



Special thanks to the Gateway Canyons Auto Museum and Museum Curator David Dormaier for granting access to this one-of-a-kind vehicle.

1954 Oldsmobile F-88

A REAL THREAT TO GM'S CORVETTE

THE CORVETTE'S 1953 DÉBUT was a runaway success. What was only meant to be a dazzling show car was rushed to production due to an overwhelming positive response. But that didn't mean it was the best two-seater that General Motors had to offer. In 1954, Oldsmobile revealed their F-88 and right out of the gate, it showed far more promise of being a true sports machine and a better one at that.

The F-88 sat low, positioned on top of a modified Corvette chassis and it too, sported a fiberglass body. It was painted in a metallic gold paint, paired with dark metallic green wheel wells. In keeping with the jet age spirit of the times, the vehicle had numerous ties to aviation.

There were 'jet airfoil wheel discs'—essentially fancy wheel covers that looked like jet turbines, and a unique dash layout that resembled a cockpit. Competition gauges were mounted in the center of the dash and flowed vertically down to the center console. Olds advertised it as an 'experimental sports convertible', connecting it to period experimental aircraft, with the hopes that the roadster would be seen as one

that pushed limits, reached for the stars, and inspired dreamers.

It was a real looker, but it wasn't the flash or glitz that set the car apart, and ahead, of the Corvette. The 'Vette was released with a six-cylinder, 150-horsepower engine and a two-speed transmission. A V8 was offered in '55, but even then, it mustered a paltry 195 horsepower. By contrast, the F-88 was equipped with an advanced version of Oldsmobile's Rocket V-8, which pumped out 250 horsepower and paired to a four-speed transmission. Flat out, it would have been thrilling to drive and an all-star track performer but alas, the F-88 was never given a chance to run.

Worried it would threaten Corvette sales, anxious Chevy execs persuaded the GM board of directors to squelch the concept car's move to production. Since Chevrolet was the company's largest and most profitable division, they were the most listened to and thus, the F-88 quietly faded into oblivion.

In its 64 years, the iconic Corvette has squared off against many stiff competitors but the one that almost brought it down was the F-88. U



Crowds were wowed by the F-88, on display at the 1954 Chicago Auto Show. Photo courtesy of the Chicago Automobile Trade Association.

Collectible Insights

Just a handful of F-88 concept cars were produced and today, this is the only surviving example. It was acquired in a 2005 auction for \$3.24 million dollars.



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