements as the years have progressed.

"With the Corvette Racing program, we are able to race what we sell in one of the most extreme environments in all of motorsports," said Mark Kent, Director of Motorsports Competition, Chevrolet Racing. "Competing in events like the 24 Hours of Le Mans and throughout IMSA serves two purposes. One is that it allows us to show the efficiency, reliability and ingenuity of the Chevrolet Corvette. Secondly, we develop technologies through racing that carry over to our production vehicles in order to make the safest and most advanced Corvettes for our customers."

The 2018 season marked the 62nd anniversary of the Corvette's first professional race. Its competition debut as a factory effort came at the 12 Hours of Sebring in 1956 with five Corvettes. In 1960, the Corvette brand raced for the first time at the 24 Hours of Le Mans with Briggs Cunningham entering three Corvettes in the French classic. It marked the Corvette's transition to an international icon.

The modern era of Corvette competition began in 1999, with the debut of the Corvette Racing team – a partnership between Chevrolet and Pratt & Miller Engineering, which builds the race cars and operates the program for Chevy Racing.

Since that time, Corvette Racing has accumulated 107 victories around the world – more than any other entrant in IMSA history. Among those are eight wins at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, three at the Rolex 24 At Daytona and 11 at the Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring. From 1999 to 2013, Corvette Racing led the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) in all-time victories and 1-2 finishes. It also won an ALMS-best 10 Team championships, 10 Manufacturer titles for Chevrolet and nine Driver championships.

During those years, the Corvettes competing on the track and those available at Chevrolet dealerships became more closely related, with racing elements adapted to make better road cars. The best and most recent example is the 2019 Corvette C7.R race car and the Chevrolet Corvette Z06 production car, which share a common aluminum frame, similar aerodynamic strategies, engine technologies and even tire construction.

For 2019, Corvette Racing once again will campaign two Chevrolet Corvette C7.Rs across two continents. The team will look to successfully defend its GT Le Mans Driver and Team titles in the full IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. Corvette Racing also aims to return to Le Mans in the great endurance classic. Each year, the race is another opportunity to compete and win against the most prestigious names in performance cars – in North America and around the world.

“Twenty years… I can hardly believe it,” says Team Principal Gary Pratt. “It’s a great partnership that we have with Chevrolet on the Corvette Racing program. It shows the commitment of everyone who touches this program. I’m really proud to have worked with the drivers, crew members, engineers, everyone at Chevrolet and many others who make this team what it is.”

In the beginning: Corvette C5-R (1999-2004)
Even before the fifth-generation Corvette rolled into dealerships, plans were well underway to return Chevrolet to professional endurance racing. The Corvette C5-R debuted in 1999 at the Rolex 24 At Daytona and was a fixture of global GT racing for the next five years. From 1999-2004, Corvette Racing and the C5-R set the standard for racing success with 31 victories in the ALMS, along with an overall victory at the Rolex 24 in 2001.

Success wasn’t limited to North America. The C5-R scored the first of its three GTS victories at Le Mans in 2001, following with wins in 2002 and 2004. ALMS team and manufacturer championships came in 2001-04.

The C5-R also helped instill Corvette drivers such as Ron Fellows and Johnny O’Connell as faces of the team and the ALMS. Fellows won 21 ALMS races in the C5-R and captured the GTS drivers’ championship three times, including twice with O’Connell. It also helped launch the sports car careers for future stars like Oliver Gavin, who remains a fixture with Corvette Racing.

Worthy successor: Corvette C6.R (2005-2013)
Chevrolet introduced the sixth-generation Corvette for 2005, and the Corvette C6.R made its competition debut at Sebring in March that year. What followed was a period of unqualified success that came to personify Corvette Racing and its new car – first in GT1 and then GT classes.

The Corvette C6.R was homologated on the Corvette Z06 production car’s architecture. Each was powered by a 7.0L small block V-8 engine, with dry-sump lubrication system, CNC-ported aluminum cylinder heads, titanium valves, forged steel crankshaft and plate-honed cylinder bores.

The C6.R proved to be a worthy successor to the C5-R. It won 39 GT1 races in the ALMS and delivered Driver, Team and Manufacturer championships every year from 2005 to 2008. In that era, Corvette Racing won 12 straight races from 2005 to 2006, followed by 25 consecutive wins from 2007 to 2009. Four drivers claimed GT1 titles, too: O’Connell, Gavin, Olivier Beretta and Jan Magnussen.

The C6.R also won the GT1 class races at Le Mans in 2006, 2007 and 2009, the latter being Corvette Racing’s last race in the class.

Corvette Racing and Chevrolet took another step forward in 2009 with the introduction of a GT2/GT-spec version of the C6.R – this one based on the Corvette ZR1. The GT rules, along with GTE at Le Mans, required many production-based components. The regulations made the C6.R and ZR1 the closest street and racing Corvettes since the 1960s. Components from four major areas carried over between the C6.R and ZR1:
• **Aluminum frame** – The same as the Z06 and ZR1, the shared structure included the windshield frame, hoop surrounding the passenger compartment, door hinge pillars, drivetrain tunnel, firewall and floor pan
• **Steering system** – The C6.R used the production steering column and production rack-and-pinion steering
• **Body profile** – The two cars are practically identical in appearance, as mandated by GT rules
• **Aerodynamics** – The C6.R used the production rear spoiler from the ZR1 and a production-based front splitter.

The GT-spec C6.R won 12 times from 2009 through 2013, plus a 2011 win at Le Mans, leading Corvette Racing and Chevrolet to Team and Manufacturer championships in 2012 and 2013. Tommy Milner and

Oliver Gavin won four times in 2012 to claim the GT Driver Championship. Antonio Garcia and Jan Magnussen followed with their own title in 2013 with three wins.

“Both the Corvette C5-R and C6.R earned a place among the greatest entries in the modern era of sports car racing,” said Doug Fehan, Corvette Racing Program Manager. “Each helped define Corvette Racing and Chevrolet as championship-winning efforts in global sports car racing. More importantly, the cars showcased and proved the technology that transferred to production Corvettes. That is a hallmark of the Corvette Racing program now, and it will be going forward."

A New Generation: Corvette C7.R (2014-Current)
Starting with the new TUDOR Championship – a merger of GRAND-AM and the ALMS – in 2014, Chevrolet and Corvette Racing entered the Chevrolet Corvette C7.R in the series’ GTLM class. Based on the seventh-generation 2015 Chevrolet Corvette Z06, the C7.R wrote a new chapter in technology transfer. The two represent the closest link in modern times between Corvettes built for racing and the road, sharing unprecedented levels of engineering and components including chassis architecture, engine technologies and aerodynamic strategies.

• **Frame Production** – As before, the race car and the Z06 will share the same, production-based aluminum frame. However, for the first time, the frames for the race car and production Z06 will be built in-house at the Corvette’s Bowling Green, Ky., assembly plant.
• **Direct Injection** – The addition of direct fuel injection to the Corvette Z06 will enable the technology to return to a Corvette race car for the first time since the end of the GT1 era in 2009. It promises greater efficiency, which can make a significant difference in long-distance endurance racing such as Daytona and Le Mans through fewer time-consuming pit stops.
• **Aerodynamics** – The Corvette Z06 and C7.R take the aerodynamic foundation to the next level, sharing aggressive strategies for increased cooling and aerodynamic downforce, including similar front splitters, rocker panels, and front- and rear-brake cooling ducts.

“It’s difficult to imagine what the Corvette brand would look like without the Corvette Racing program,” said Tadge Juechter, Corvette Executive Chief Engineer. “For 20 years we have been working towards total integration of the race- and street-car teams. Endurance racing provides us with a treasure trove of information in any number of areas – aerodynamics, engine performance and chassis, to name a few. That kind of real-world data is highly valuable to production engineers and designers, and we have made great use of those lessons from the racetrack. It really improves our products, and resonates with our fanbase and Corvette owners.”

CORVETTE RACING FAST FACTS – 1999-2019 (through Daytona)
Le Mans class wins: 8
Class Manufacturer titles: 12
Class Driver titles: 11
Class Team titles: 12
Worldwide starts (by car): 433
Worldwide starts (by event): 215
Worldwide wins: 107
Team 1-2 finishes: 60

About Chevrolet
Founded in 1911 in Detroit, Chevrolet is one of the world's largest car brands, doing business in more than 100 countries and selling more than 4.0 million cars and trucks a year. Chevrolet provides customers with fuel-efficient vehicles that feature engaging performance, design that makes the heart beat, passive and active safety features and easy-to-use technology, all at a value. More information on Chevrolet models can be found at www.chevrolet.com.