

CORVETTE VIN DECODING GUIDE

How to Read Your VIN, Trim Tag, and Engine Suffix Codes

Every Corvette carries a coded identity—stamped into metal, embossed on tags, and cast into engine blocks. Learning to read these codes is essential for verifying authenticity, confirming matching numbers, understanding a car's original equipment, and making informed purchase decisions.

This guide walks you through the three most important identification systems on any Corvette: the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), the trim tag, and the engine suffix code.

Understanding the VIN

The VIN is the Corvette's birth certificate. Its location and format changed over the years, but its purpose has always been the same: to uniquely identify every car that left the factory.

Pre-1972 VINs

Early Corvette VINs are shorter and simpler. A typical 1967 VIN reads **194677S100001**, which breaks down as: **1** = Chevrolet, **9467** = Corvette coupe, **7** = 1967 model year, **S** = St. Louis assembly plant, **100001** = sequential production number. The VIN plate is typically riveted to the steering column support or the door jamb.

1972–1980 VINs

GM expanded the VIN to 13 characters and added engine codes. A 1972 VIN like **1Z37K2S500001** tells you: **1** = Chevrolet, **Z37** = Corvette coupe, **K** = 350/200hp engine, **2** = 1972, **S** = St. Louis, **500001** = sequence. This is the era where the VIN directly reveals the engine—critical for verifying originality.

1981–Present (17-Digit VIN)

Starting in 1981, all vehicles adopted the standardized 17-character VIN. This format includes the country of origin, manufacturer, vehicle type, restraint system, body style, engine code, check digit, model year, assembly plant, and sequential number. Online decoders can break down every character, but understanding the engine code and assembly plant positions is most useful for quick verification.

MATCHING NUMBERS

"Matching numbers" means the engine suffix code, casting number, and date code are all consistent with the VIN and trim tag. A car advertised as matching numbers should have

documentation supporting every claim. At Corvette Connection, we verify matching numbers as part of every pre-purchase inspection.

The Trim Tag

The trim tag (also called the cowl tag or body plate) is a small metal tag typically found on the firewall or windshield pillar. It contains information the factory used during assembly and is one of the most valuable tools for verifying originality.

A typical C3 trim tag includes the Fisher Body style number, the body assembly plant, the trim (interior) color code, the exterior paint code, and the build date. These codes cross-reference with the VIN and engine data to form a complete picture of how the car was originally built.

Common Trim Tag Codes

- **ST:** Style number (e.g., 67-19437 = 1967 Corvette coupe)
- **TR:** Trim/interior color code (e.g., 407 = red vinyl)
- **EXT:** Exterior paint code (e.g., 976 = Rally Red)
- **BDY:** Body assembly sequence

Cross-referencing these codes against known factory records helps confirm whether the car retains its original colors and options, or has been repainted or reupholstered.

Engine Suffix Codes

The engine suffix code is stamped on a machined pad on the engine block, typically on the front passenger side. This code identifies the engine's original application, horsepower rating, transmission pairing, and date of manufacture.

A suffix code like **HE** on a 1967 block tells you it's a 327/300hp engine paired with a manual transmission. **HO** would indicate the 327/350hp L79 with a manual. These codes are generation-specific and there are hundreds of them across the production years.

Why Suffix Codes Matter

A Corvette advertised as having a “big block” should have a suffix code that confirms it. A “matching numbers” car should have a suffix code that matches the VIN. And a car presented as a rare L88 or ZL1 should have documentation far beyond just the suffix code—including tank sticker, Protect-O-Plate, and ideally, documented provenance.

FREE ONLINE TOOLS

Several free resources can help decode your Corvette's identity. CorvSport.com offers comprehensive VIN decoders for all generations. The Corvette Black Book is the definitive printed reference. And if you want hands-on verification, bring your car to Corvette Connection—we inspect these codes as part of every evaluation.

Red Flags in Documentation

When evaluating a Corvette's documentation, watch for these warning signs:

- VIN plate rivets that appear to have been disturbed or re-attached
- Engine date codes that are later than the car's assembly date (the engine should have been built before the car)
- Trim tag codes that don't match the car's current paint or interior
- Suffix codes inconsistent with the advertised engine specification
- Missing or re-stamped pad markings on the engine block

None of these alone means fraud—engines get replaced, cars get repainted, and legitimate repairs happen over 50+ years. But each discrepancy requires explanation, and the explanations should be documented.

CALL BEFORE YOU BUY

If you're considering a Corvette purchase and want the VIN, trim tag, and engine codes professionally verified, call Corvette Connection at 860-645-0184. Our pre-purchase inspections include complete code verification and documentation review.