

CORVETTE

Corvette Fever

February 1995

Road Testing The Legends

'57 Fuelie

'66 427

'68 L88

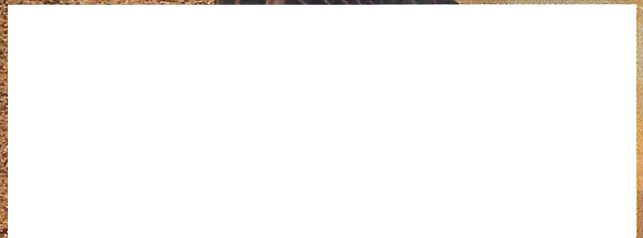
'70 LT-1

'87 Callaway

'90 ZR-1

'84-'95

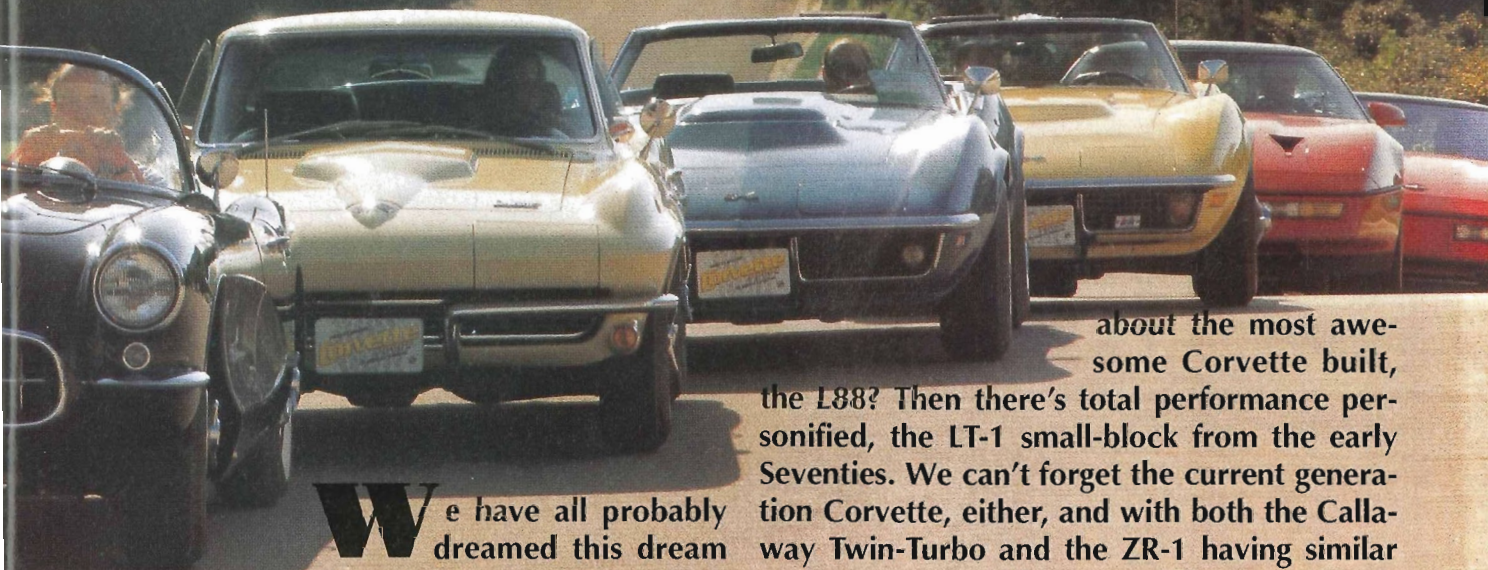
BIG BRAKE BUILDUP



Driving The Legends

A behind-the-wheel look at a sextet of ultimate dream Corvettes

text and photography by Thomas Glatch



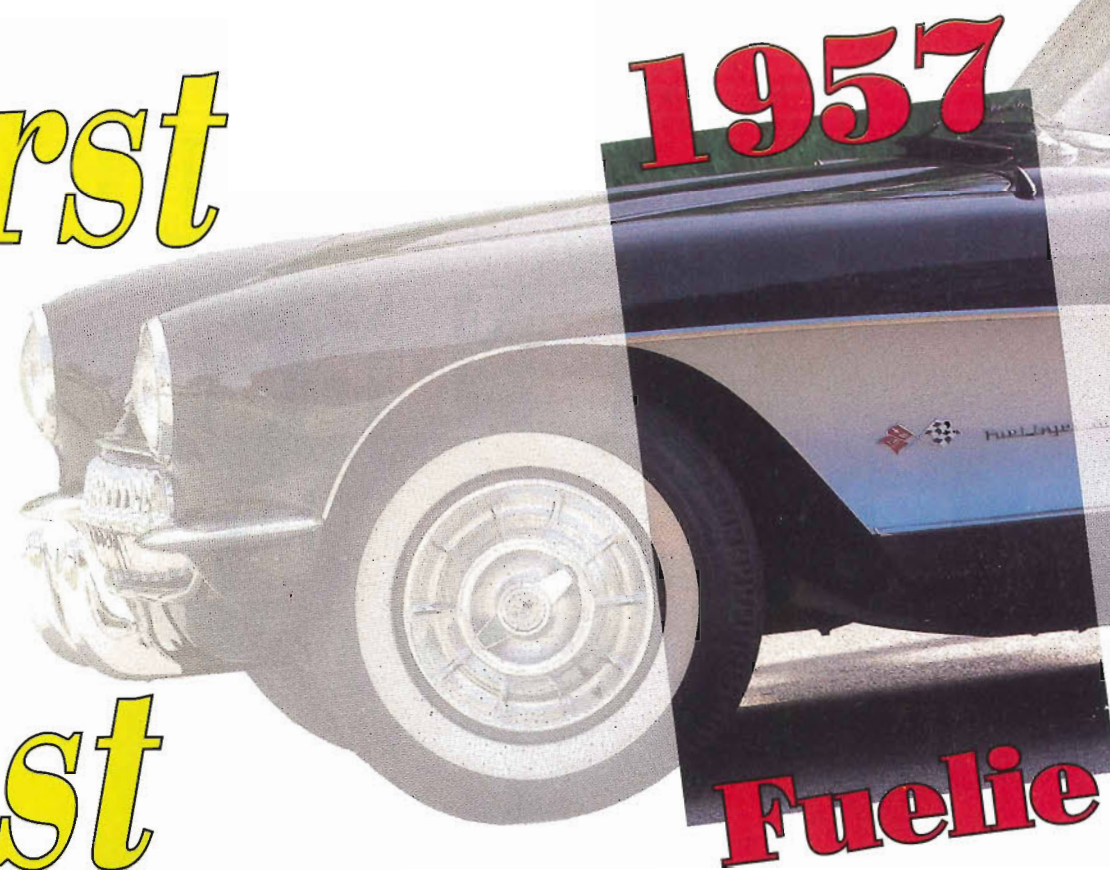
We have all probably dreamed this dream at one time or another. Let's imagine we have enough money to buy the most legendary of Corvettes. Which ones would we want? Since we're interested in nothing but the best, the list would include the most notable, most spectacular Corvettes ever.

Certainly a fuel-injected '57, the first of the legends. A mid-year big-block, of course. How

about the most awesome Corvette built, the L88? Then there's total performance personified, the LT-1 small-block from the early Seventies. We can't forget the current generation Corvette, either, and with both the Callaway Twin-Turbo and the ZR-1 having similar performance we'd have to opt for one of each.

It's a short list, but an impressive one. Sadly, most of us will never get to drive, much less own, even one of these legendary machines. But *Corvette Fever* recently gathered together, and drove, one perfect example of each of the legends. Let's take a ride and dream a little dream...

First In Fast



Chevrolet built a good sports car the first four years of the Corvette's life — then they built a great one. It looked the same as the previous model, but with one significant difference: gone was the carbureted 265 cid V-8. In its place was the new 283 small-block, with the top-of-the-line and revolutionary Rochester "Ram-Jet" mechanical fuel injection. And suddenly the world took notice.

One horsepower per cubic inch is what Chevrolet claimed. Even many specially built race cars could not make that boast. Although the ad writers may have stretched the facts a little — rear wheel horsepower was probably closer to 230 — the point was made: The best production engine in the world was now powering America's sports car. And that fact was proven on racetracks the world over.

Gary Rush, of Barrington, Illinois, brought out his magnificent '57 Fuelie for us to drive. Getting into Gary's '57 is an exercise in nostalgia. The big truck-like steering wheel is upright and close to the chest, and you sit with that elbows-out style that Formula 1 drivers had at the time. Make no mistake, this car is comfortable, with fine visibility, good access to the controls, and plenty of wide-open space. You are sitting on, not in, this car, and it's a commanding sensation in which you feel you are master of your fate.

Twist the key, and the Fuelie fires readily. The sound is a raucous mid-range burble with a sassy metallic rasp, like cellist Yo Yo Ma playing through Metallica's sound system. 1957 was the first year a four-speed transmission was offered in the Corvette, and obviously Corvettes have always had superb four-speeds, as Gary's slips through the gears with the short, solid throws we are familiar with on newer cars. Getting under way is tricky, since the clutch pedal has very short travel, but we're off and running.

Hitting the loud pedal results in instant acceleration, and we're soon in second and climbing. That familiar howl of the carbureted small-block is missing, replaced by that same raunchy rasp that just gets louder. This car may be nearly four decades old, but for all we could tell the powerplant could be as modern as tomorrow. John Dolza designed the Rochester mechanical fuel injection system not so much for increased performance, but for faster throttle response, and his creation does all it's supposed to. *Road & Track* magazine, in its August 1957 issue saw 0-60 in 5.7 seconds, and the quarter mile in 14.3 — outstanding performance even by today's standards.

Reality sets in when you try to turn or stop the '57. Tire, brake and suspension technology have made quantum leaps over the years, and Gary's Fuelie bears that out. You soon understand why the steering wheel is so big and so close to your chest, as you need the leverage to crank the unassisted steering. Things happen slowly, and you have to learn to anticipate your actions in advance. But drive any other automobile from 1957, and you instantly understand how superior the Corvette was in its time. We recently drove a 1954 Corvette, and the improvements that were made by 1957 were truly amazing.

Restored by Ken Hanna and D & M Corvette, Gary Rush and his family have owned their '57 Fuelie for over two years, and "plan on keeping it forever." Who can blame them, for this, the first Corvette supercar, certainly earns the title "legend."



1957 Fuelie - At A Glance

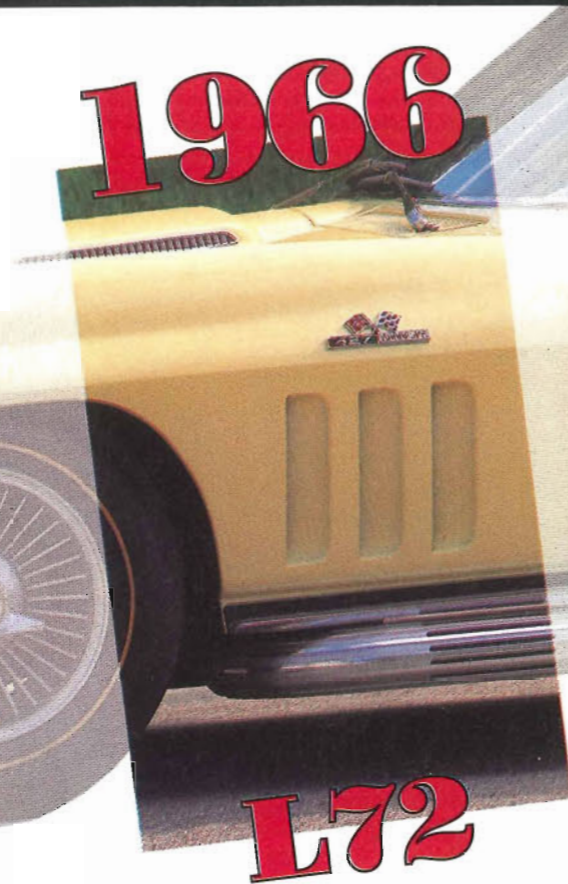
Owner Gary Rush
 Horsepower ... 283 @ 6200 rpm (SAE gross)
 230-hp (approx. net)
 Torque (lb-ft) 290 @ 4400 rpm
 Production 713
 List price \$4,277.62

PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph 5.7 sec.
 Quarter mile 14.3 sec



More Power To You



What a difference nine years makes. A whole new Corvette was introduced in 1963; as modern as tomorrow, it made cars like the '57 seem positively old fashioned. Then in 1965 a whole new way of making power came on line.

Chief engineer Zora Duntov resisted installing big-block power in the Corvette as long as he could, but the bean counters won out. It was much less expensive to pack a big-block punch into a Corvette than build the complex, temperamental fuelie. But which big-block to choose for our dream team?

Dave and Mary Glass of D&M Corvette in Downers Grove, Illinois, offered us three big-block cars from their collection: a 1965 375-horsepower, a 1966 425-horse, or a 1967 435-horse. The obvious choice would be the '67 L71, the famed 427 tri-carb that is a favorite of collectors. But a look at vintage magazine road test suggests that the '66 L72 might have been as much as one second faster in the quarter mile. So Dave Glass brought out his Sunfire Yellow '66 coupe. The first car ever restored by their shop 13 years ago, this Bloomington Gold-certified Corvette is packed with options, like side pipes, knock-offs and goldlines, headrest seats and a teakwood steering wheel; driving the original price close to the \$6,000 mark.

Climbing into the '66 is a much more familiar feeling, with its cockpit-like instrument panel and down-low driving position. Getting comfortable is easy, as the Glass' Corvette is equipped with the great "tilt-tele" adjustable wheel. As with all mid-year coupes, rearward visibility is poor, but then you can see the fading competition just as well in the side mirrors.

Two or three revolutions of the starter and the big 427 comes to life. It idles easily, producing that beautiful, distinctive big-block rumble out of the optional side exhaust. The clutch spring is very strong, but with the 427's massive torque, getting the Corvette rolling is easy. Mashing the throttle produces instant acceleration, the kind no small-block could produce. The fuel-injected "mouse" motors were noted for their quick response, yet the single four-barrel 427 jumps ahead just as instantly. But while the small-blocks produce steady streams of power (especially in upper rpm range), the 427 leaps forward faster, then keeps on climbing. Yet for all the horsepower, this car does not feel on the brink of disaster like so many musclecars of the era. With this much power the narrow original goldline tires could be like driving on ice, but the Corvette's excellent chassis keeps things from going too far over the edge.

The coming and heavy-duty J56 brakes are light-years better than the '57 Corvettes, yet this is a car that seems reluctant to turn, preferring to go straight and let that 427 wind out. And therein lies the different philosophies. Cars like the fuelies were better balanced, their lighter powerplants allowing better cornering and braking. But the big-blocks make up for their handling deficiencies with head-spinning power, along with lower cost and easier upkeep. And driving one is a unique experience. No, make that a legendary one.

1966 L72 - At A Glance

OwnersDavid & Mary Glass
 Horsepower425 @ 6400 rpm (SAE gross)
 340-hp (approx. net)
 Torque (lb-ft)415 @ 4000 rpm
 Production5,258
 List price\$5,760.40

PERFORMANCE

0-60mph5.7 sec.
 Quarter mile12.8 sec. @ 112 mph



Small Block Sensation

1970
LT-1

It doesn't look much different than Lou Groebner's L88, but Chris Balodimas' 1970 LT-1 is a whole 'nother story. Despite its big-block hood and familiar Stingray styling, a few moments behind the wheel is a lesson in contrasts.

Turn the key and the engine jumps to life. Let out the light, smooth clutch and the LT-1 springs ahead. With power steering and brakes, this LT-1 has a much lighter feel than either of the big-blocks, as eager to turn and stop as it is to go. This was one of the last Corvettes that Zora Duntov worked on, and one he was especially proud of.

The difference, of course, is under the hood. A high-performance version of the 350 cubic-inch small-block resides there, pumping out an advertised 370 horsepower, or about 295 by current SAE net horsepower ratings. It is lighter than a big-block, reducing weight over the front wheels and overall. But with 10.5:1 compression, a big Holley four-barrel, and high-lift cam and solid lifters, this is a thoroughbred performance engine. The fuelie was reborn, at least philosophically.

Dropping the hammer, the LT-1 lets out that familiar NASCAR-like roar as it leaps ahead. Slipping the smooth M21 four-speed into sec-

ond is a joy, as the mighty "mouse" winds and winds. It just never seems to lose its breath, content to be unleashed. But when asked to slow or turn, the LT-1 responds just as readily. Without those huge amounts of big-block torque to break them loose, the tires grip tenaciously, and the power-assisted four-wheel disc brakes are almost too sensitive, screeching the car to a halt in an instant.

"I love this car; it's such a joy to drive," Chris Balodimas yelled over the noise. He owns a '65 396 roadster along with a '92 roadster and a '93 40th Anniversary roadster, but the LT-1 is special. It received a full restoration by D&M Corvette in 1992, and has earned Bloomington Gold, NCRS Top Flight, and Chevy/VetteFest Triple Crown awards for the effort. The Daytona Yellow paint is highlighted by the deluxe wheelcovers and Firestone whitewalls, while the Black standard interior sports an AM-FM radio and tilt-tele wheel. It certainly turns heads around Chris' Glendale Heights, Illinois, home.

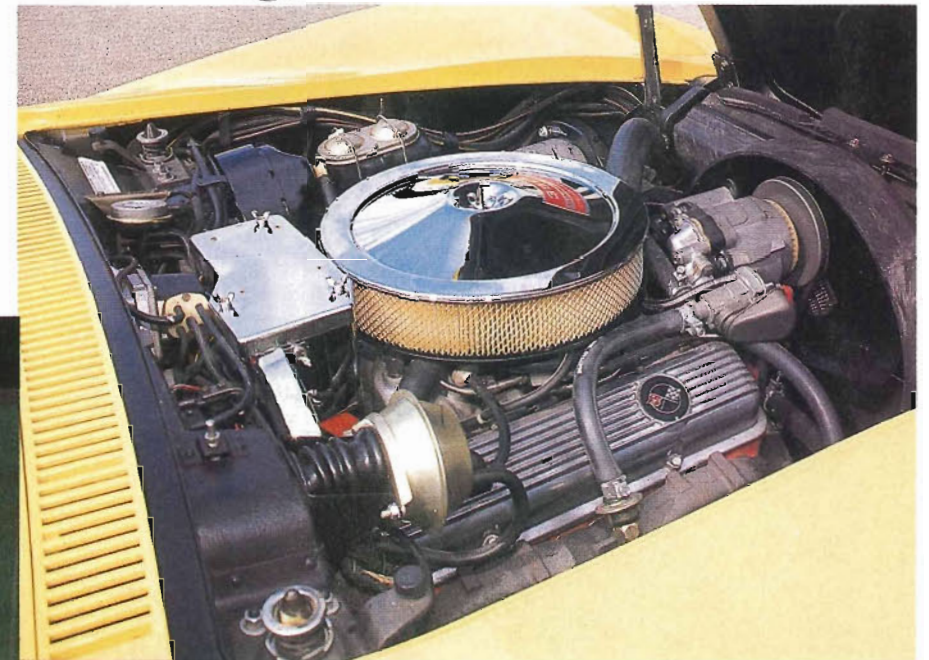
While the big-block cars produce heart-stopping thrills, they are a stressful beast to drive. The LT-1, on the other hand, is a car we could drive hard all day long. It begs to be turned loose on deserted back roads, running right at the limit. That's the kind of performance that make this thoroughbred so legendary.

1970 LT-1 - At A Glance

Owner.....	Chris Balodimas
Horsepower.....	370 @ 5600 rpm (SAE gross) 295-hp (approx. net)
Torque (lb-ft).....	380 @ 4000 rpm
Production.....	1,287
List price.....	\$6,185.05

PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph.....	5.7 sec.
Quarter Mile.....	14.17 sec. @ 102.2 mph



Twin Turbo Terror

1987

Callaway

After the last LT-1 rolled off the line in 1972, it sure seemed like we would never have a Corvette supercar again. Chevrolet kept turning out the best in sports cars, but with the Arab oil embargoes, runaway inflation, and ever-tighter government restrictions, the days of legendary performance seemed like history.

But Chevrolet engineers never gave up, looking toward the day when technology could combine performance with social responsibility. The all new 1984 Corvette brought us that much closer to that goal; all it needed was good old-fashioned gut-twisting horsepower. Chevy engineers developed 18 twin-turbocharged Corvettes, nicknamed "Puff the Magic Dragon," that put 1960s power into the latest generation Corvette. But the cost and complexity of the installation was beyond what Chevrolet could produce themselves.

Enter Reeves Callaway. Callaway Cars had already built excellent turbo conversions for BMWs, Volkswagens and Alfa-Romeos. Now it was time to build an all-American supercar.

Steve Bramati, of Skokie, Illinois, bought this Twin-Turbo new in 1987 the same way every Callaway was ordered — right from the local Chevy dealer. It was a factory option, dubbed RPO B2K, that drop-shipped the Corvette to Callaway's Connecticut shop for the extensive conversion. Steve's Corvette had every available option offered, and the Callaway package tacked on another \$19,995.

Inside, the Callaway looked like any other 1984-'89 Corvette, with its warm, inviting leather seats and digital F-16-like instrument panel. Only a turbo boost gauge mounted on the dash and a serial number plate on the console revealed that this was something special.

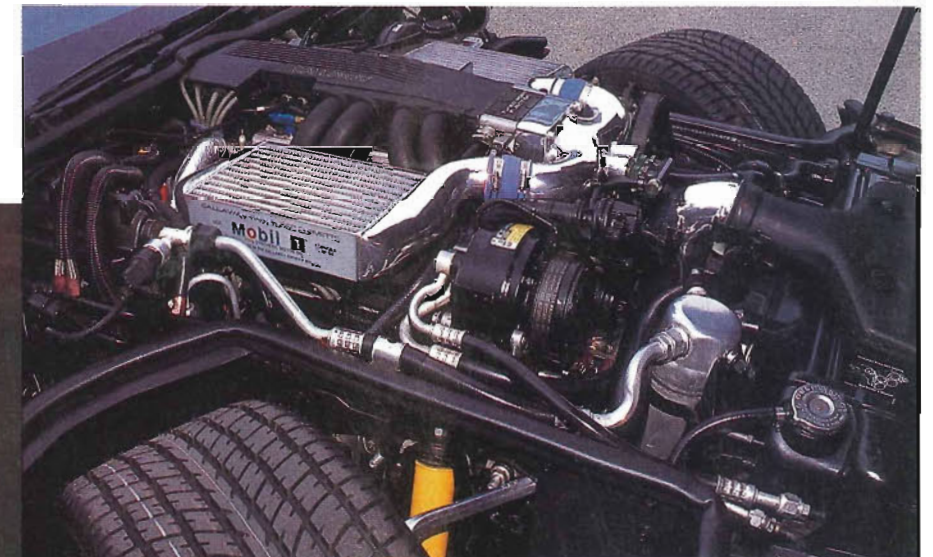
Open the hood, though, and the difference is loud and clear. Under two huge stainless steel intercoolers rests a blueprinted 350 charged by two IHI turbos. Horsepower in

1987 was 345, compared to the stock 235-horse L98. Most important, 465 lb-ft of torque is available at just 2800 rpm. That's almost as much as the L88, but at a lower rpm.

Firing up the Twin-Turbo produces the most interesting of sounds. It's a deep, dark basso profundo, like the pulsing grind of a 16-inch pipe organ stop. Floor the big pedal on the right, and the Callaway leaps ahead like a big-block for just an instant, then explodes as the turbos kick in. Flick the 4+3 shifter into second, and the Callaway just rockets forth, the deep thunder joined by the whine of the turbos. Everything is very smooth, very secure, as the world blurs by. We are not driving anymore, but rather flying on the ground, the digital speedometer climbing like an altimeter, the car reacting to even the slightest steering input.

The sensation is unbelievably thrilling. You'd swear there's an L88 under the hood, but the rest of the car reacts to the power with amazing calm. The L88 is viscous, violent; the Callaway, almost orgasmic. Small-blocks aren't supposed to feel like this, but then this is no ordinary small-block. Only one thing could be better than Steve Bramati's 2,800-mile '87 Callaway, and that would be a newer one, as the gang from Old Lyme upped the power ante to as much as 450 horsepower before the last Twin-Turbo was built in 1992.

Old-fashioned excitement with modern control — the Callaway Twin-Turbo is a dream come true!

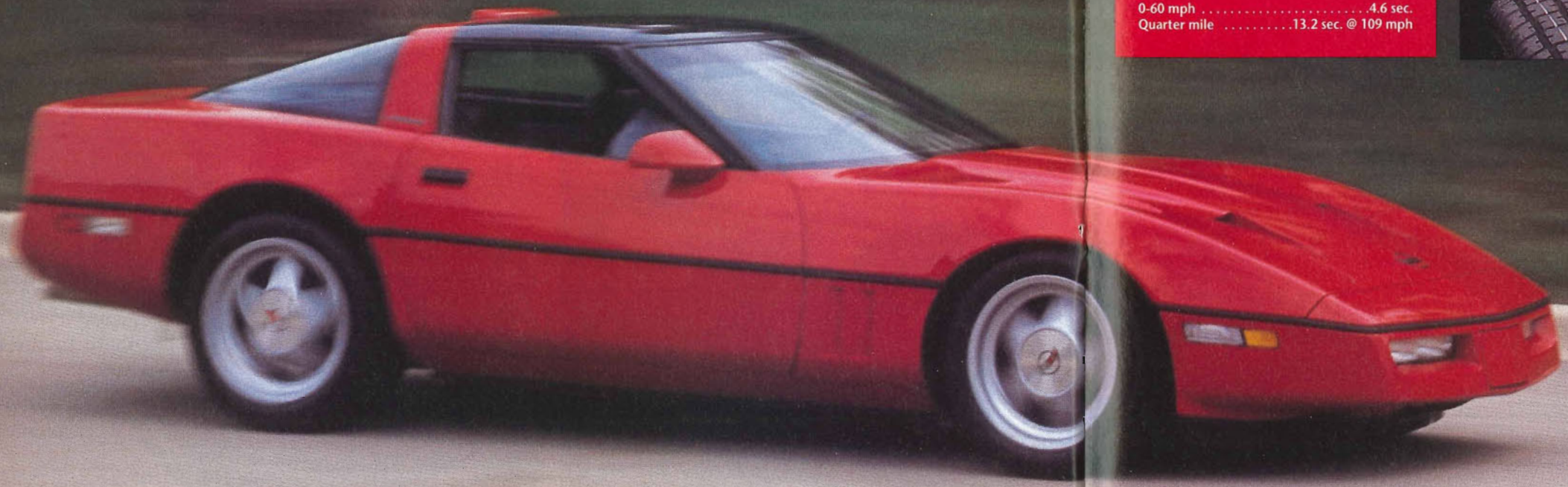


1987 Callaway - At A Glance

Owner Steve Bramati
 Horsepower 345 @ 5600 rpm (SAE net)
 Torque (lb-ft) 465 @ 2800 rpm
 Production 124
 List price \$52,425

PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph 4.6 sec.
 Quarter mile 13.2 sec. @ 109 mph



Modern Day Mauler

1990

ZR-1

At first glance, the '87 Callaway Corvette and Dave Glass's '90 ZR-1 could pass as twins. Same Bright Red paint, same basic body style. Dave added 1994 ZR-1 wheels "because they look better," and they even look similar to the Callaway's DyMags. But open the hood, and you know better.

Behold the LT5, motivating force behind the King of the Hill, the ZR-1. Has a more beautiful engine ever come out of Detroit, an all-aluminum, four-cam, 32-valve sculpture shining in the sun? Chevrolet, Lotus and Mercury Marine joined forces to pack 375 real-world horsepower into a normally-aspirated 350 that still gets 20 mpg. Amazing!

Inside, the ZR-1 feels much like the Callaway, too, although the Eighties-era *Star Wars* instrument panel is replaced with a sweeping arch behind the wheel filled with analog and digital information. Under the fiberglass reside wider rear wheels and tires, along with special body panels to accommodate them. The familiar flat tail is replaced with a more curvaceous piece sporting squarish taillights. Subtle, but different.

But fire up the LT5 and the difference is like night and day. The King sounds more like a normal small-block, but with the added music of 32 valves, lifters and cam lobes whirling around. Hit the road, jam the pedal, and the good times are rolling. In a few heartbeats you're sliding the six-speed (the nicest-shifting transmission of our group) into second as the 60 mph mark passes. The howl joined by the metallic song of the valvetrain is sheer music to our ears.

The amazing thing about the ZR-1 is the incredible calm inside the cabin. You would just never think you are driving one of the fastest production cars in the world. Soaring past 100 mph is not much different than

cruising the double nickel. Taking a corner 25 or 30 mph faster than you've ever done it before is no big deal. Dave Glass's 1990 ZR-1 has only 2,700 miles on it because the lady who bought it new "didn't like it." She never drove it hard, and she'll never know what she's missing. And like the Callaway, only one thing could be better: a 1994 or 1995 ZR-1 which now sports 405 horsepower.

But what a contrast! The Callaway and the ZR-1 may both be 350s, but they generate power in two very different ways. The LT5 loves to run above 3500 rpm where it produces maximum power, while the Twin-Turbo is packed with down-low tire-smoking torque. On paper, the performance times are similar. By the seat of your pants, the two modern supercars are totally distinct. The thrilling slam-bang blast of the Callaway is gone, replaced by the confident, reassuring thrust of the ZR-1.

Then again, our dream team has been a lesson in contrasts. The '57 fuelie, the '70 LT-1 and the '90 ZR-1 are all kindred spirits; the perfect blend of power and torque, cornering and braking, in their respective generations. The '66 425-horse Corvette and the L88 are from the other school, giving up good manners for mind-altering power and torque. And the Callaway Twin-Turbo is a hybrid of both, with Sixties' grunt and today's grace. Yet each car is unique and thoroughly enjoyable in their own right. Each represents a high-water mark in Corvette history. And each is very much a dream to drive!

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1990 ZR-1 - At A Glance

Owners David & Mary Glass
Horsepower 375 @ 6200 rpm (SAE net)
Torque (lb-ft) 370 @ 4500 rpm
Production 3,032
List price \$59,495

PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph 4.9 sec.
Quarter mile 13.4 sec. @ 108.5 mph

