

How rare is your C3 RPO V54 T-top Carrier?

by Tom Russo

It is rare to come across Corvettes on the judging field with the factory-installed RPO V54 panel rack, but when found, becomes a curious oddity. The factory-installed RPO V54 Luggage & Roof Panel Carrier was offered only in 1977, then dropped in 1978-79, and again offered in 1980-82 with the same RPO but then a name change where it becomes a Roof Panel Carrier. In 1977, it was a rather popular item, selling 16,860 units while in 1980-81 orders only mustered an average of 3,530 units. In 1982, only 1922 were ordered.

The assembly, function and materials of the 1977 V54 is considerable different from the 1980-82 V54. Thus, the design differential easily earns a distinction of a first design (1977) versus the second design (1980-82) while both carry the same regular production option (RPO V54) assignment.

One look at the second design and it is easy to understand why reactions are mixed when seeing a Corvette sporting a 1980-82 rack with T-tops on the rear deck! A 1980 owner describes the reactions when he pulled into a Corvette show; people were more interested in the T-top carrier than the Vette! Another owner, after seeing this fully assembled, told the dealer "I'm not going down the road looking like that!" Yet another, inheriting a 1980 with the rack assembly, had the Corvette holes filled and repainted! Still others, once the Corvette is parked, mount the assembly...for display only!

Function

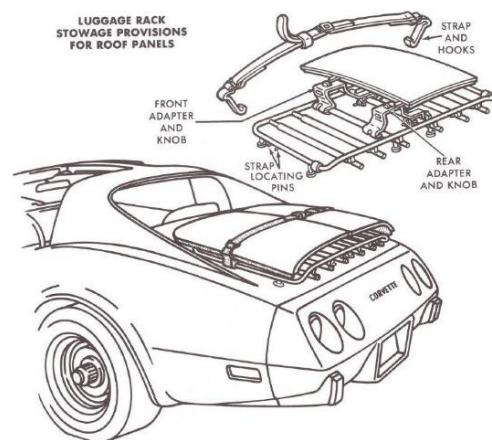
The function is nearly self-explanatory given the title that follows the RPO; luggage and roof panel carrier versus roof panel carrier. The first design suggests that in addition to the roof panels, the carrier can store additional luggage given the limited rear compartment storage in 1977. In contrast, second-design engineers must have assumed that with the large rear storage compartment in 1980-82, there was no need for roof-top type luggage storage. Thus a name change to Roof Panel Carrier. Other differences as well deserve to be documented give the rarity of the second design.



1977 Luggage & Roof Panel Carrier



1980-82 Roof Panel Carrier



1977 instruction & schematic

Each design uses mounting posts, brackets, and straps that secure the tops to the carrier assembly. Instruction sheets accompany both designs to assist owners with assembly.

Assembly & Hardware – 1977

The 1977 rack is centered on the rear deck over the fuel-filler opening. Eight mounting posts support the rack and eight cross-recess screws secure them to well-nuts under the deck. Positioning pins are welded to the two innermost bars (bracket guides) and to the vertical bars of the rack frame (strap guides). In contrast, the typical dealer-installed rack used six mounting posts with six screws to mount the rack to the body; positioning pins are absent.

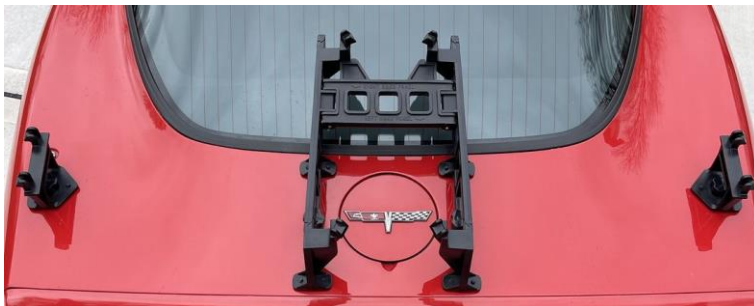


1977 Chrome-mounting hardware

Two chrome-mounting brackets are supplied to secure tops to the luggage rack, guided by the four positioning pins on the innermost bars. Strap ends fasten between the pins on the frame's vertical bars. When not in use, the mounting brackets and straps are stored in the passenger-side compartment.

Assembly & Hardware – 1980-82

The second design rack also mounts over the gas lid but departs from the chrome rack of 1977, using an injection-molded plastic process to produce black-plastic hardware. The factory pre-drills the four mounting holes and inserts the grommets with well-nuts under the deck. Black-



1980-82 black-plastic mounting hardware

plastic knobs on the mounting posts fasten the two outboard posts to the rear deck while an inboard rack, centered over the gas lid, locks the tops into place. The inboard and outboard posts secure the brackets for the Y-straps that wrap over the tops and to the two connections on the inboard rack. The dealer provides assembly upon request by the buyer.



1980-82 Factory-installed deck grommet & well-nut

Is it factory-installed or dealer equipment?

Whether your V54 is a first design or second design, original hardware is embossed with the *corvette* logo. The knobs that tighten the straps of the first design, have the *corvette* embossment while the second design, the *corvette* name tag is embossed on the

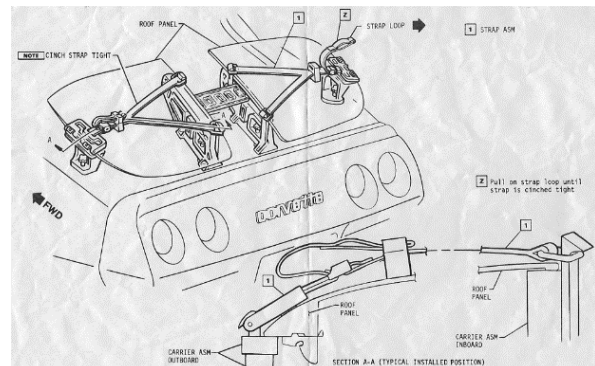
strap brackets. In 1977, when equipped with V54, T-top bags were deleted. In contrast, the second design included, not only T-top bags, but a rack hardware storage bag as well. The hardware bag is color-keyed to the interior while T-top bags are black.

When shipped, both designs included instruction assembly kits to assist the owner with the carrier's use once back at home. Schematic graphics depict the process for mounting panels using the carrier's brackets and straps.

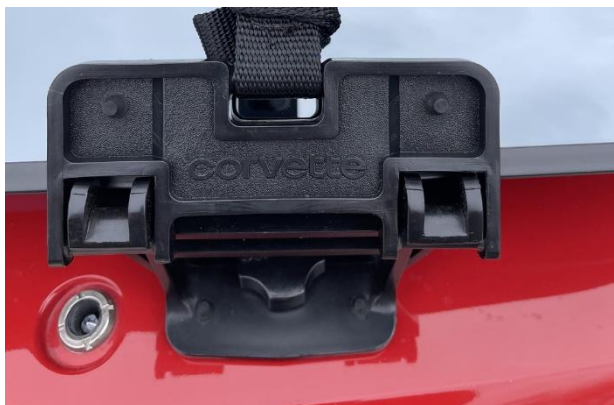
Owners who pick up a used 1977 or 1980-82 find remnants (brackets and/or straps) in the storage area and wonder whether their Corvette came with a roof panel carrier. When originally ordered, the GMAD manifest (buildsheet) listed the RPO V54 Roof Panel Carrier, as well as the window sticker, thus confirming its factory originality. The buildsheet listed all the new buyer's options and therefore documents a factory-installed unit. But as noted above, second-design assemblies are considerably rarer than the first design. Locating original parts, as well replacement parts becomes a significant challenge.



1980-82 Color-matched rack-hardware bag



1980-82 instruction & schematic



1980-82 corvette logo. Note assembly knob.

The NCRS Restorer and this author thank Oliver Brandenburg (1977) and Jim Pizar (1980) for their contributions to this article.

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1977 corvette logo on knob