

# 2020 Corvettes at Carlisle 2019 Bring Strong Reactions from 60K Hardcore Fans

What do the faithful think of the new mid-engine Corvette?



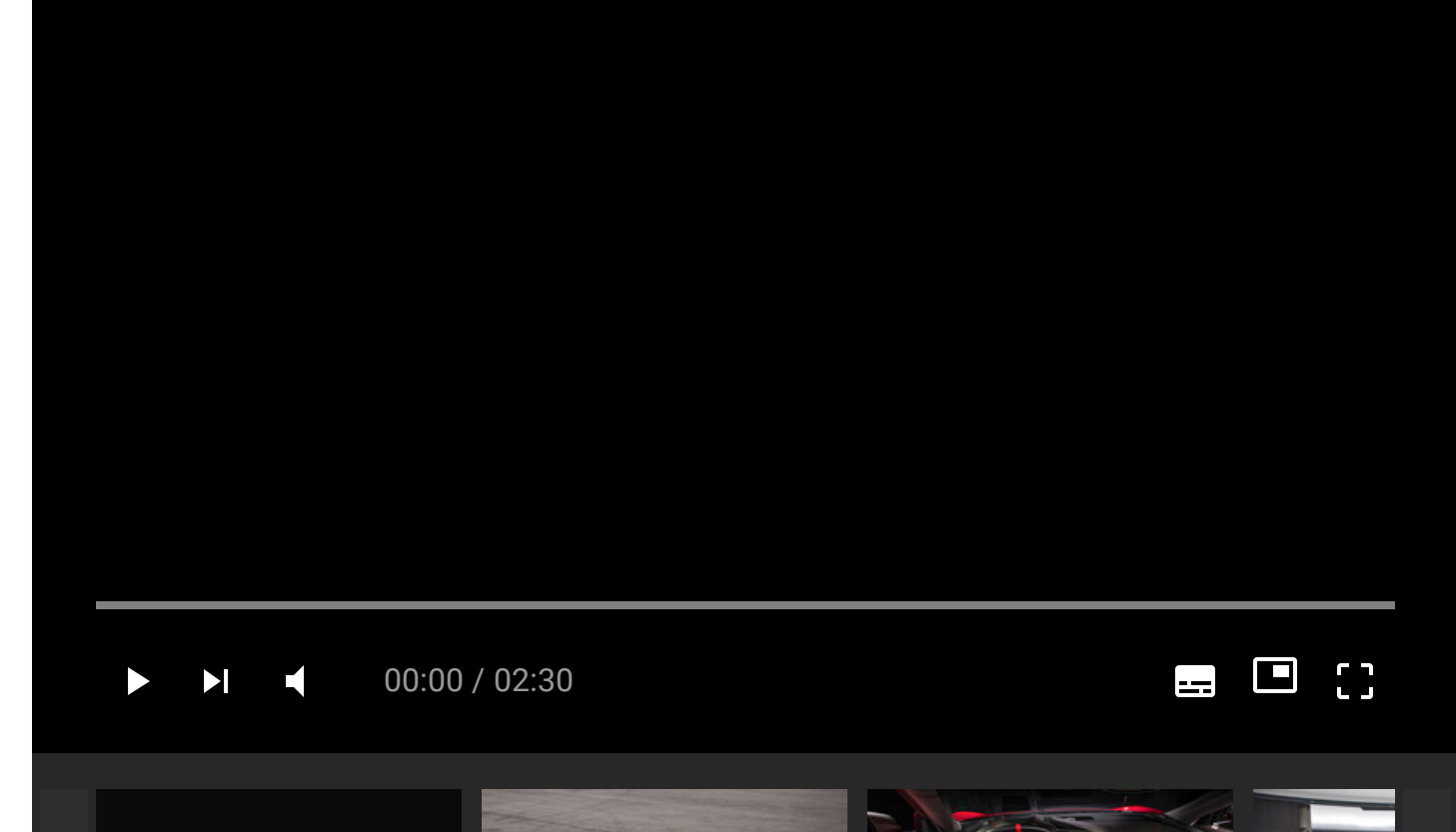
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Eric Tegler - Words and Photos; Manufacturer - Photos; James Lipman - Photos | Aug 30, 2019

By 3:30 p.m., [Chevrolet Corvette](#) product manager Harlan Charles was losing his voice at the biggest Corvette show in the world. Rain did nothing to dampen the spirits of the throng of loyalists snaking out of the huge tent that held the 2020 Corvette C8 at Corvettes at Carlisle, the famed annual 'Vette show held roughly midway between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Inside, Charles, Tadge Juechter, and the rest of the Corvette team faced a (mostly) friendly interrogation from hundreds of Corvette owners and enthusiasts.

Despite the crowd circling him, I got Charles' attention and asked the question I'd heard repeated endlessly since 7 a.m. Why no traditional manual transmission offered? Charles was ready, smoothly explaining the C8's architecture constraints, stick-shift sales rates, and the [Chevy](#) team's effort to make the new 'Vette's dual-clutch transmission engaging.



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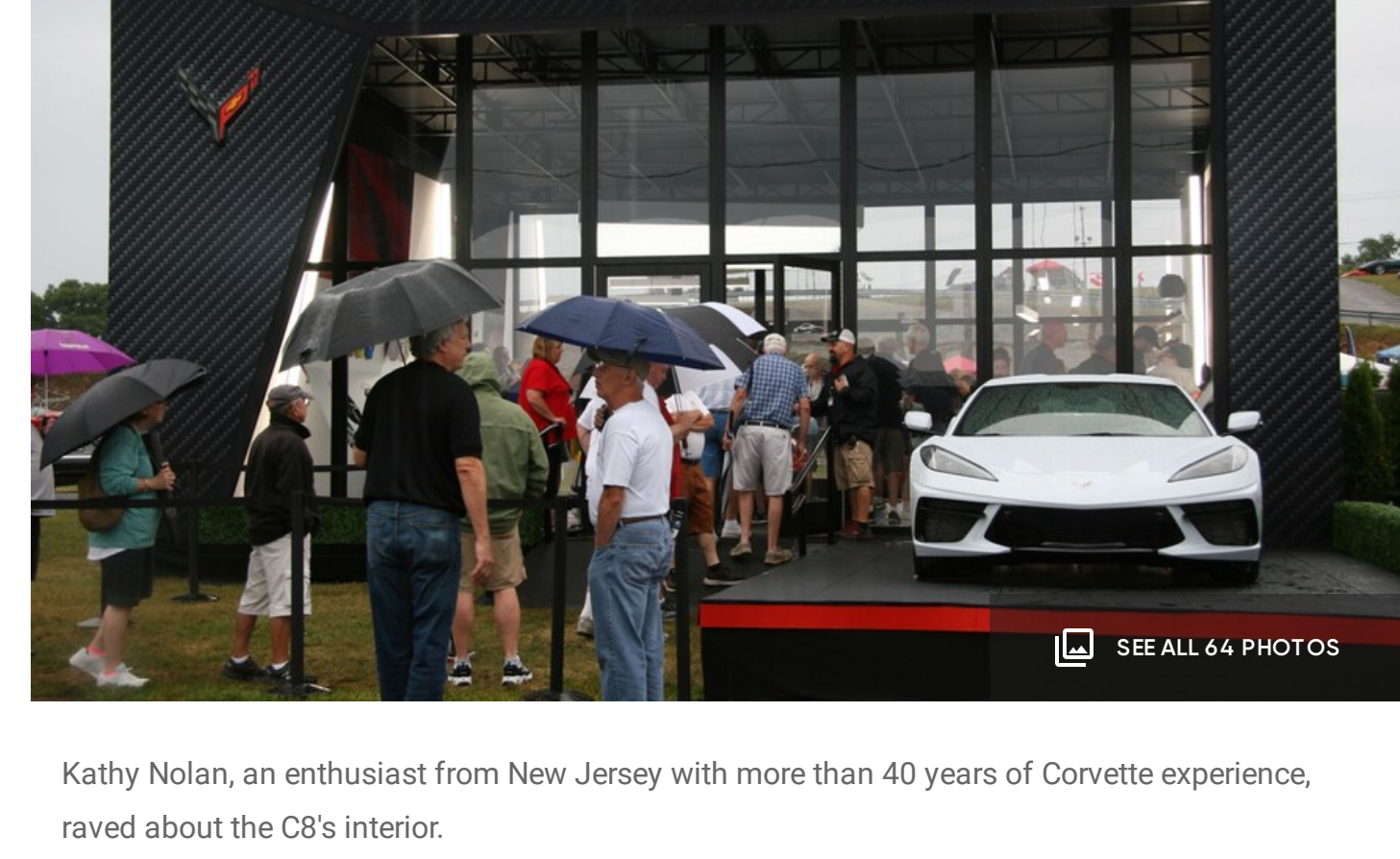
Half a beat after he asserted, "It is a manual transmission," a tall middle-aged man literally leaned in between Charles and me, interjecting, "It's still not a manual, you're not using your left foot!"

It wasn't rude so much as passionate. Carlisle is the "Church of the Corvette," with more than 60,000 attendees and 2,901 Corvettes on the show grounds this year.

And the congregation couldn't wait to see the new C8. They stood in long, wet lines to sit in pre-production cars (14 C8s, 11 driven from Michigan), took innumerable selfies, and pressed and pawed at them with endearing fervor. By any measure, their enthusiasm was a triumph for [Chevrolet](#).

Every Corvette stereotype was on display from gray-haired Z06 drivers, to couples with "Jake" tattoos. But there were young people, too, working-class folks, and the well-to-do. Overwhelmingly, they said they like first mid-engine Corvette—with some qualifications.

"For somebody that's not a big fan of mid-engine cars, I love it," said Ed Bradley from northern Virginia. "I was hoping that they would still build a front-engine car along with the C8, though," he added.



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Kathy Nolan, an enthusiast from New Jersey with more than 40 years of Corvette experience, raved about the C8's interior.

"My husband has a hard time getting in and out of our C7. The seat in the C8 would fit him. It's a man's seat." She loves the looks and the mid-engine configuration. "Zora Arkus-Duntov had this dream, and Corvette have honored him. I'm not afraid."

Brent (no last name given) from Berville, Pennsylvania, isn't afraid, either. He's ticked off. As Juechter addressed a huge afternoon crowd in Carlisle's grandstands, the 31-year-old muttered, "I'm done," and turned on his heel.

"They said they don't come with a clutch anymore. Honestly, I'm not even interested in finding out anything else about it. I'll never own an automatic toy car. I guarantee that even if [the C8] is super-affordable 15 years from now, I wouldn't even give it shot."

The day made it clear that Chevy will have difficulty shifting perceptions of a Corvette without a three-pedal option.

The company is trying equally hard to appeal to a younger audience. William Scott, a 27-year-old engineer from nearby Lancaster, Pennsylvania, understands Chevrolet's initiative but adds that the C8's price and ECU lockdown are a stretch for his peers.

"I think Chevy's being a little naive. It could be \$50K, and it would still be unattainable for most people my age. We also like to modify tech. With the supposedly uncrackable ECU, someone they choose is going to charge you a small fortune if you want the car reprogrammed."

Scott added that if money were no object, he'd attempt to engineer his own manual transmission for the C8.

Lance Miller, renowned enthusiast and Carlisle Events co-owner, admits, "I'm the biggest advocate of having a manual. That's one thing I'm bummed about."



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But Miller says he personally knows [Ferrari](#) and [Porsche](#) owners now ready to look at a Corvette for the first time, thanks to its exotic-like engine placement. "We will see a shift, and I'm excited to see that."

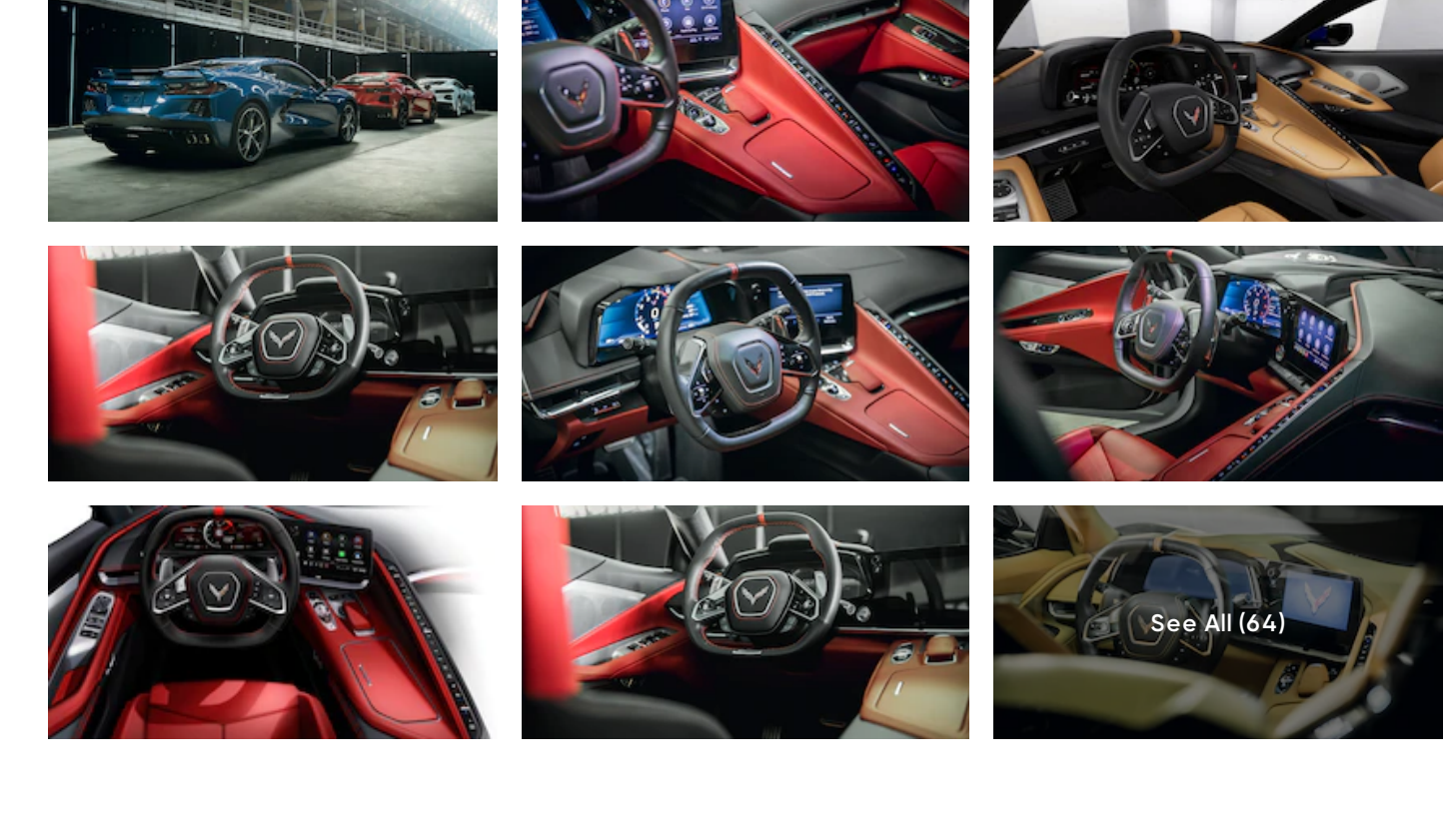
Jay Wilson from Long Island walked into the C8 display wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase, "Real Cars Don't Shift Themselves." Nevertheless, he says the 2020 Corvette is growing on him, and, like others we spoke with, he's waiting to see the Z06 or ZR1 before he puts down his money.

As I sat in my own C5 munching a sandwich, I noticed a familiar face. Le Mans-winning Corvette Racing driver Johnny O'Connell walked by. I dropped my lunch and asked him what he thought of the new 'Vette?

"Visually, it's stunning," he said, "But until I drive one in anger, I can't tell you what I really think."

None of us can.

**Image Gallery (64)**



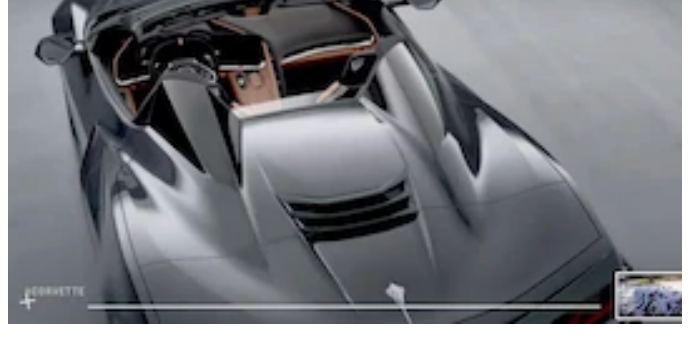
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