

Avelate Corvette

In the late 90's, noted hotrod builder Dean 'Dino' Arnold contacted Don Johnson to do some design work for him. Johnson, a respected automotive designer having put in time as a member of General Motors design staff as well as a stint at Toyota was happy to oblige. During that time, Johnson showed Arnold a few sketches of a custom Corvette he'd drawn. Enthralled with the design, Arnold suggested he and Johnson should partner to build it for the public. It was from those sketches that the 'Avelate' Corvette was born.

The design was based on the C5 Corvette platform. Its unique look evolved from his passion for American luxury sports cars especially the 1963-1967 Sting Ray design. Feeling that current GM designs had lost the sculptured look of Mitchell era vehicles, Johnson wanted to resurrect the Mitchell style using the DNA of a Sting Ray but in a modern rather than a pure retro look. The sketches included a split window coupe and roadster model.

From every corner, the 'Avelate' was stunning. The slab sided C5 Corvette panels were history, replaced with panels that had a European flair. The previous softly rounded tops of the Corvette front fenders were now heavily peaked. The front fascia, while continuing in the Corvette tradition, appeared more aggressive. A side cove reminiscent to the 1957 Corvette tucked into the fenders and doors. An aggressive horizontal feature line ran across the front fenders and was duplicated in the quarter panels. Twin circular tail lamps were deeply frenched into the tail panel.

The icing on the cake, at least for the 'Avelate' coupe model, was its split rear window design similar to the design made famous in the 1963 Corvette. While it looked like two separate windows, a cleverly designed fiberglass cap neatly fit over the factory rear

window. In addition to the new exterior, interior appointments were upgraded with special multi-color leather seat covers and door pads.

The 'Avelate' was produced at Arnold's 5,000 square foot Tacoma, Washington facility. The business plan was based on a customer delivering their newly purchased Corvette to Arnold's shop where his team would strip the exterior of nearly all body panels, replacing them with custom 'Avelate' body panels. The only original exterior parts that remained were the door handles, mirrors and lower valance. The base price of the conversion was \$29,000 but customers could order additional options including a supercharger, Brembo brakes and special wheels that could add another \$20,000 to the price. Arnold also attempted to partner with high performance Chevrolet dealers who would sell 'Avelate's' next to other new Corvettes. Sadly, only two dealers signed on.

Production began early 2001. With only two Chevrolet dealers signing up and no national marketing plan in place, initial sales were lackluster at best. With little money in the bank, the financial situation was becoming grave.

In 2003, Avelate Automotive was approached by John Rothman who asked Arnold to produce another Corvette based custom sports car. A partnership was formed, with hopes that the potential added revenue would help keep Avelate Automotive afloat. Unfortunately the partnership deteriorated and a lawsuit was filed by Rothman. As a result of the lawsuit, the company was required to hand over all of the molds to one of the plaintiffs in the suit, culminating in Avelate Automotive closing its doors in July, 2004.

The setback didn't stop Dean or Don. Both continued to ply their trade in specialty automotive work. In 2009, Dean 'Dino' Arnold was inducted into Daryl Starbird's ***National Rod and Custom***

Car Hall of Fame. He was named the ***2009 Builder of the Year***. Today, Dean Arnold and Don Johnson continue to work together on future projects. One can only imagine what they have up their sleeves this time.