



Photo by Mike Cooney

America's Sports Car." "Cultural Icon." Praised in song by The Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, even Prince. And star of the '60s TV series "Route 66," along with "Tod" and "Buz." What is it about Corvettes that still turn heads and make teenage girls yell out "COOL CAR!!!" while their parents, and even grandparents, wistfully lament "I've wanted one all my life...."?

The mystique began in 1953 when the first 300 Corvettes rolled off the assembly line. Now in its fifth generation (dubbed "C5"), Corvettes are available in three styles: the Targa-roofed hatchback coupe, a manual top convertible, and the racetrack focused 405 horsepower Z06 hardtop.

Coupes and convertibles are powered by an aluminum 5.7L pushrod V8 belting out 350 horsepower at 5,600 rpm. A 4-speed automatic is standard, 6-speed stick optional. With automatics, you can choose between standard 2.73:1 rear-end gears or the optional 3.15:1 performance ratio—recommended for a bit more "punch."

In any combination, though, the Corvette is well equipped for its mission in life. Which is, to pin your shoulders to the seatback and put a huge grin on your face.

50th Anniversary Special Editions are decked out in gor-

Corvette 50th Anniversary Special Edition

Land-Based Rocket Delivers Thrills & Grins

geous metal-flake "Anniversary Red" paint with a unique "shale" interior. It's a striking package, priced at \$5,000, which also includes a variety of other desirable options.

Inside, there's a lot to like. Seats are all-day comfortable, with perfect support from the adjustable lumbar supports and side bolsters. Instruments are complete and highly legible, and the data you can access on the fly from its push-button information center is outstanding. Since Corvettes use run-flat tires and thus carry no spare, you can even check the pressure in each tire while driving. My favorite is the instant MPG readout. Foot to the floor sends it to three; a level freeway with cruise control set at 65–70 will show around 30 mpg.

Noteworthy is this year's Magnetic Selective Ride Control option (included in the Special Edition package) that further improves the Corvette's already considerable handling prowess.

In "touring" mode, the ride is firm but supple. Switch to "sport" and it's ready for aggressive

canyon carving, without being harsh. In either mode, when sensors detect a bump, dip or sharp turn on the wheel, current sent to an electro-magnetic coil inside each damper's piston changes the magneto-rheological fluid's viscosity to firm up response in mille-seconds. Simply put, it's brilliant.

Straight-line acceleration is equally impressive. With stick or auto, expect 0–60 times around 4.8 seconds.

Putting it all together, here's my recipe for major fun: Find a tightly curving road, set the suspension to "sport," shift into second, and attack. With the 3.15:1 performance ratio, second gear gives you a range of 30 to 90 mph (2000 to 6000 rpm). In the twisties, handling felt precise, sharp, and immensely capable. Combining stellar road holding with loads of low-end torque and strong mid-range horsepower, the 'Vette is one stormin' machine.

Amidst all the thrills, there are still minor nits to pick, plus a few changes I'd like to see.

First, cut length and width by

four percent to make it more real-world nimble—it's too large. Upgrade interior vinyl; Cadillac's CTS proves GM can do it right. Extend Special Edition look to offer colors besides boring black for dash and steering wheel. Continue improvements on minor interior buzzes and rattles. This unit's instrument panel buzzed over coarse pavement; past C5s have too. Finally, the throaty, rumbling exhaust note the Corvette *should* have had mysteriously ended up in the Mustang GT. C'mon guys, let 'er GROWL!

Automatic Corvettes are EPA rated at 18-city, 25-highway mpg. Driving on city streets, freeways and mountain roads yielded a 19.1-mpg average. Convertibles sticker at \$51,335 including destination fees. This Special Edition totaled \$56,730.

Whether cruising around town with The Beach Boys playing, or rocketing out of corners far from civilization, this Corvette was just too much fun. It's surprisingly comfortable, yet seriously competent—which is why those Beach Boys, long ago, cautioned those who would challenge the mighty Corvette: "Tach it up, tach it up, buddy gonna shut you down...." ("Shut Down," 1963). Words to heed, even today. 🚩

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