

Late Model C3 Job Number

by Tom Russo

What is the meaning of those handwritten grease-pencil numbers on the underbody of my late-model C3? For years, factory handwritten marks have been the study, discussion and publication among Corvette enthusiasts. They are a frequent topic in Corvette forums, and restorers are always encouraged to clean the chassis lightly, document with photography, and spare them if at all possible.

Body panel marks or job numbers for C2s and early C3s have been interpreted and described by John Hinckley in "Numbers and the "Missing Link: the Broadcast Copy," *The Corvette Restorer*, Spring 2003. These terms used are consistent with the works of Al Grenning and John Hinckley, published in *The Corvette Restorer* that described C2 scheduling and assembly processes and production documents. The practice by factory workers of using grease pencils to mark fiberglass was to coordinate the assembly of body panels prior to trim tag and vehicle identification number (VIN) assignment and plate attachment. At the point that body assembly began, the VIN plate and the trim tag had yet to be attached. In fact their purpose was not to inform workers of vehicle identification or paint and trim but rather document buyer options and comply with federal requirements. Therefore, workers depended on other manual methods to track assembly of body panels that were being prepared for buyer-ordered options that would come later in assembly.



Figure 1: Jub # 195 on a 1973 underbody panel

This article will describe how this practice evolved and was used for the late-C3 years. It will also discuss how this method adapted to the integration of data processing and the GMAD landscape-style manifest or build sheet. In this analysis, data is used from 1973 (Figure 1) and 1978 to show the quality of original factory marks and availability of production documents. While this method is described for two production years, the methods were typical for the 1973-82 production periods.

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Discussion begins with the order in which manufacturing documents would have been prepared, distributed and used each day beginning with the run sheet. Next, the role of the build sheet is explained that documents this process and finally the link between body panel and build sheet is illustrated...the handwritten job number.

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The Job Number: Run Sheet

So, how did the St Louis Corvette assembly plant schedule, track and build 100-plus Corvettes sequenced on the production schedule for a given day? As dealer orders were processed, Scheduling and Production Control Departments would prepare the daily production schedules based on material and supply availability, options and balancing assembly line workloads. Each day, the schedules were distributed to the body shop showing the orders and their options and assigned a schedule sequence number. These schedules were called run sheets. Other schedules were also used that were a derivative of the run sheet called a low-run sheet.



Figure 2: Build Sheet 1978 VIN 00009

Believe it or not, quite similar methods are still used today in the Bowling Green Corvette assembly plant. Figure 7 is an example of a 2008 low-run sheet, displayed in an Excel spreadsheet format for the chassis and shows model, paint, order-related RPOs and of course, the pre-assigned VIN. The practice of pre-assigning the VIN prior to body panel assembly was introduced when the Bowling Green plant and its state-of-art data processing system began production in 1981.

In the late-C3 period, the run sheet was a columnar report, listing order-related data on a single line. The run sheet grouped 30 jobs per schedule... enough for one dot matrix printed sheet and each vehicle's option data. It sequenced

each order and option data by the schedule number. Each line item represented a unit or job with its related RPOs and schedule data that included the schedule number and a four-digit number used as a job number. The data included model (1YZ87), dealer order number and the RPOs associated with a particular order such as L82, FE7, ZX2, etc.

Factory workers used the run sheet as an overview of the 100-plus units to be built on any given day. Use of the run sheet would permit workers to get ready for the vehicle before it arrived and anticipate the next several hours of production work. On the chassis line, workers could see for example that for the next 30 vehicles, only a few heavy-duty suspensions (FE7) would be installed for that particular run. In the paint shop, a run sheet would show paint colors and what quantities to expect for the next few hours.

At this point, the vehicle identification number (VIN) had yet to be assigned so there was no way to track the buildup of a particular unit as assembly began. Build sheets were not used other than to confirm the options on a vehicle as it went down the assembly line. It was the run sheet that was the primary production document, few of which survived. In C2 years, the run sheet also listed the IDENT number but it is not clear if the IDENT was still used in the 1973-82 production period.

The Job Number: Build Sheet

The landscape-style manifest used in production from 1973-82, was typical of production documents used in GMAD assembly plants, such as Chevelle and Camaro plants. The St Louis assembly plant was among the last GM plants to adopt this method with the transition begun in the 1973 model year. A copy of this landscape-style build sheet was glued to the gas tank beginning in 1973, replacing the portrait-style Corvette Order Copy from the 1967-72 periods.

The manifest (build sheet) used Box 10 with the caption SCHED NO DATE to print schedule related information and an estimated date of production. The use of Box 10 to display this data was consistent with those 1973-82 manifests that were representative for this period.

Figure 2 depicts the upper left-hand corner of a 1978 build sheet for an early-built Pace Car... VIN 900009. The printed section in box 10 shows two data sets: A production schedule number (33 – 0290) and numerical data separated by a dash (03 – 18).

The numerical data 03 – 18 for VIN 90009 was an estimated date of production that body assembly was scheduled to begin for this particular vehicle. This information, once scheduled by the factory, was transmitted to the dealer and the anxious customer awaiting delivery. This vehicle has a trim-tag date code of 03-8 (G18) and reconciles nicely with the estimated date of production. So, on March 18, body assembly was completed, primed, painted and VIN plate and trim tag attached to the body. VIN 900009 was on schedule.

The other schedule code of interest is 33 – 0290. The 33 refers to the schedule number while 0290 was the sequence number that was used as the job number in the Body Shop. Another vehicle studied was VIN 900003, the first Pace Car available to a dealer for resale, also with a trim-tag date code of G18. Its job number is 281. Interestingly enough, the first day for Pace Car production, March 18, 1978, was Saturday.



Figure 3: Build Sheet 1978 VIN 02324

The estimated date of production does not always reconcile with a trim-tag date code and should not be expected to match up. For example, Figure 3 represents the manifest for VIN 902324 and shows an estimated date for production of 04-04. The trim-tag date code for this vehicle is stamped H05 or April 5. This was typical of scheduling and assembly since it took a day or two for a body to move through the Body Shop depending on the time of day assembly started and repairs that may have been caught in the Paint Shop and required the body to be removed from the body assembly line.

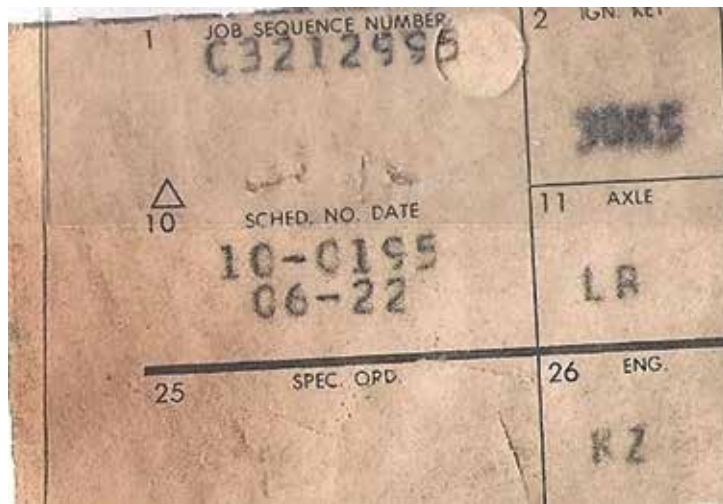


Figure 4: Build sheet 1973

Note that in the previous paragraph, March 18 was referenced as a production day of Saturday and the first day of Pace Car production. Saturday would represent an extra date of production and therefore those Corvettes built on Saturday were more than likely ahead of schedule. So, it is coincidental when the trim-tag date code reconciles with the estimated date of production referenced on a manifest.

Figure 4 shows schedule code 10-0195 for job number 195 shown in Figure 1. The schedule shows the estimated date of production 06-22. The trim-tag date code is K21, a day earlier than the estimated date. In 1973, trim-tag attachment was installed at the end of the Body Shop as the vehicle was readied for the Trim Line.

The schedule codes in Figures 2, 3 and 4 show that four digits were used as the numerical sequence for job numbers, which would have been recycled after 1,000 or approximately ten days of production. Most build sheets available for this study show three digits used. Only one build sheet used all four digits. It cannot be determined during these production years, whether the factory used 1—0999 or 1—9999 and then recycled the numbers. This is in contrast to job number sequence used for C2 production period, 1—500, which then repeated. However, in late-C3 period, the sequence runs through at least 999.

Spring 2014 The Job Number: Body Panel

The body panel underbodies available for study were limited to those with three-digit numbers visible on relatively well-preserved and maintained late-C3 Corvettes. Neither two-digit or four-digit job numbers were observed, so at this point it cannot be stated how the first 99 numbers of the sequence were hand-scrawled on the passenger side underbody. Figure 1 shows the number 195 from a 1973 Corvette. Figure 5 shows a hand-scrawled yellow grease pencil mark 281 from Pace Car VIN 900003. Figure 6 represents VIN 900009 and illustrates 290. VIN 900003 and 900009 are very low-mileage Pace Cars and the quality of the grease marks are excellent. The job number illustrates the nature of a grease pencil to penetrate a fiberglass panel and migrate outward, giving the appearance of a shadow on its digits.

Although there are nine digits between 281 and 290 and only six between VIN90003 and VIN90009, it is known that during this period of Corvette manufacturing, bodies were pulled regularly for repair as they moved through the Paint Shop. All bets were off for maintaining any semblance of sequence due to the chronic need for all manner of paint repairs—runs through prime or color, solvent pops in panels and filled seams, burn-throughs on the Polish Deck, etc. The Paint Shop was a real sequence mix-master. (Hinckley, Restorer article)

In this example, by the time units were ready for VIN-plate attachment, three had been removed from the assembly line for repair. Once repaired the body would have been re-scheduled for assembly. Thus, there exists an ebb and flow of job numbers when contrasted to VIN assignments. Table 1 illustrates three pairs of VINs and their related job numbers, of which all pairs were assembled from the same schedule number or the next number.



Figure 5: Underbody Panel VIN 00003



Figure 6: Underbody panel VIN 00009

Summary

Build sheets are highly coveted by Corvette owners, but what is known about their application to Corvette assembly for the late-C3 models has just begun to be explored, understood and published. Most enthusiasts know about RPOs but less is known about the interpretations and application of broadcast codes. The focus of this article targeted the SCHED NO DATE or scheduling information and estimated date of production, which represented only two data sets printed on a 1970s style GMAD production manifest.

An additional objective of this study was to differentiate C2 use of job numbers in contrast with those of the later-model C3 period, recognizing that early C3 was more like C2 rather than late C3.

Three methods were described that differentiate these periods:

1. The use of the 1—500 sequence for job numbers increased to four digits.
2. Job numbers were pre-assigned based on a schedule number on the run sheet.
3. Job numbers were documented on the build sheet.

Note that while production continued to integrate state-of-the-art data-processing methodology during 1970s Corvette assembly, it continued to depend on hand-scrawled yellow grease pencil marks to coordinate body panel assembly. Did this practice continue once assembly operations moved from St Louis to Bowling Green? It is hoped that this discussion will inspire enthusiasts of late-model C3 Bowling Green-built Corvettes to pursue such a study.

The author and *The Corvette Restorer* appreciate the contributions of C3 owners who have contributed to this article in the spirit that the hobby would benefit. In particular, a special thanks to Tim DeAtley, John Hinckley, Mike Kaps, Terry McManmon and Kevin Nelson for their contribution.

Table 1 Job Numbers vs VIN Assignment				
Sched NO	Date	Job #	VIN	VIN
Date	Number	Differential		Differential
03-18	33-0281	9	0003	6
03-18	33-0290		0009	
04-04	44-0623	65	2324	66
04-05	45-0688		2390	
04-28	61-0975	100	5691	104
04-28	61-1075		5795	



LOW RUN SHEET FOR CHASSIS DATE 10/03/07

PVI	MODEL	PAINT	TOP	THOOK	EXP	T90	T93	TRANS	O/COOLR	KOS	BRAKE	FSS	EXH	VZ3	VIN
11111	1Y167	998						AA			JSS	FSS			110174
11112	1Y107	998	TWO					AA			JL9		NPP		110175
11113	1Y107	998	PTD					MM	KPS		JSS				110176
11114	1Y107	414	PTD					AA			JL9				110177
11116	1Y187	998	Z06					MM	KPS		J56				110178
11117	1Y167	45U						AA			JSS		NPP		110179
11118	1Y107	748	PTD					MM			JL9			VZ3	110180
11119	1Y107	740	CLR					AA			JL9		NPP		110181
11120	1Y187	998	Z06					MM	KPS		J56				110182
11121	1Y167	838						AA			JSS	FSS			110183
11122	1Y107	838	CLR					MM	KPS		JSS		NPP		110184
11123	1Y107	85U	PTD					AA			JL9				110185
11124	1Y187	998	Z06					MM	KPS		J56			VZ3	110186
11125	1Y167	838						AA			JSS				110187
11126	1Y107	998	CLR					AA			JSS		NPP		110188
11127	1Y107	414	PTD					MM			JL9				110189
11128	1Y187	998	Z06					MM	KPS		J56				110190
11129	1Y167	168						AA			JSS	FSS	NPP		110191
11130	1Y107	108	TWO					AA			JSS		NPP		110192
11131	1Y107	678	PTD					MM			JL9				110193
11132	1Y187	678	Z06					MM	KPS		J56				110194
11133	1Y167	168						AA			JSS		NPP		110195
11135	1Y107	168	CLR					AA			JL9				110196
11136	1Y107	108	PTD					AA			JL9				110197
11137	1Y187	414	Z06					MM	KPS		J56				110198
11138	1Y167	85U						MM			JL9		NPP		110199
11139	1Y107	998	TWO					AA			J56	FSS	NPP		110200
11140	1Y107	748	CLR					AA			J56				110201
11141	1Y187	85U	Z06					MM	KPS		J56				110202

Figure 7: Low Run Chassis Sheet, Bowling Green, 2008 Model Year

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